

SPEECH

OF

HON. GEORGE Q. CANNON,
OF UTAH,In the House of Representatives,
Wednesday, April 19, 1882.

We publish below the full text of the speech of Hon. Geo. Q. Cannon, in the House of Representatives, on the question of the admission of the Delegate from Utah. We give it place out of its order in the debate, as we know that his constituents are anxious to see his remarks. Several speakers preceded him and followed him, and the remainder of the debate will be published in the regular order:

Mr. Cannon said:

Mr. Speaker: As I have not prepared any written remarks, I will feel greatly obliged to members if they will allow me to proceed with what I have to say, without interruption.

I did not expect when this debate commenced, to have anything to say upon this question, unless the necessity should arise such as I think has arisen. I would feel ashamed, Mr. Speaker, if I could get the opportunity that has been afforded me now, to go back, should the House vote that this seat is vacant, to my constituents without saying something in reply to the many charges which have been made against them by various speakers during this debate.

I am comforted, Mr. Speaker, by one reflection. That Christianity which has been so much vaunted upon this floor, and which has been held up in contradistinction to that system which many of my constituents believe in, was itself a persecuted sect, and its founder was crucified between two thieves. And from that day until the present every man who has ever stood among his fellowmen to declare principles which came in conflict with popular ideas, has in almost every instance, had to lay down his life as a proof of the sincerity of his convictions concerning that which he has taught. There has been no end of false statements made on this floor concerning the people with which I am connected. But while this flood of false statements has been pouring over the country, concerning the people of Utah, scarcely a voice has been heard in their defense.

Those who attempted to say something favorable concerning them in the first discussion which took place upon the Utah case were sneered at and were derided and laughed almost out of the arena, to prevent them from saying a word respecting the morality, industry, the good order, or other good qualities the people of Utah possess.

Sir, that people have suffered persecution, but I did not expect the day would come when, on the floor of the American Congress, the fact that they had been driven five times from their homes would be cited as a reason why they should still be ill-treated, and why further inhuman resolutions should be adopted against them. But this has been the case in this discussion. The fact that they lived in Ohio, the fact that they lived in Missouri, the fact that they lived in Illinois, and that, mobbed, plundered, and driven out, they took their flight into the wilderness, has been urged as a reason why they should be treated as is proposed, as has been enacted in the law that has passed this body and passed the other house, and that is now on the statute-book, and also as a reason why the people should be deprived of their representation on this floor.

In 1847, Mr. Speaker, in company with a large number of others, I reached Utah Territory, which was then a portion of the Mexican Republic. While we were at Council Bluffs in the summer of 1848 a demand was made by the Federal Government upon the traveling camps of the Mormon people for five hundred young men to enlist in a battalion to go to California and fight in the Mexican war. Those five hundred young men enlisted, and they helped with others of their countrymen in conquering and securing California, which then comprised what is now Utah Territory and adjacent Territories, including the now State of Nevada.

Before the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, we had reached Salt Lake City, and one of our first acts after

reaching that place was to hoist the United States flag and to take possession of the country as citizens of the United States. Though we had fled from religious persecutions there was deeply implanted in our hearts a love for the institutions of this country. We knew that there was no form of government upon the face of the earth that could be compared with this under which we dwelt; that the largest possible liberty that man could desire could be enjoyed under this Constitution, which had been secured by so many sacrifices. And though we might have formed alliances with others, with neighboring powers, there was no disposition of that kind. The people were fondly attached to their country, to its institutions, and to its Constitution. At that time there were comparatively few of foreign birth among the people. A provisional government was formed as quickly as possible, under which the people dwelt until they could bring their condition before Congress. As soon as practicable delegates were sent down to Washington asking for the admission of the country as the State of Deseret, this being the title that was given to the provisional government. Almon W. Babbitt came down here in 1849; John M. Bernhisel came down afterwards; both of them acting as delegates representing the people, who, as I have said, had formed a provisional government, and enacted laws for the government of the country and the maintenance of good order.

