

THE SUPREME COURT DECISION.

INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT JOHN TAYLOR.

An interview with President John Taylor, having been requested by O. J. Hollister, Esq., United States Collector of Internal Revenue for Utah Territory, and correspondent of the New York Tribune, on Monday, Jan. 13, 1879, those gentlemen met by appointment in the President's office, Salt Lake City, when the following conversation ensued, as reported by Mr. Geo. F. Gibbs, phonographer, Mr. Hollister having his questions prepared in writing. President Taylor is not in the habit of granting such requests for interviews, and met Mr. Hollister simply because he was in some sense a representative of the Federal Government. The report is now published in full because it embodies many important statements, and because it is hardly to be expected that the whole conversation, unabridged, will appear in the paper for which it was obtained. In connection with current events vitally affecting the religious liberties of the Latter-day Saints, we have no doubt that it will be read with interest by many persons of various creeds, as well as by the people who are chiefly concerned in the issues alluded to therein, and the bearings of the recent decision of the Supreme Court of the United States.—ED. NEWS.]

MR. HOLLISTER.—I would like, as a representative of the New York Tribune, to ask you, Mr. Taylor, whether you dissent from Judge Waite's decision, and if so, wherein?

MR. TAYLOR.—In relation to this matter, I suppose you want something from me for the purpose of laying it before the public?

MR. H.—Yes, sir.

MR. T.—Then, while I am not averse to my views being made known to the public, and as you, I understand, are a United States officer, I may take the liberty of interviewing you.

MR. H.—If you will answer my questions, I will answer yours.

MR. T.—(By way of introduction), this is Mr. Pentrose, one of our editors, whom I have invited to be present, as he is also a public man. Well, Mr. Hollister, what do you wish to ask me?

MR. H.—I have a number of questions written down, which, if you please, I will present; and, to commence, I will ask, Do you dissent from Judge Waite's statement of the scope and effect of the amendment to the constitution guaranteeing religious freedom?

MR. T.—Yes, sir.

MR. H.—That Congress was thereby deprived of all legislative power over mere opinion or belief, but was left free to reach actions which are in violation of social duties or subversive of good order?

MR. PENTROSE, Associate Editor of the DESERET NEWS.—That is, it is assumed that a religious people have the right of belief, but have not the right to carry out and practice their belief.

MR. T.—I regard that a religious faith amounts to nothing unless we are permitted to carry it into effect. Congress and the Supreme Court are carrying out the same principles that were practised in the persecutions against the Huguenots in France, the Waldenses and Albigenses in Piedmont, the Non-conformists in England, and others who have been persecuted on account of their religion. All of those people had the right in their respective governments anywhere and everywhere to entertain their religious beliefs, but it was the practice of that faith that made it offensive. And I look upon this in the same way. Article I. of the amendments to the Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." They will allow us to think—what an unspeakable privilege that is—but they will not allow us the free exercise of that faith which the Constitution guarantees. Here is the injustice and the manifest breach of faith.

MR. H.—Is it not true that marriage is the basis of society, that out of it spring the social relations, obligations and duties with which governments must necessarily con-

cern themselves? And is it not therefore within the legitimate scope of the power of every civil government to determine whether marriage shall be polygamous or monogamous under its dominion?

MR. T.—I do not look upon it in that way. I consider that when the Constitution of the United States was framed and adopted, those high contracting parties did positively agree that they would not interfere with religious affairs. Now, if our marital relations are not religious, what is? This ordinance of marriage was a direct revelation to us through Joseph Smith the Prophet, which we as a people believe in. I refer you to my testimony given not long ago in a United States Court, and I will tell you now, as I there stated under oath, that I know that God has given this to us for our guidance in these matters. My oath would be taken on other matters, why not on religion? You may not know it, but I know that this is a revelation from God and a command to his people, and therefore it is my religion. I do not believe that the Supreme Court of the United States nor the Congress of the United States has any right to interfere with my religious views, and in doing it they are violating their most sacred obligations.

