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OPENING REMARKS

OF

APOSTLE F. D. RICHARDS,

AT THE

General Conference at Provo, April 4th, 1886.

It is very delightful that we find ourselves this morning so comfortably situated. The good people of Provo have diligently labored to provide a place for us to meet in; but it is very apparent that the same class of circumstances attends us here, that has followed us during all the progress of our growth, which may be expressed in scripture phrase, "The place is to strait for us." The elements seem to be kindly favorable for our assembling together.

When we contemplate the condition of God's people and their existence on the earth, I do not know that there ever was a day where we had more sound reason to be glad—to rejoice and to praise the Lord, than we have this morning.

It is true, we have experienced times when a greater degree of liberty has been enjoyed by the Latter-day Saints, when the First Presidency, the Council of the Twelve Apostles, and Elders of the various quorums of the Church, could meet in General Conference without fear of molestation; being free to come, to go, and to move as we will among the people. But it is a question whether, so great liberty as we have had, could be extended to us always, with the best results, as touching our present and eternal welfare.

It is a fact shown in history and declared in holy writ, that they who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. There does not appear to be anything uncertain or ambiguous about that manner of speech. Therefore, where we have things pretty much our own way, we may well question whether we are living as near to the Lord as we should do. But while we cannot and do not court opposition, we have to meet it by reason of the fact that error is hostile to truth, and that the adversary of truth is cognizant of the fact that the Lord has chosen to establish His Church on the earth for the last time. And our mission is "peace on earth, and good will to all men," if they will but receive it; but if they will not receive the truth, then the other saying of the Savior becomes applicable: "I come not to send peace, but a sword;" "Father shall be arrayed against the son, and the mother against the daughter," etc., and a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

It is just as necessary and important that we should test the truth of these sayings, as any of the more peaceful and happifying promises. All are necessary to complete the programme of our existence, our growth and increase upon the earth.

We have seasons of great outward prosperity and also those of apparent adversity—when everything appears to be at a standstill and even dead; nature itself declares it to be a necessary condition, for after the husbandman has sown his grain, nursed its growth and harvested the crop, behold, the sere and yellow leaf of autumn comes, the winter frosts freeze up the streams and all nature appears sombre and sorrowful—quite a different state of things to that which was going on during the summer.

It is as necessary for us to have cloudy weather and rainy weather, as it is that we should have sunshine, in order to bring about the objects of creation, the various kinds of fruits and vegetables necessary for the support of the human family. Seeing it is so in temporal things, is it strange that it should be the same, or even more so in spiritual things? No, brethren, it is as necessary that we should have difficulties to contend with, in order to make intelligent provision for our spiritual concerns, as it is that we should have the winter frosts and stormy weather to enable us to make discreet provision for our temporal necessities.

Then let us, as Saints, learn to look upon the conditions which Providence permits to attend us, as for our greatest good; and acknowledge His hand in all our ways.

The Lord has been pleased to say to us in His revelations, that no man is under condemnation who keeps His commandments and acknowledges His hand in all things. It, doubtless, taxes our ingenuity, our judgment, and our discernment by many times, to see how to operate against us, especially as they, to all human appearance, have been doing of late; but, behold, our vision becomes more clear, and we see things as they are; and we accept the adverse state of things as being conducive to our greatest possible good and blessing. And in thus acknowledging the hand of God, we prove ourselves through a living and abiding faith in Him, to reap the blessings which He, in His wisdom, designs to bestow upon us; and that we, when we shall have lived out the days allotted to us, may have great cause to rejoice in consequence of the fact that we have been faithful and true through evil, as well as through good report, and thus proven ourselves worthy of the society of the former-day Saints who were tried and proven in their day, as we are tried and proven in ours.

I deeply regret, with all of you, no doubt, that we cannot have the Presidency with us; but it does not seem to be permissible at the present time. We therefore accept the situation, make the best of it, and, I trust, seek more diligently to the Lord for the light of His Spirit to guide us.

The last news we had from our venerable and worthy President, which was quite recent, his health was good. His spirit is devoted continually to the interest of the people and his labors are bestowed in that direction day by day. I would say to the Saints, be of good cheer. Let your prayers ascend continually in behalf of the authorities of the Church wherever they are. And although we may be taunted with being "underground," let me assure you, it is a condition that has been incident to the people of God in former ages of the world. It would seem that the spirit of the Infernal knew when the Savior was about to come into the world, and at once instituted a plan to destroy Him by inspiring Herod to kill all the male children. The scheme was devised and was being carried out by the government and highest authorities in the land; but did His friends leave him to be sacrificed and His life taken that they might be considered good, law-abiding citizens, and the purposes of Jehovah to be frustrated? Not at all. When His mother was able to travel, Joseph was commanded in a dream to take a trip on the "underground railroad," if you please, and he did so. They started out and traveled until they reached Egypt, where they remained "underground" until the angel again ministered unto them, informing them that they might now return, as they who sought the child's life were dead. Cannot we manage to stand it, whether it be "underground" or above ground, as circumstances permit or require, and not consider that there is anything particularly new or strange imposed upon us either?