In September, 1850, Utah Territory was organized, at the same time that New Mexico was organized, and at the same time that California was admitted into the Union.

Our petition to be admitted as a State was denied us, but we were granted a territorial form of government. The first governor of the Territory who was appointed was Brigham Young, concerning whose family and the size of it the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. Hazellon) told you yesterday. He was appointed by Millard Fillmore and acted as such governor for four years. At the expiration of that term Franklin Pierce, who was then President of the United States, reappointed him governor, and he continued to act in that capacity until the expiration of the second term of four years.

John M. Bernhisel came here as the Delegate from that Territory; a gentleman whom some few of the older members here will recollect; a man who in every way adorned the position, and whose conduct in life and every thing pertaining to him was unexceptionable. He was here for nearly twelve years. He served five terms in Congress, besides the time he was here as a representative of his people previous to the organization of the Territory.

During his term of service here the law of 1862, to which allusion has been made, was enacted. He was a polygamist, as the term goes; he had more wives than one, as also had the governor of Utah Territory who served the eight years for which he had been appointed.

In 1866 William H. Hooper was elected to serve as Delegate from Utah, and continued to serve until 1873, when George Q. Cannon was nominated, elected, and came here to Congress. With the exception of one term that was filled by a gentleman of the name of Kinney, those three men whose names I have given have represented Utah Territory on this floor during the entire period of the existence of Utah as a Territory, now nearly thirty-two years.

During all that time not a question has been raised, except that to which allusion has been made in this discussion, the question in my own case. In the Forty-third Congress my seat was contested, as the seat of my predecessor had been, not because he was open to the charge of plural marriages, for it was well known he had but one wife. His seat was contested on the ground that he was a Mormon, and his contestant claimed that no Mormon was entitled to a seat on this floor.

The first man who contested his seat had 105 votes against upward of 12,000 votes for Mr. Hooper. That man came here and remained during the entire session, annoying the sitting Delegate with his claim to the seat. It was during that contest that all this matter was published which has been quoted on the other side during this discussion. It was reported by a member of the Committee on Elections from New York, who made this report individually, and, though appearing on the record, was responsible for it.

That report was entirely his own, and it was *ex parte* and uncontradicted, because there was no fair opportunity given to the people whom it maligned to meet and disprove the statements which it contained. And like other statements which are constantly being made, they are again and again quoted as though they were true because they appear in this report to Congress. And if contests should continue, they will be again quoted, and the same kind of *ex parte* statements, which are equally unfounded, will probably be quoted from the speeches which gentlemen have made here to-day, when in reality they will not bear the least investigation, for they are untrue and without foundation in fact.

On the 2d day of November, 1880, in a convention of delegates from all parts of the Territory of Utah, I received, on my part, the unanimous nomination for Delegate to this House. Notwithstanding all that has been said about church and state, I assert here that there is no place in the United States where there is greater freedom and greater liberty for the expression of opinions by the people respecting the men whom they wish to serve than there is in the Territory of Utah. Our political organization is entirely distinct from our church organization. It is true that the members of the political party, because they are all—that is, the great bulk of the people, now numbering over 120,000 according to the last census—members of that church. We have no salaried ministers. Every man is a preacher who is a reputable man among us. From the midst of the congregation men are called to preach, very frequently without any previous notice. All the males over twenty-one years of age of good repute hold office in the church. It is this, and this alone, which can give any color to the statements that there is a connection between church and state.

Now, I wish to say here that though I have had probably as much influence in political matters as most of the men in the Territory of Utah, occupying as I do a position of confidence among the people, I can state on my honor that beyond the expression of an opinion as a citizen when asked, at no time and under no circumstances have I endeavored to influence any man or any body of men in the Territory of Utah respecting the selection of any one they had in view for office. I have not myself used any influence of that kind that could possibly be called by any one improper. When I speak of myself of course I speak of my own personal knowledge. But I think I can say the same for the rest of the leading men of Utah. Whatever influence they have used has been always to have the people select and vote for men who would worthily fill the offices. Knowing the jealousy there is abroad respecting this matter, there is the greatest care exercised so as to prevent anything from occurring which would give color to the prejudice existing upon this point; yet of course where men have influence, if their opinions are asked their views will always have considerable weight.

