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Delivered at the Utah Stake Conference, Provo, Sunday, April 19th, 1896, by
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[REPORTED BY ARTHUR WINTER.]

I am very much gratified at meeting with so large a number of the Latter-day Saints of this Stake, and have been deeply interested in the remarks of Brother Reed Smoot. He referred to the individuality of the members of this Church, and it struck me while he was speaking that that is the strong feature of what is called Mormonism—that all its members act on their own responsibility and according to their own knowledge, if they are living as they should do. There has never been a time when the people were forced to follow the counsel of those who presided over them. We believe more firmly than any other religious body, and we carry out more strictly, the principle of individual agency, believing that this is ordained of God. While there are penalties, in a Church sense, attached to disobedience to counsel there are no physical punishments inflicted upon those who disregard the advice of their ecclesiastical officers. I know that the rumor has been very diligently circulated in many places that when the Latter-day Saints had control in this country, they were not slow to visit those who were disobedient with severe punishment, and even with death. Blood atonement, as we believe it, has been misrepresented, and we have been accused of seeking the death of those who disobeyed counsel or who apostatized from the Church. Those who have circulated such rumors have, I believe, wilfully misrepresented facts. If they have supposed they were telling the truth, they have certainly neglected their opportunity of gaining correct information. I am free to admit that we have been a people of perhaps too strong prejudices. We have had set views. Indeed, a people such as we are could not help but feel as many of us have done; yet I believe God is softening out hearts by the experiences through which we are now passing, and which we have already had, and will bring us eventually into a condition where we will be able to look with the utmost charity, long suffering and patience upon the weaknesses of our fellowmen; and He will give us so strict a sense of justice that our Church courts will assume the position which they once occupied in the estimation of many people of the world, who were willing to submit their differences and their troubles to the arbitration of the

Church officers, feeling that even where one of their own community stood upon the one side and a non-Mormon upon the other, these courts would only take cognizance of facts and of equity, and decide accordingly. I trust that this condition will soon prevail among this people, if it does not already; for I cannot believe that God will justify us in treating improperly any man or woman who lives upon the earth, whether he or she sees as we do or not. We believe that the Lord designs to place power in our hands, because of the principles by which we will be governed. It is consequently of the utmost importance that we be brought into a condition where we will have these Christlike qualities which will make our counsel sought and will compel the good and the noble everywhere to sustain our decisions.

I have so much confidence in my brethren who preside in the wards and Stakes of Zion that I cannot now conceive of any case that might arise in my experience that I would not be willing to submit to them for judgment; and in hearing of appeals that have come to the First Presidency from the various Stakes of Zion, and they sitting as an impartial court of appeal, I think it shows how careful the High Councils are when it is known that it is very unusual for one of their decisions to be reverse. I can appreciate the fact that these men living in Utah Stake might become prejudiced against a fellow member. Being so closely associated, they would naturally partake more or less of the spirit of prejudice and ill-feeling which might be aroused against a man or a woman in this Stake; yet I cannot believe that a single member of this High Council—or any other, for that matter—would dare, in the face of the covenants he has made before God and the people, to knowingly sustain or pass an unjust decree, however much their prejudices might be aroused against the individual whose case was investigated. I know, as I know that I live, that the man who would raise his voice or his hand to do a wrong to a member of the Church must answer for his wrong to God and to his fellow-man. I know the Lord has record of everything we do. Even the thoughts of our hearts are revealed unto Him; and if we in our official positions are tempted to treat unjustly the poor and the meek, or the rich and the proud, we will be held to a strict account therefor, and we will be required to make restitution and to humble ourselves to the complete satisfaction of the wronged one before we can receive the blessings for which we claim to be so earnestly striving. Men may err in judgment, and do frequently make mistakes; but even under those

circumstances, if the one who is misjudged and considers himself wronged will adhere strictly to the commandments of God, the misjudgment, the wrong, will be overruled for his good, and God will vindicate him before the people and before those who have done him wrong.

This is the condition, I believe, that prevails in Zion—a desire on the part of the Priesthood to care for and to protect the interests of the people, to give them all their rights and privileges, to exercise no unrighteous dominion over them, but rather to suffer wrong patiently than to see a soul turned to the broad path of destruction. This has been the characteristic of the people from the beginning of the Church, notwithstanding the assaults of their enemies upon them; and yet every now and again the Church is charged with wrongs by the people of the world, because the Church passes regulations to govern its members, gives counsel for their guidance, issues addresses for their information! What would a church be if it were not alive to the conditions that prevailed? It would become a dead branch in the earth, a tree without force, without benefit, worthy only to be destroyed. It would reach the condition of other churches among men that have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof. It is a fact that this Church is alive, through the revelations that God gives to it, to existing conditions, which makes it a force among men and gives it power to attract the good of the earth to its standard. I hope never to live to see the day when this Church is to be controlled alone by that which is written in the sacred scriptures. I hope that this Church will be guided continually by the living spirit of the Almighty, and that there will never be a condition of things arise among this people wherein the face of God will be shut out from them. I know that men would like to see Zion in the condition of other sects, because they know their craft is in danger with the growth of this Church and with the spread of its principles. Only within a few days we have heard things from a minister in this community concerning this people which he knows well are untrue, and which some of his own congregation have themselves denounced to me within the last few days.

This reverend divine declared that this people came to these mountains because they would not be tolerated in the States where they desired to locate.

We know, and it is easy for him to ascertain—not from our records alone, but from the indisputable evidence of those who were unfriendly to us—the causes of our removal and the manner in which that removal was accomplished.