A great many curious things have transpired since the creation of the world, in order that the righteous might have an existence on the earth; and, doubtless, many *more* singular events may yet transpire than heretofore.

I do not see any occasion for our knees to knock together, our heads to droop, our hearts to feel heavy, or our faces to look sad. Let every man and woman put on the armor of righteousness and live so near to the Lord that His Spirit shall be with them; and their faces will glisten with joy, because the silent triumphs of truth will be manifest to them continually, and we shall perfect more and more until the perfect day.

It is a blessed privilege we enjoy to come together in the capacity of a general conference. Let us be glad and rejoice, seeking the blessing of God upon us, that our services may be conducted in a way that shall be according to His mind and will; that instructions may be given unto us that shall be edifying and profitable to all.

If the Saints shall be of one heart and mind, I will venture to say that there will be dispensed unto us that which will furnish edification and spiritual food to every soul that has come hungry, expecting to be fed. I wish to impress upon the minds of the Saints that if all is not just as well as we would like to have it, our enemies can do no more than our heavenly Father permits them to do. He has undertaken a work in which He has said that He will make the wisdom of the wise to perish, and the understanding of the prudent He will bring to naught. We know He has done so in times that are past; we have every reason to believe that He will carry on His work to a successful completion, triumph over all the works of darkness, and prepare the earth for the reign of peace, the time which the Saints, ancient and modern, are all looking forward to, with anticipations of eternal joy. The dawn of that day has come; the light of heaven has begun to shine upon the benighted earth; the morning of the great millenium has begun to be seen; its light is tinging the horizon through all the clouds of persecution which lower about us, and we should be making the necessary preparations for the great work while the day lasts; the work which not only pertains to ourselves who are living, but our friends who are dead as well.

If we will but purify ourselves by disfellowshipping sin from among us, and so live as to render ourselves acceptable unto God, He will hasten His work, and will bring it about in His own way and according to the counsels of His own will by cutting it short in righteousness.

CLOSING DISCOURSE

BY

APOSTLE F. D. RICHARDS,

AT THE

General Conference at Provo, April 7th, 1886.

I have enjoyed the spirit and the instructions that have been given at this Conference very much. I think the Epistle, covering the vast ground that it does, will be productive of great good to this people, both at home and abroad. I hope the Saints will take pains to send copies of it to their relatives and friends living in the distant parts of the earth. This you can do, and what a preacher it will make. It can go to places and enter habitations where our Elders cannot go. It will help to disabuse prejudice and false good with which the world is deluged against this people.

Of the few things I wish to mention this morning, one is, that during these times, when the Presidency, some of the Twelve Apostles, and Elders occupying different positions in the Church are restrained of their liberty, that we should not, might or could, be diligent in performing the various duties assigned to us. Because of the negligence of the clerks of Wards, Stakes, and their Presidents, we are unable to present to you the usual annual statistical report. This is certainly a great oversight. It should not occur on account of the peculiarity of the times; because some men have been away, and have not been as thoughtful as they should have been. It is very annoying to lack, *as we do*, important information because of the incompleteness of reports. I trust that all parties concerned will, henceforth, bear in mind, that at the Annual Conferences, all the reports should be brought in. We should have reports from the Temples, from the Relief Societies and the Associations. It is very important that we should make our reports, that they may go upon the records and form part of our history. It is vastly better for us to represent ourselves, than to be misrepresented by others. I hope this will be sufficient; and that everyone concerned, from the Primary Association upwards, will have their reports ready next annual Conference; so that we can learn the condition of the family, all through the house.