All the forms of political procedure prevail in Utah as in other Territories and in the States. The people hold their primary meetings elect delegates, and those delegates, meet in convention, sometimes instructed whom they are to vote for and sometimes not, and every delegate has the right to express his views in favor of or against any candidate, and to vote for whom he pleases, and as the secret ballot prevails in Utah there can possibly be no interference on the part of any one to prevent citizens from expressing their unbiased choice for any candidate. It was a convention of this kind, composed of delegates from all parts of the Territory, which nominated me as Delegate to Congress. I had given my friends to understand that I was not a candidate, and had done so upon every previous occasion when I had been nominated; for you know, gentlemen, the position I have occupied here now for nine years is one which no one capable of filling the place would desire to occupy. It is not pleasant to be made a target for every man who wishes to gain credit for his morality to aim his arrows at. In coming here, however, I have been sustained by the consciences that I was at a post of duty where it was necessary for some one to represent the people and that I had the solid support of my constitu-

ents. It was the unanimous feeling of the delegates coming from all parts of the Territory that I should be nominated, and I received their unanimous vote. At that time I was occupying the position of Delegate in Congress. No question as to my eligibility had arisen or could arise; my constituents had the best of evidence in their possession that I was eligible from the fact that I was at that time a Delegate in good standing in this House with an unquestioned right to my seat, and was in the same position when I was voted for and elected. Directly after the election I came here and took my seat and served through the last session of the last Congress.

But the governor of Utah Territory, having an idea that he had the opportunity to gain fame and make himself popular, entered, as I have full reason to believe, into a conspiracy with others to precipitate upon the country this question, for the agitation of which a favorable opportunity had been long sought, to furnish some excuse for nullifying the election, and either making the seat of the Delegate vacant, or have a man occupy it whom the people had refused to elect. I having been born in a foreign land, he affected to entertain the belief that I was not properly naturalized. At our last interview, before I came to Washington to occupy my seat at the last session, he told me he thought some question would arise on that point. I told him then that it was a matter which the House had decided in the Forty-fourth Congress, that the question had been fully examined and adjudicated, and I thought there ought to be some time in a man's life when the statute of repose should intervene to prevent his being annoyed upon a question of that kind, especially after it had been so thoroughly investigated. I told him further that it was the province of Congress to decide upon the qualifications of its members. But in accordance, as I believe, with this pre-arranged programme, he withdrew from me the certificate of election.

I came here, as you know, and claimed my seat as I had done before. I courted investigation. I have been willing that this charge should be thoroughly re-examined, although, as I said, it was thoroughly investigated by the Committee on Elections of the Forty-fourth Congress, who unanimously reported that I was a citizen of the United States. Since this session began a distinguished Republican member of the Committee on Elections, well known, if not personally at least by reputation, to every member of this House, Hon. Martin I. Townsend, told me—and I will be pardoned for mentioning his name because I have no doubt he would be quite willing I should use it—"Mr. Cannon, there is nothing whatever in this charge about you not being a citizen. I went to the bottom of that case myself in the Forty-fourth Congress, and if you are not a naturalized citizen I do not know where to look for one." But at this session my case was referred, and fourteen of a committee composed of fifteen members of the House have decided that I was properly elected. Of that there can be no question; for the governor himself in my presence gave to the Clerk of this House last winter his decision upon the election; and in response to my question, in the presence of the then Clerk of the House, "Governor, do you admit that this is your official action?" he replied that it was. In that decision he stated (and it is his duty under the law to declare the result of the election) that I had received 18,568 votes and my competitor 1,357. This is the decision also of your committee; and further, they decide after thorough discussion and examination that I am a citizen and, so far as election and citizenship are concerned, am entitled to my seat.