MR. H.—My idea of religion is this:—that man acknowledges, loves, reverences, worships, and gives thanks to God; that constitutes religion. Worship may take various forms of expression, but where did it ever, how can it, take the form of marrying and raising families—either single or plural families?

MR. T.—Mr. Hollister, are you a believer in the Bible?

MR. P.—Mr. Hollister's question is answered by the Bible, which plainly says—that marriage is ordained of God, etc.

MR. T.—Now, Mr. Hollister, I have so far answered your questions, will you answer mine?

MR. H.—In one sense I do. I believe that part of the Bible that my reason approves of.

MR. T.—It would not be of any use arguing with you on this subject then; but as my opinions are desired for the public, I will state that I believe in the Bible, and believing in it I believe in those principles therein set forth.

MR. H.—If marriage can be legitimately called religion, what human relation or pursuit may not be so called? and if everything is religion, and the state is prohibited from interfering with it, what place is there left for the state?

MR. T.—I do not know of any particular necessity for the state interfering with religious matters; the Constitution declares it shall not.

MR. P.—That is easily answered. When one's religion assumes to interfere with the rights and liberties of others.

MR. T.—Whose rights do we interfere with? that is a question I was going to ask you.

MR. H.—I consider that you interfere with men's rights and women's rights and children's rights.

MR. T.—How can we interfere with men's rights or with women's rights if all enter into it voluntarily? The man is not injured by it, for he assumes premeditatedly and knowingly the responsibilities that he voluntarily enters into; the woman's rights are not interfered with, for her actions are as the man's—voluntary, and she understands the nature of the covenant as well as the responsibility she assumes.

MR. H.—I think it interferes with the rights of men and women, because when a man marries a second woman, some other man must do without any. Travelers such as Livingston and Sveinfurth tell us that the slave trade in Eastern and Central Africa has been supported for ages by the demand for plural wives or concubines in polygamous Asia. You believe that Mormonism will be universally received, but polygamy cannot become universal, because the sexes are born in about equal numbers. How can a principle, not of universal applicability, be philosophically sound, or sound in any sense?

MR. P.—What need of going out of Utah?

MR. T.—If you are going to defend polygamy as a sound philosophical principle, I don't see how you can avoid going out of Utah.

MR. P.—But we only practice it as a part of our religion.

MR. H.—But if it is a true principle it must be of universal applicability?

MR. P.—There are certain principles of our faith that must be believed in and practised before the principle of polygamy, and therefore it could not apply to any but believers in those principles as well as polygamy.

MR. T.—I do not think it necessary to enter into a discussion on these points. I speak of facts and consequently I do not think they can be successfully controverted. These theories are too visionary and too far in the future. It is well known that there are scores of thousands of women in these United States who cannot obtain husbands and the same also in England and other Christian countries. And furthermore, we regard the plural order of marriage as being voluntary, both on the part of the man and the woman. If there should be any disparity, as you refer to—if there should not be two wives for one man, why then he could not get them.

MR. H.—Is it not a trespass on the rights of others? those of men, because when a man marries two women, some other man must do without any? those of women, because they are each entitled to a husband, and because the essence of conjugal love is exclusiveness; those of children, because they cannot have that care from a polygamic they ought to and do have from a monogamic father?

MR. CALDER.—Let me ask you, Mr. Hollister, if you think a person has the right to practice polygamy in our faith unless he accepts Joseph Smith as a prophet of God?

MR. H.—No, nor then either.

MR. C.—How then can it affect others that do not believe in him?