We are living in times quite peculiar from what they have been in any part of our history. The fact is, if we had laid out the plan and known how everything was to be, we should be so well about it that our faith would be greatly slackened. The spirit and genius of our work is that we, in faith, watch and pray continually; for we know not the hour that the thief may come. The Savior made this expression in illustration of what the condition of the human family would be, that they would not know when He would come. For it has been decreed, that the specific time of His coming should be hidden from the world, but this we do know, that He will not come until the Gospel is preached to all the world as a witness. It is being preached to all the nations of the earth; and how pleasing to know that the islands of the sea, and even the ends of the earth, are yielding up their native sons and daughters unto God. It is very cheering to learn, that in New Zealand, there have been nearly 2,000 baptized into the Church; that they are very diligent and very faithful as a general thing. There are among them, a great many who are exceedingly intelligent and noble men who have attained to membership of the colonial parliament in that island. A young Elder, writing from there, states that he had been meeting with about sixty of his brethren who were obliged to answer separately, whether they would renounce the religion of "Mormonism," or be cast out of the Church of England with threats of imprisonment. He relates that out of the sixty, only two or three prevaricated; that nearly all of them were true and faithful; preferring to be expelled from the popular Church than to renounce their true faith. It is very pleasing to know that fidelity to the truth is so manifest in these semi-civilized nations. The work of God is prospering in many of the missions; though in some, where they have been most active, baptisms are not quite so frequent; still the work is making satisfactory headway.

The persecution that is being waged against us is having the effect to open the eyes of thinking men, and of calling forth the attention of many who have never thought of these things before. And so it is in these lands; while we are so persecuted, the justice of our cause is quietly taking effect in the hearts of many of the people. It is not true that the fifty-five millions—the estimate of our nation's population—are against us; not by any means. The priests that are among us, it is true, join in the common cause of opposition, publish lies and succeed in stirring up the feelings of many against us. They have moved members of Congress by threatening that they should not be re-elected if they did not take a position against us. This is not, however, the feeling of the whole people, though it is to a very terrible extent.

We must continue to labor and be true and faithful to the covenants we have made, and keep the commandments of God, seek after the words of truth, abide in them, and our desire to know and do His will should become intensified in us day by day. We should not let temporalities hinder the growth of faith in our hearts; to hinder the continued increase of the fellowship of God; but obtain more and more of the Holy Spirit to enlighten and prepare us for the future; for the great conflict between truth and error, the great contest that is coming.

It is very difficult for us sometimes to know how to comprehend each others views; but singular to say that each Latter-day Saint knows of what his principles of faith consists. The principles are the same with us all; there is only a diversity as to how far some have advanced, some others not quite so far, and some perhaps, further as the case may be. This accounts for our unanimity. We have been baptized into one spirit; we worship one God. One Gospel has been revealed, which is the same Gospel given to Adam, to Enoch, to Moses; the same Gospel introduced anew by Jesus, and preached by the Apostles. The Gospel produces the same effects to-day as it did in the earlier times. To some it comes as the harbinger of peace; to others it proves a disturbing element in their families. In the days of Jesus, people were going on in their quiet old way, thinking there should not be any more revelation; that all things were to remain as they were in the beginning. When the Gospel of Christ comes to such people, how wonderfully it works! It gets into a family, and sets one against another; proving a source of joy and comfort to those that receive it, while it embitters the feelings of those who reject it; and this division of feeling exists until the honest in heart are gathered out, one of a family, and two of a city; while the others are left to fill up the measure of their iniquity, in the rejection of the truth.

Does it occur to you, my brethren, that in this great land which all nations look upon as a choice land, that heretofore two whole nations have been destroyed from the face of it? When the Jaredites were brought here from the time of the confusion of tongues, which occurred about 2,000 years before the birth of our Savior, they flourished 1,400 years, became exceedingly numerous and powerful, built towns and cities, towers and fortifications, and had all the evidences of an advanced state of civilization. In the course of time they became sinful, haughty and proud; until their wickedness at last led them to dissensions and strife, which resulted in the total destruction of that mighty race. They fought against and destroyed each other until there were but few left. So complete was the destruction of the once great and prosperous nation of the Jaredites, that the forces were reduced to but two warriors; the leaders of the two great factions. And they fought against each other until the darkness overtook them; and they slept upon their swords, and, on the morrow, renewed the struggle. They fought until one fell dead, and the other fell fainting on his sword.

Again, the Lord brought out from Jerusalem, six hundred years B. C., Lehi, Ishmael and Zoram, who became the ancestry of another great and mighty people, including also Mulek and his company who came some ten years after. They saw the remains of the Jaredites; witnessed their bones around the hill Ramah, bleached and bare; and it was made known to them how their brethren had fallen. They in turn occupied the land, and became a mighty people until some four hundred years after the coming of Christ. This people also obtained the favor of God to a wonderful degree, insomuch that the Savior established His Church among them. This book, (the Book of Mormon), is a record and history of the people that lived on this western hemisphere, and is a history of the work of God in this land; the building up of His Church among them, and their apostacy, transgression and final destruction as a nation around the hill Cumorah.

