

## DISCOURSE BY PRESIDENT GEO. Q. CANNON.

In the Tabernacle, on Sunday, June  
25th, 1882.

REPORTED BY G. F. GIBBS.

I am exceedingly thankful to have the opportunity once more of being with you and of partaking of that peaceful and sweet influence which prevails in the midst of this much despised and terribly abused people. The contrast, to me, is exceedingly marked between the circumstances in which I have been placed and the influences that I have had to meet, and those which surround me to-day. There have been some things which have transpired which have not been very pleasant; but on the whole, I can truthfully say, that I have enjoyed myself better than I expected, and probably much better than many of you would suppose that one under the circumstances could do. At no time, in my experience—in my life, have I ever seen a more imbibed feeling manifested against the Latter-day Saints than prevailed during this past winter. You have had opportunities of understanding this to some extent, for you have felt that influence here, and you have seen its effects in the results that have been wrought out. And I suppose if we were like other people we should have been terribly alarmed at the manifestations we have witnessed. There was a time when it seemed as though all hell had broken loose, and that nothing less than the entire destruction of the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would satisfy popular clamor. A most extraordinary manifestation, especially when we consider the absence of all provocation for such an outburst of wrath. If a person last winter had come into Utah Territory and travelled through our settlements, visiting the houses of the people and examining the condition of affairs here, he would have found it difficult to understand the cause of all the excitement that was raging throughout the United States concerning this people. If there are those who do not believe in the existence of spiritual powers and influences let them examine into this Utah question and the effects of its agitation upon the public mind, and it seems to me they must be convinced that there are unseen powers which operate upon the minds of the people at large, to produce such extraordinary outbursts of prejudice and passion as we have witnessed—fifty millions of people stirred up from one end of the land to the other by a tornado of passion, unreasoning, blind, besotted, bloodthirsty, which has carried men and women before it, and has dethroned reason, concerning a people who were quietly pursuing their avocations, molesting none, doing nothing that could be construed by any reasonable person into anything that would be offensive.

It is generally supposed that we are living in an enlightened age. Popular preachers claim that this is the crowning generation for light, and knowledge, and truth; that we are living in fact, in the full blaze of Gospel light and glory. Politicians also claim that this republican government of the United States is the fruit of the ripened experience of all the ages, the product of the accumulated wisdom of the centuries, that human aspirations finds the fullest development under our form of government. This is the boast of the press, and these are the teachings of the pulpit. And yet, through agencies which boast of their enlightenment this whirlwind of passion to which I have alluded—this spasm of feeling that has convulsed the nation, has swept over the land, and everything has been done that was possible to make it destructive in its effects upon the objects of its wrath. I have thought, and have sometimes expressed myself, that if lies could destroy a people, we should have been buried out of sight long ago. The basest and most malignant and most cruel, the most unfounded and causeless misrepresentations and falsehoods have been circulated, and men and women who knew nothing about us, preachers who had no idea of our real belief, and editors who had no conception of the true condition of affairs in this Territory, have all lent themselves, sometimes understandingly and other times ignorantly to do everything in their

power to destroy an innocent people. And what has been the crime? We have been accused of immorality. God knows if that were to be a crime sufficient to evoke destruction there would be other communities visited with wrath besides ours, even if we were all that we are painted. But the fact is, there is no other Territory or State in the United States—and I say this knowingly and understandingly—where virtue is respected, revered and protected as it is in Utah. There is no other community in the United States in which more young men grow up to manhood pure, in proportion to the population than in the Territory of Utah.

