

LECTURE

BY

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REPORTED BY F. E. BARKER.

In looking over this vast congregation, I can but reflect, with infinite joy, upon the occasion that has brought us together. The exercises of our Conference are nearing their conclusion, and the question may be asked of those who are here, Why have we thus come together? What does this Conference import to those in whose interest it has been called? We have heard words of eloquence, treating upon themes of deepest interest to us since we convened yesterday morning. We have had lectures upon theology, and science and history; upon the government of our Associations, and treating upon the various items of interest to us, that are calculated, in their practical application to our lives, to benefit us and advance us in the culture and improvement of our minds and of our hearts. We have assembled by thousands, because the youth of this people, the young men and women of Zion, are interested in the cause of Zion.

Our organization has had, during the period of its existence, such an experience as to make an occasion of this kind one of the utmost satisfaction and pleasure to those who have been workers in it. We reflect upon the labors of the past; and while, as we have plodded along, step by step, our advancement has oftentimes seemed extremely slow, yet when we take a retrospective view we discover that we have made progress. It has not been many years since, when great fears were expressed by those who had stood and borne the heat and burden of the day, in the defense of the cause of Zion, for the future of Zion; at least, if not for the future of Zion, they were perplexed in looking about them to see where were those who would follow voluntarily in their footsteps. The rude, impetuous and often profane conduct of many young men in this community, a few years ago, was spoken of to their shame. Sabbath-breaking, intemperance, profanity and many evils had grown and increased to an alarming extent among us. I believe that I am within the bounds of truth when I say that the Mutual Improvement Associations have effected a very great reform in this respect. I will, however, basing my remarks upon reports that have come to us, and that have been read in your hearing in this Conference, allude to one or two of the results of this Association.

A few years ago it was the practice to send out missionaries from our midst from the workshop and the field, young men who had never in their lives stood on their feet to bear testimony of the truth, who had never made an attempt to speak in the name of the Lord. Ridiculous, trying, painful incidents have often been narrated in our hearing of the experiences of these young men when facing strange audiences, before congregations on foreign shores. The authorities of the Church had, at times, with difficulty, been able to find, among the people, suitable missionaries to send abroad to proclaim the Gospel to the inhabitants of the earth. I think that I might safely declare that the day is past and gone forever in the history of this people when such needs to be the case. We have reported here about fifteen thousand members of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Associations, and during the past year, each of those, has at least, stood upon his feet and said something, either in the form of a lecture, or a testimony or some exercise before the congregation of his brethren. He has had his first experience at home, among his friends. And words come from the young missionaries abroad thanking the Lord first, and these Associations after, that they have had the opportunity of receiving this experience among their associates, and not among strangers who did not sympathize with them. In some instances this organization has made its power and influence felt in upbearing and sustaining the arms of the Holy Priesthood. There have been practices among us which have met with the disapproval of the authorities of the Church, and these Societies have been called upon to use an influence to put them down, and we have succeeded wherever that effort has been unitedly made; if not as perfectly as was desired, in a very great degree. While I feel that the Associations are entitled to congratulation; while I feel and believe that they are entitled to a meed of praise; while I believe that they have done good in the past, and I know that God has vouchsafed to us His holy spirit to support and sustain us; the purpose of my remarks tonight shall be to indicate, if it be in my power, how we may do more good in the future than we have done in the past. We may listen to the wise sayings of the sages and those of experience among us; we may receive instruction from the lips of inspired men; we may read words of light and truth for our betterment, our natural development and education; but the efforts that we put forth ourselves, for our own mutual improvement, are those which will count most to us in life. It will not do for us forever to lean upon another. When we started out in this work of mutual improvement, the counsel and injunction to us