The Prophets have left it on record, which in the providences of Almighty God their writings have come down to us for our edification and instruction, that any people that shall be permitted to occupy this land who will not serve the God of Israel shall, when they have become fully ripened in their wickedness, be destroyed in like manner. For the Lord promised this choicest of all lands to the house of Joseph, to the seed of Ephraim and Manasse, telling them that it should be a land in which his name should be revered.

The prophet Ether in the 2nd chapter and 9th verse, says:

> And now we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them, when they are ripened in iniquity;
>
> And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God, that ye may repent and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come; that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you, as the inhabitants of this land hath hitherto done.
>
> Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it, shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ, who hath been manifested by the things which we have written.

God is now raising up another people to carry out his purposes; and we have need to be patient, long suffering, and charitable. We must labor diligently to perform the work He has given us to do, trusting in Him, and in no one else, for the outcome.

Now, it is a very singular thing that here in Utah, a people are endeavoring to live consistent with their religious convictions, according to the light which the Lord has revealed to them; and that among them are men representing the government of the country, who take delight in persecuting them because they follow out their conscientious convictions of religious duty.

Such convictions are mighty, in controlling the actions of men, as illustrated in the history of both individual and national traits of character.

The Indian races by which we are surrounded, are conscientious in many things that they do which are looked upon as cruel in the extreme by the more highly civilized nations. For instance, when anyone of their number meets his death by the hand of an enemy, it becomes the conscientious duty of the male nearest of kin to the deceased, to deal out summary vengence upon the head of the slayer if he finds him, if not, upon the first of his race whom he may chance to meet. They believe it right to do this; and if they fail to satisfy their conscience in this respect, they feel that they are lacking in the performance of a great moral obligation, and that they are humiliated in the eyes of their tribe.

In East India we find another people whose conscientious convictions lead them in a very different channel of thought and action. There, when a man dies leaving a widow, her conscience leads her to believe that she cannot in any other way show proof of her fidelity to her deceased husband except in voluntarily offering her body to be consumed upon the funeral pile of his grave. If widow is not taken by force and terror, as some imagine, she offers herself willingly in order to satisfy her religious convictions; and in thus ending her life she, according to her standard of education, offers indubitable proof of her marital fidelity.

Here then we find people in one part of the earth who, in order to appease their conscience, will deliberately take the life of a fellow-creature; and in another part where they voluntarily give their own life, as a means to answer a similar conscientious demand. As with the American Indian, so with the Oriental races, their education forms and determines their conscience.

The Apostle Paul tells us that he even held the garments of the men who participated in the stoning to death of Stephen. Would you not suppose that he felt sorrowful, after he found the truth, that he had anything to do with the arresting and putting to death of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ; of consenting in thought, or acting in any way whatever in the shedding of innocent blood? Notwithstanding the inhumanity of the work of persecution in which he took a part, the fact that he was a Jew and believed in Jewry; and what may be considered still more extraordinary was the fact of his being a highly educated man, having been brought up at the feet of Gamaiel, and taught in all the learning of the Jewish people. Yet we hear after enumerating all these things which he had done: "I have lived in all good conscience unto this day." In arresting true believers in Christ and casting them into prison, and even in stoning them to death, he was merely vindicating the supremacy of the law of Moses, as it is called, as to heresy, which was a capital crime worthy of death. And Paul was merely acting the part of a conscientious bigoted man when he was engaged persecuting the former-day Saints.

Latter-day Saints should be exceedingly thankful that they have the revelations of God's holy will, and that by obedience thereto, and the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, their consciences are formed and conformed to this supreme standard of eternal truth. Their education teaches them that to fear God and keep His commandments is the highest and most important duty of man. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself. On this hangs all the law and the prophets." This is the grand axiom of all intelligence and exaltation. Saints worship the Creator and are forbidden to worship any of His creatures. That would be idolatry. Where little is given, but little will be required. Where much is given, much will be exacted. They who lived without the knowledge of God's law, will perish or die without being judged by it. Their consciences, meanwhile, accusing or excusing them according to their knowledge of what is right or wrong. So also the Saints who occupy a higher platform of education will be judged by the higher law which they have accepted, and by which they will be judged. Their consciences also are formed and determined by their education in the laws of God.