Mr. Speaker, it is now clear, that if I had had my rights I should have come here with a certificate from the Territory of Utah under the seal of the Territory, signed by the governor and countersigned by the secretary of the Territory. That would have been my position if I had not been defrauded of my rights. I say "defrauded," it is not too strong a term. I was defrauded of my rights and thus prevented from taking my seat on this floor; and the country has been inundated with falsehood since the election eighteen months ago to make the public believe that I was not eligible to a seat. I have been held in that position until within a few weeks a law of Congress has been passed which now disqualifies me in the opinion of many gentlemen on the

other side who previously favored my case and said that I could not be kept out of my seat on account of any alleged disqualification arising out of my marital relations. I have been held in this position, bound hand and foot, until the passage of this act; and now it is proposed to make this law operative against me to expel me literally from the House, not by a two-thirds vote, but by a majority vote.

If any gentlemen feel that they can vote thus to exclude me and be justified because of the clamor that is raised about Utah and the people of Utah and the religion of the people of Utah, I do not envy their feelings, but from the bottom of my heart I pity them. Of course every man must be responsible to himself and his constituency and his God for whatever vote he may cast. I do not question the right of any member to vote as he may deem best. I do not quarrel with any man on that account. His is the responsibility. I do not do so now; but I say it is a great wrong to this act. Whatever may be said about my constituents or myself does not justify the violation of the Constitution and the laws in my case.

It is conceded by the best lawyers in this House if that recent law had not been passed my case would have been a good one, notwithstanding the report of the Committee on Elections, and I could not have been kept out of my seat by that report nor by any reasoning embodied in it. This is the unanimous opinion of the best lawyers in this House. I had no fears about the subject myself. I was undisturbed as to what the result would be. But when this law was passed I knew it was intended to furnish ground of justification for voting against me for many who were doubtful previously as to what vote they should cast.

Mr. Speaker, if religious prejudice, if religious animosity, if allegations against the people of Utah are to be accepted as the foundations upon which action in my case is to be based, then it is clear I am to be excluded, and cannot take my seat. If these are to be accepted as reasons why Utah should not have representation, then certainly all representation will be stricken down on this floor, and the seat of the Delegate from Utah Territory, legally elected under the laws and under the Constitution, will be declared vacant.

But I ask you, gentlemen, all of you, who say the people of Utah shall obey the law, will you who say we should comply with the law, religion or no religion, will you set us the example by smiling law down here, in what ought to be the temple of justice? Will you do this? Will you who ask equity from the people of Utah do equity, or will you deny us equity, and say we shall not have it because there are allegations made against Utah Territory; because they are falsely accused of every thing that is vile, and charged with being bad men, just as the first Christians were when Nero burned them, made torches of them, and justified himself in doing so—will you, because of the alleged bad character of the people of Utah, be guilty of this great wrong?

I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that before I would be guilty of that, I would want my right hand to lose its cunning and my tongue to cleave to the roof of my mouth—ay! before I would tear out the corner-stone of this grand and glorious temple of liberty which has been reared with so much costly toil and sacrifice, tear out the corner-stone of the right of the people to representation.

That, sir, has been conceded to Utah from the beginning. You not prescribe by law certain disqualifications. This, upon no principle of fairness can apply to me. It would be an outrage to have it do so. I would be giving legislation a retroactive effect. I am just as eligible to this seat in Congress to-day, as was the first Monday in December 1873, when the Forty-third Congress convened in this Hall of Representatives; for this new law does not affect me. I have not exposed myself to its disqualifying cause. My eligibility has not been interfered with in the least. I have not committed any act which makes me any more unsuitable to the position than I was at that time. And if this idea shall prevail which is the ground upon which the majority of the committee—by their report—that every Congress shall have the right to prescribe qualifications for Delegates to Congress, imagine the condition of the people of the Territory. They elected a man in good faith, believing they have a right to elect him, and because of some whim or caprice