As I have repeatedly said, we believe in marriage, we have opened the door in that direction, and we say to the sexes marry; but we close the door in the other direction, and say, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not seduce, defile, prostitute or lead astray innocent beings; if you do, and we had the power, we would punish you. It seems like a paradox that those who do that which is according to their religion should be punished, while those who trample upon their religion should go free. And yet this is really true. All that we can be accused of is, we have embodied in our religion practices that belonged to the Patriarchs, which we believe, and so declare, God has revealed to us, for the purposes of salvation and of producing greater purity and of checking the flood of vice that is sweeping through the land and sapping the foundation of this nation and all the nations of Christendom. We have adopted the principle of plural marriage as part of our religion. We have not led women astray, we have protected them. We have not coerced them or used violence, but have thrown around them a shield of protection and at the same time have left them to exercise the fullest liberty and the most extensive right of free choice in every respect. But this is a sin; this shocks, we are told, the moral sense of the nation. While, on the other hand, there are communities who say they do not believe in adultery or in seduction—that is, their religion teaches them that these things are wrong; but many of whose members practice these crimes, and yet they pass along unnoticed and undisturbed.

Salt Lake City is 2,400 miles from Washington—a remote place; it might be supposed the effect of our examples, if they were bad, would not reach that distance; that if there was any contagion flowing from our practices it would have expended its force before traveling that far. But in Washington City, at the head of the government, where Congress has unquestioned jurisdiction, there is no law against adultery; no one can be punished in the District for violating the marriage vow; that escapes the attention of Congress. So with fornication; it goes unpunished, unless it should be of so flagrant a character, done in so open and indecent a manner as to excite public condemnation. Now if morality were to be achieved it might be thought that Washington would be a fine field for the exercise of the power that is unquestionably invested in the Congress of the United States. I presented this view of the question to Senator Edmunds when this bill, which has since become a law, was being discussed. I called his attention to the fact that it was not an unfrequent thing, in taking up an evening paper in Washington city, to read accounts of the finding of two or three infants that had been cast away or deserted by their inhuman mothers, found in vacant lots and in out-of-the-way places, and that too in the most elegant city to be found in the United States. It appeared to me, as I said to him, that Washington was a splendid field for the exercise of the power of Congress. If it was a sincere wish to check immorality and to put down vice that prompted the Edmunds bill, however mistaken its author might be in his ideas respecting the existence of these evils in Utah, the best place to commence was at the head. But it was plain to be seen that nothing in that bill was designed to reach real vice, to strike down immorality; it was a blow at our religious practices. To be sure, however, as to what the intent of the bill really was, and to know this from his own lips, I asked him if adulterers could be punished in Utah Territory under the provisions of the bill. His reply was that if a man who had one wife were to live openly and continuously with another woman he could

be punished under it; but adulterers would not be very likely to expose themselves to the operations of the law in that manner. He said that "sporadic cases of adultery could not be punished by this bill." I thought the reply one of which a Senator of the United States should be ashamed. I have known Senator Edmunds for some time, and have had some admiration for him, but I declare I blushed for him when he made the reply that "sporadic cases of adultery" could not be punished under the provisions of this bill, now become law.

Now, you can see what the design is. It is not to punish immorality. If immorality were the object to be reached, that law would have been made broad enough for every case, whether they be practices, what they term under religious guise, or practices in violation of religion. What then is the object of the measure? It is to strike down a prominent feature of our religion; that is its object, and there is no other object to be achieved. It is the fact that we make marriage a part of our religion that excites animosity, and they are determined to destroy us.

"If you were to protect immorality and not call it religion," I have been told many and many a time, "we should not object to it; but you are sanctioning by the forms of religion that which we cannot endure, and which is hateful to our civilization." It is the marriage ceremony, that is the offensive part of it; it is, in other words, the marrying that excites dislike and hatred.

Now, is this to be wondered at? I do not wonder at it; I am not surprised at all at this feeling; for the reason that I have always expected that this doctrine, like every doctrine connected with this Church, would excite the bitter hatred of those who oppose the work of God. It was the fact that the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Elders of this Church declared that revelation had been received from God, that excited animosity in the first place. The Elders of this Church might have preached any doctrines they pleased and not said they had been taught them by revelation, nor by special divine assistance, nor by angels having come from heaven, but preached them as the speculations of men, as doctrines discovered, framed and arranged by men, by some theologians of eminent ability, and they would have had no particular difficulty. In preaching precisely the same doctrines we now preach, that is, the first principles of the Gospel, a church might have been made one of the most popular churches upon the face of the earth.