It, therefore, becomes four highest duty to obey God. How supremely grateful ought we to be, since we are accounted worthy to occupy so high a platform of intelligence and education under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and how exceedingly careful ought we always to be that we preserve in ourselves a conscience void of offense toward God and man. Some have, by transgression, stifled the monitions of their conscience, until it has become silent—having become seared as with a hot iron. The faithful Saint can safely adopt the beautiful sentiment:

> What conscience dictates to be done, or warns me not to do; this teach me more than hell to shun, that more than heaven pursue

Concerning the Epistle that has been read, I wish you to peruse it very carefully. Get your families to read it, do not let it pass by like idle wind, and let us see that we practice in our lives, that which is applicable to us. I commend this to the Presidents of Stakes, the Bishops of Wards, and the Presidents of Quorums, trusting that the spirit of that communication will burn within them, and lead them to carry out in their fields of labor the counsel given.

The great boon to the human family is peace. Notwithstanding they want us to become like them, they cannot give us peace. And although we may be harassed, persecuted and deprived of our rights and liberties as citizens of this great nation, let me tell you that we all have a peace of mind such as they know nothing at all about—the peace of God that passeth understanding, which is the Comforter, the Holy Ghost. When we lie down at night, our sleep is sweet and refreshing; our hearts are buoyant and our spirits strong in the Lord. So it is with our brethren in prison; the Lord is blessing them with His Spirit, as we have heard during our Conference. Said the Savior, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him, which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell." We want to fear God, and have our hearts full of love, that perfect love, which casteth out fear, except the proper fear of God our Heavenly Father. This is the kind of fear we want to entertain.

There are many things I would like to say if I had time. I want to call the attention of the Bishops and that of the lesser Priesthood, to the duty devolving upon them in relation to the people of their several Wards, that duty which requires them to seek after the welfare of the Saints, to see that iniquity does not abound; but that the Spirit of the Lord flows freely in their hearts. The divine philosophy of the Gospel is as true as any philosophy that can be established upon the earth; and where there is devotion to God, the Spirit of God will be enjoyed. If it is not enjoyed, there is a cause; and if there is a cause you are the ones to eradicate it. And in the performance of this duty, as in that of all others, you must be wise, lest in taking out the tares you pull up the wheat also. In many instances you may have to let the tares grow with the wheat until the harvest comes; but because there may be instances where wisdom would dictate such a course, that is not to say that wickedness should be tolerated or winked at. If the people have sinned, let wisdom dictate the course to be taken against them.

Do not destroy confidence, nor drive people to despair. Jesus said in His day; "Though their sins were like crimson, they could be made white as snow; and though they were as scarlet, they could be made white as wool; if they would put on proper and fitting repentance." This is the duty of all people, and especially of all Saints. While there are some sins that are unto death; there others which are not unto death; and we should pray for them. Men who are called as Presidents over Stakes, and Bishops over Wards, should learn how to rescue sinners; how to teach the people young and old, and how to rightly divide the word of truth, and give to each his portion in due season.

I feel to labor with all my heart and ability in behalf of the Church, and hope the blessings of God may be abundantly dispensed upon all who have come up hither—I doubt not that all who have come here have received comfort and edification. I pray that His blessing may attend the Saints, in all the world, and especially His servants who are deprived of the pleasure of being present with us, and that the work of God may continue to prosper in the earth, until His will shall be done among men as it is by angels in heaven. God bless you. Amen.

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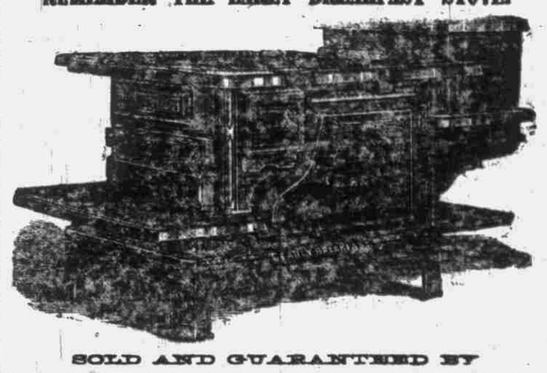

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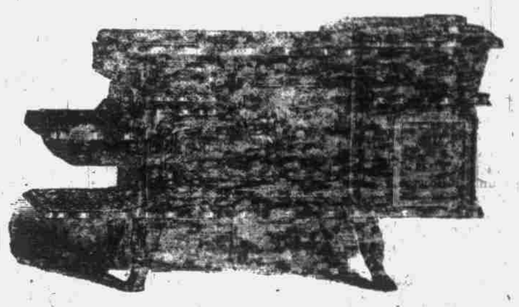

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