MR. T.—You propose to interview me in relation to this matter; and on the other hand I propose to interview you. You give me credit for my good faith; I give you credit for yours. You are a United States officer, and I am a believer in the United States government. I have taken the oath of allegiance to the United States government, not being American born, and I have always admired its institutions; and I have been very desirous to see the practice and carrying out of these fundamental principles of our government; I have been anxious to see public affairs conducted in a correct, philosophic, patriotic and statesmanlike form in all things. These have been my sentiments; I presume they are yours. I would like to see the Government take a course that would be calculated to promote union, confidence and fellowship among all classes. I am not one of those that feel like damning and destroying those that do not believe as I do. I believe that God is the Father of all; and I believe that this government was instituted by God for certain purposes, in the interests of humanity; and I wish to see things conducted in that manner that will tend to promote the happiness and well-being of all grades and classes, irrespective of creed. I think, and know in fact, we are misunderstood in many respects. Some people think we are enemies to this government. I can truthfully say I never was an enemy to the government, neither have I ever entertained a feeling of enmity in my heart. I do not think for one moment that either Joseph Smith or Brigham Young was an enemy to the government; neither do I believe that any of our leading men, comprehending correct principles, ever feel inimical to the government of the United States. Joseph Smith had a revelation. Could he help that? If the Lord spoke to him was he to blame? I believe that revelation. You do not. That is all right. One is a Baptist, say, another a Presbyterian, etc., etc.; that is his individual business, not mine. I look upon it that we are all the children of the same Parent, all having a perfect right to His mercy and full freedom of action without distinction. And I would be much pleased to see correct principles established in the United States, and thence spread throughout the world. That is my political faith, Mr. Hollister.

MR. H.—Can religious belief, in your opinion, be accepted by any government as justification of an act which it has by law made criminal without abdicating its functions as a government?

MR. T.—Well, that would be a question admitting of a great deal of argument, depending altogether upon circumstances. If the government sets out in the first place with a Constitution guaranteeing to all men freedom in regard to their religious right and then violates that Constitution, the government then becomes the transgressor, not the parties. For instance, referring to the government of the United States; do you believe that its Constitution is binding upon Congress and upon the Supreme Court?

MR. H.—Yes, sir.

MR. T.—Then, although I am sorry to say it, yet I believe that both of these exalted branches of the government have violated their most sacred obligations to sustain that instrument.

MR. H.—Can your people longer entertain a reasonable expectation of changing, or materially modifying, the sentiment of the American people on this subject?

MR. T.—Unless they go back to first principles we cannot. We can have but very little hope unless they recognize the validity of the Constitution, and do not tamper with that sacred covenant.

MR. H.—If not, can you expect as a people to practice polygamy indefinitely, hedging it about with secrecy, and when questioned judicially, evade or deny it?

MR. T.—In relation to our expectations pertaining to that, the U. S. judiciary as well as all the powers of this government are in the hands of God, and we are in the hands of God, and we and they also must abide the issue.

MR. H.—Viewed socially or philosophically, apart from all religious considerations, do you regard polygamy as worthy of perpetuation at the cost of perpetual antagonism between your people and their countrymen?

MR. T.—However we may respect the government and its institutions I would respectfully say we are not the parties who produce this antagonism; it is men who place themselves in antagonism to the Constitution of the United States. We are governed by the law of God, which is not in violation of that Constitution. Our revelation given in August 1831 specifically states that if we keep the laws of God we need not break the laws of the land. Congress has since, by its act, placed us in antagonism to what we term an unconstitutional law, and it now becomes a question whether we should obey God or man.

MR. H.—But in taking that position do you not set yourselves up as the judges of the Constitution, whereas the laws (Sec 709 R. S.) make the Supreme Court the judge of the constitutionality of the laws of Congress?

MR. T.—Without any interpretations from the Supreme Court, I take it that the words themselves are explicit on this point requiring no interpretation, and any interpretation could not make them plainer. We take them to mean what they say. When the Constitution says Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, we take it to mean what it says. Congress, indeed, can pass laws, and the Supreme Court can sanction those laws; but while they have the power, being in the majority, the justice of those laws is another matter.

MR. H.—Viewed as above do you regard polygamy as superior to monogamy as the form or law of marriage, and if so wherein?