But what was it that excited animosity? It was the declaration that God had spoken from the heavens and had restored the primitive Gospel in its original purity and power, and that we had the power and authority to administer in the ordinances of the Gospel through which had been restored the gifts and blessings and powers that pertained to the Gospel in the days of Jesus. It was this declaration that excited animosity throughout the religious world against the Latter-day Saints in the beginning. Every preacher felt that he was condemned by this declaration. If we had stood upon the same platform as they, saying that our organization was the result of man's wisdom, we should then have had some sympathy from them. But because our Elders declared that God had spoken, and that we preached that which had been revealed to us, animosity was excited, and mobs rose against us, entertaining the most bitter feelings, and committing the most terrible outrages.

It is interesting reading now, in this year of our Lord, 1882, to go back to that which occurred fifty years ago, in Missouri, soon after this Church was organized. The charges against us then were that we believed in Prophets, that we believed in revelation, that we believed in healing the sick, according to the pattern in the New Testament, that we were so credulous as to believe that God would work miracles; and the crowning accusation was that we were Yankees and abolitionists, and therefore were unfit to live in the State of Missouri. I say, it is interesting in these days to go back and read the documents issued by the mob in 1832-3 in Jackson County, Missouri. There was no plural marriage then to cause offense. The cry against us then was, that we believed that God was a God of revelation as He was in ancient days; that He was the same God in this,

the 19th century, that He was in the first century of the Christian era, when Jesus and the Apostles ministered among men. This was considered sufficient cause for mobs to organize themselves and drive our people from their homes and lands, and to kill some of them.

If we were to practice plural marriage in some other manner, and not sanctify it by the forms of religion; if we were to be guilty of anything of this character, separating it entirely from all religious ceremonies and ordinances, there would be little, if anything, said about us. To judge from expressions I hear, I do not suppose it would excite any particular animosity.

We, as a people, have to pass through these ordeals. It is a great consolation to me, it has been while I have been absent, to know that we are fighting the battles of religious liberty for the entire people; it might be said, for the entire world. And there is no people on this continent in so good a position to do this to-day as we are, for there is no people so well organized as we are. No man, single-handed, could do what we are doing; no half dozen men could do it; they would be crushed. Let any man go out from this place and attempt, single-handed and apart from any other organization, to fight the battle that we are fighting, and he would soon be overwhelmed. But we are an organized community; we can live here as we did in the early days without help from any other source except God. We can raise our food; we can make our clothing. If it be necessary we can pinch ourselves, dispense with luxuries, and can live on those things which are barely essential to life. We do not necessarily have to depend upon other people for support. If grasshoppers come and sweep our fields, as they have done, there is no cry from Utah to the general government for help. We have borne these afflictions unassisted by our fellow citizens; and we have proven to our own satisfaction, if not to the nation at large, that we are capable of sustaining ourselves. Therefore, when wrath is excited against us, we do not lose employment, we do not lose food, we are not turned out of our houses nor otherwise impoverished; because we have the elements in our own midst from which we can draw a living; and we know how to use them for our own sustenance, and for the preservation of those who are dependent upon us. Hence we are in an excellent position to fight the battles of freedom; and it is the most glorious warfare that men or women were ever engaged in. I expect we shall continue to contend for liberty, not with physical weapons but with steadfast moral courage, despite the Edmunds law, despite the Poland law, despite the law of '62 or any other law that may be made in violation of the Constitution, and of the Bill of Rights. We shall have to contend unceasingly for those principles, without wavering or yielding one iota in our determination. I claim this not for Latter-day Saints alone, but I claim it for every man and woman in this Republic; for I say that the men and women in this great nation have the right to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences, as long as they do not, in so doing, interfere with the rights of their fellow citizens; and I claim that they have the right to do this, despite the Supreme Court decisions, despite the action of Congress, despite the expressions of pulpit and press; and I am willing to contend for that liberty for every man and woman whether they be of the Methodist, the Presbyterian, the Episcopalian or any other persuasion, or whether they be believers in the doctrine or views of Col. Robert Ingersoll. God has given us this right, and He has given unto us our agency. If we violate His will, He will punish us; He has threatened us with punishment if we do so, and we are responsible to Him, and not to the Congress of the United States, nor to the President of the United States, nor to any human being; we are responsible alone to our God, and there is no power upon the earth that can justly deprive me or deprive you of this right. They may, by force of power, by illegal measures and unconstitutional laws do this; men may be imprisoned or slain; but the principle that I now declare is a fundamental, a constitutional principle, and it will endure. And the day will come in this land when every man will have this right, regardless of his profession. Are we to be dictated to by popular preachers? Such men say to the Congress