was to procure for ourselves, as individuals, a testimony of the truth, that we might not depend upon the testimony of any other man, but that there might be living within us an assurance that we were accepted of God and engaged in promoting His work upon the earth; and this has been our leading motive and object. This has been our principal work and achievement, and this forever will be the key to our success, the foundation upon which we may build, namely, individual testimonies of the truth, obtained by exercises that shall be from time to time prescribed for us. Our mission in life is to be exponents of the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, revealed from heaven, in the dispensation in which we live, by the Prophet Joseph Smith. Our destiny is to aid in the establishment of the kingdom of God upon the earth, with dominion and influence; to prepare the people for the coming of the Son of Man, who will reign and rule among them; to teach the nations of the earth the law of God and bring mankind into subjection to the principles thereof. It has been proclaimed in our hearing by inspired men, from our childhood, that this was the destiny of the youth of this people, and we have seen their predictions fulfilled from year to year and from time to time, and today we are living in a period of the greatest possible interest, because we have heard the very situation that we are passing through described by the spirit and power of prophecy in years that are gone. We are having opportunities of proving our fidelity, of displaying our integrity to the truth, of proving ourselves worthy to represent the principles of revealed truth, of the name we bear, of the high distinction that God has called us to, even to be the messengers of life, to be the exemplars of character and of holy and pure names unto the inhabitants of the earth. We have set out to win a victory that the world has failed to achieve by all the wisdom and learning and knowledge that is in it: to establish government that is applicable to the condition of men, and that is indeed what it professes to be. The great, aye the greatest, achievement of this people is this, that by the power of God, they have learned to master and control their passions and subject themselves to the influences of purity and holiness. They do not talk of virtue they do not possess. Young men of this community understand that their very eternal life depends upon the purity of their lives here upon this earth; and upon that basis, upon that foundation, with a people in whom this truth abides, God will rear a kingdom, a nation, a power in the earth, that is irresistible, and against which no enemy can prevail.

We heard beautifully described to us the manner in which the foundation of this great structure has been laid, in the rugged blocks of granite that have been set firm upon the earth, upon which shall be built, by polished stone, a glorious, a magnificent structure, walls that shine and glitter in the sun, and spires that look to heaven, glorious in their beauty and symmetry. While we praise the work of the fathers, we have no time to waste in preparing ourselves for the place that we shall occupy in this great structure. It is by cutting and breaking off the rough and uneven parts, by polishing and smoothing ourselves, being certain in the first place that we are made of good and honest material. We have accomplished something by our reliance upon the spirit of our religion, by the instruction and counsel and teachings that have been given us. Now, while not in the least degree departing from these, the time has come when we should take an onward step.

It is said of us, with more or less truth, that we are not a reading people. The young men and the young ladies of this community are chargeable, to a certain extent, with light-mindedness and folly, with thoughtlessness, with indulging in pastimes and pleasures to the exclusion of weightier and more important considerations of life. We may not have given our hearts to the study and consideration of those things that will most benefit us, to the extent that we should have done, but we are now called upon to step forth and take a front rank, an advance in the scale of human intelligence, to inform and educate ourselves, according to the injunctions of Holy Writ and the counsel of the inspired Prophets of God. We, as a people, receive perhaps more practical instructions from the pulpit than any other people upon the earth. But this is not enough. If we would become learned, if we would become cultured, if we would occupy the place that He has said we should occupy, if we would become, indeed, the people that God has declared it our privilege to be, we must observe to obey and keep His commandments with respect to the acquirement of knowledge. The fathers of the people, our leaders, have not ignored the use of books. They are almost universally versed in the Holy Scriptures. They have read with profound thought the utterances of inspired men of other ages. They have pored over the Book of Mormon; they have studied and learned by heart the revelations of modern times; they are familiar with the history of the world to a greater or less extent. Those who have occupied high and important positions among us have been, in some instances, notorious for their knowledge of the past history of the races and peoples of the world. Our opportunities for acquiring knowledge respecting the countries and places of the world are