MR. T.—I consider it altogether superior to the law of monogamy in a great many particulars. First, I base it upon the will and command of God both in ancient and modern times; second, I base it upon the natural results of monogamy. There is in all monogamic countries, the United States not excepted, a terrible state of things arising from the practice of monogamy, infanticide and feicide prevailing to an alarming extent. Statements are on record of reliable men, such as physicians, statesmen and others, to the effect that they feared that, in consequence of such practices, the original stock of people in certain districts would run out. It is said that they arrange the size of their families to suit themselves, generally calculating to have about two children, and the rest must be killed either before they come into the world or afterwards, thus making murderers and murderers of all who engage in it, imbruing their hands in the blood of innocence and taking the lives of those whom God committed to their care. And it must be admitted that whoredoms and other abominable practices, which are offensive to good or civilized society

and contrary to the laws of nature, are carried on extensively, and that people are doing far worse things, according to their own admissions, associated with monogamy than we are even charged with. And that while these things are sanctioned and protected to a certain extent by government—at least winked at, all those highly moral and religious principles, ordained of God, by which men ought to be actuated, are trampled under foot. A man marries a wife, he does not calculate to be true to her, but associates with lewd women, of whom there are thousands upon thousands in the United States. Polygamy protects its offspring; monogamy does not. How many are there now in Washington, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and other cities that make it a practice to cohabit with other women, to whom children are born, the results of their adultery, whom they do not acknowledge, but who are turned out upon the streets to become waifs in the shape of newsboys, street-sweepers, etc., outcasts and pariahs of society, augmenting also the criminal classes and the paupers, leaving other people to provide for their illicit offspring; and it is not an unfrequent thing for such children, while engaged sweeping the street crossings, to ask their own father for a penny, the child not knowing the father nor the father the child.

MR. H.—Do you consider these evils the necessary concomitants of monogamy more than of polygamy?

MR. T.—These are the results of monogamy, whether necessary or not, and these are the evils associated with it. We acknowledge our children, we acknowledge our wives; we have no mistresses. We had no prostitution here until it was introduced by monogamy, and I am now told that these other diabolical deeds are following in its train. The courts have protected these people in their wicked practices. We repudiate all such things, and hence I consider that a system that will enable a man to carry out his professions, and that will enable him to acknowledge his wife or wives and acknowledge and provide for his children and wives, is much more honorable than that principle which violates its marital relations, and whilst hypocritically professing to be true to its pledges, recklessly violates the same and tramples upon every principle of honor, which sits down and coolly and deliberately decides how many children shall be murdered and how many shall live. The one, Mr. Hollister, is a great deal better system than the other. Before monogamy came here we had no houses of ill fame, and our women were not seduced.

MR. H.—Does not the Bible which gives the first account of polygamy also give us the first account of prostitution?

MR. T.—To a very limited extent, but it was punishable by death in connection with the polygamic law.

MR. H.—Then prostitution is not necessarily a concomitant of monogamy any more than it is of polygamy?

MR. T.—O yes, it is, for under the polygamic law adulterers were punished with death. And it is known to the world that prostitution is a concomitant or outgrowth of monogamy to be found in all monogamous countries, and is really one of the prominent institutions of monogamy, having been licensed in some parts of the United States, and it is also licensed in France and other "Christian" countries.

MR. H.—I might reply to this that Christian nations regard prostitution as an evil, to be regulated where it cannot be suppressed; that it is nowhere among them encouraged, but universally frowned upon; that it were better for man to put mere restraint upon his passions, than to provide the means of satisfying them under the cover of law or religion.

MR. T.—I think it better to honestly and honorably carry out our professions, than to act the part of hypocrites whether as individuals or nations.

MR. H.—But if we want to get through we must confine the discussion to the line of my written questions. Otherwise it would be endless. I will therefore ask—Was not the great object of the institution of polygamy to rapidly increase the number of the adherents of your church, and is not that object accomplished as far as is practicable in that way?

MR. T.—The object as well as the institution was designed by the Almighty and not by man. I believe