of the United States, "You must enact certain laws; we demand it you, our congregations demand it you must put down 'Mormonism.' We do not want that religion." We are Methodists; we are Presbyterians, or we are somebody else, as we call upon you to maintain orthodoxy and to put down heterodoxy. I would just as soon be dictated to by the Pope of Rome, by Mr. Ingersoll or by a "Mormon" Bishop, as be dictated by popular preachers to what I must accept as religion.

Fault is found with us in the Territory because it is said the hierarchy dictates legislation; but you know this is not true. I wish you could dictate it more than it is done. We have our views like other citizens, but who has ever known them to be forced upon any? And, this is the head and front of our offending, namely, that in Utah there is a theocracy dictating legislation. Now who is it that has demanded Congress this Edmunds law against Utah? It has been the pulpit of a nation, the orthodox pulpit. It is their behests this legislation has been enacted. They would destroy us; and if they could do this they would turn their attention somebody else—the Catholics, the Infidels, the Spiritualists—the would not be satisfied until they obtained what they call "uniformity." They do the very thing themselves that they charge us with doing, and which they pretend to desire to prevent in this Territory.

It is this principle of freedom which I have been speaking that are determined to maintain; shall contend for it to the very term of life as long as life remains. This is the feeling I have. Do not feel the same? I am sure you do; I know you all do; I need not call for any expression of your feelings. We cannot fight law; must submit to law, the law be more powerful than we are; but we can do as John Bunyan said: "cannot obey, but I can suffer." We cannot renounce our religion; cannot throw it aside; we cannot trample upon the commandments of God; but we can endure the penalty of obeying God's law, even to imprisonment. It is part of a contract. We know what we had to endure for the religion of Jesus, and if we expect to obtain same glory as they, we must be prepared to endure the same consequences.

I do not make these remarks stir up feelings of defiance. It is a most unwise and a most unfortunate position for us to occupy to place ourselves in an attitude of defiance against the laws of the land; but while we do not defy, at the same time shall maintain, hope, the principles of liberty, and claim them for every man and woman as well as for ourselves. We shall never cease our efforts, I hope until from one end of the land to the other men and women can worship God whether they be Mormon or infidel, or whether they believe in Buddha, or are believers in the God of Israel, the Lord of the whole earth, or worship a wooden god without interference or interruption from others as long as they do not trespass upon or interfere with the rights of their fellow citizens. I ought to have this right, and no one should seek to deprive them of it.

The most nonsensical arguments have been used against us in consequence of our claiming liberty of this kind. Say some men: Suppose there were Thugs in this country or Hindoos who believed in burning widows as they did in India, shall the government not have the right to put down such murders and such ceremonies of cremation? Suppose that human sacrifice was deemed proper by some religious sect and should be called a religious ordinance, do you mean to say that Government has not the right to interfere with and to stop the taking of life in such a way?

Certainly, I have never said that. I have never said I claimed that when I have said that we had a right to practice this feature of our religion. There is a very wide distinction, but many do not seem to understand the difference. There are certain acts that are crimes in and of themselves; they are not made so by statutory law; one of these is murder. It always was a crime against nature and always will be. He who takes the life of a fellow being commits a crime, even if it should be in a land where there is no law; it is in and of itself a crime—*malum in se*. It needs no statutory law to make it so. Marriage occupies a very different position from this. Before the law of 1862 was passed by Congress