better than any other people possess. I have been abroad and have met tourists who have been traveling for the purposes of acquiring knowledge of countries and people, and for pleasure. But among them all, rare, indeed, has been the time when I have seen one who possessed so good an opportunity as the plodding, unknown Elders of the Church, going from place to place proclaiming the truth. The average tourist visits the hotels, the large galleries, finding companions of his own country, with whom he constantly associates and converses. He might almost as well have taken up the guide book and studied those countries which he visits, at home. But with the Elder of the Church, how is it? He has no guide book; he goes to no hotel. But he visits among the people; he walks across the country from one point to another. He is informed of the people; he learns the history of the day as no other tourist learns it. In many instances, however, there are Elders, young and inexperienced Elders among us, who go abroad without having knowledge enough of the history of the world to appreciate the things they see. I have known Elders to pass within three miles of Canterbury Town, in England, and because of their utter lack of knowledge of the history of England, they had not curiosity nor interest enough to walk over that distance of three miles, and see the place where Thomas a'Becket was slain—to gaze upon one of the grandest structures of olden times, or to learn the lessons which the inscriptions upon the memorial stones in that grand building contain. I was visiting Trafalgar Square, in the city of London, with a young man of our community, and looking upon the Nelson monument, a glorious, grand monument of the devotion of the British to their great Admiral. After viewing the lions at its base, cut by one of the world's most famous sculptors, the great Thorwaldsen, and dabbling in the fountains that play about it, as we left the square, I asked him what he thought of the monument. His observation was, "It's awful high." I told him the height of it, and he responded by the inquiry, "What's it for?" It wasn't a house to live in; it wasn't a barn, nor a windmill; and it was a mystery to him why so great a column should be erected in such a place. And this through lack of reading; this because he was ignorant of the history of that country.

I recite these instances, not that I think it is necessary to say much of what we do not know, but that there is much for us to learn. There is much that we need to know, to qualify ourselves for the mission that is before us. It is vain for us to hope to acquire that knowledge without systematic study, without we give our hearts and our thoughts to reflection, and to the improvement and cultivation of our minds.

We have an organization that is capable of prescribing to its members the manner and methods to be pursued to make them in all respects capable and prepared for the duties of life that are before them. And that is our mission, to aid and help, in preparing ourselves to live successfully, to perform the duties of life in a manner that shall be pleasing to God and acceptable to His servants, and to ourselves. There are those within the sound of my voice, the young people of this community, who if asked will generally respond and say, We desire knowledge, we desire culture, we desire improvement. The great difficulty among us is proper preparation. The number of young people in this city, and in this Territory, who ask the question, What shall I read? and How shall I read? is very great, and it is constantly increasing. These questions spring to the lips of almost every one into whose heart has entered the desire for knowledge. We go into the libraries, or into the bookstores, and gaze upon the shelves of books, row upon row, in bindings of every hue, and we are bewildered to know which of these we should select, for our information, for our culture, and the development of our faculties. We are as likely as not to make a choice that is bad. If we ask the bookseller, he will perhaps cite us to the most popular book of the day, without regard to our needs or necessities. We turn away, bewildered and discouraged, in looking upon the vast quantity of books that are presented for us to choose from; and still, deep in our hearts, are these questions: What shall I read to the best advantage? How shall I read in order to learn the most? And we need direction in regard to these things.

In selecting books to read, the first consideration should be, what do we wish to know? For what purpose do we wish to acquire knowledge? We wish to prepare ourselves to be representatives of the cause in which we are engaged. The first thing, then, that we should know, is the truth respecting that cause, to know the truth that it involves; to know the laws by which we shall be governed, and invite mankind to be governed; to know, in a word, the principles of divine truth, and to be prepared to explain them to our fellow men. If we would be happy with the profession of Latter-day Saints, we must be able to give a reason for the faith that is in us. If we are to go abroad into the world, we should desire to know the history of the world to which we shall go and bear our testimony, learn things that are regarded by the world and to have a proper appreciation of those to whom we are sent. We can in no way so readily reach the hearts of our

fellow men as by proper consideration for their present condition. If we do understand their present condition, with the light and aid of the Holy Spirit, we may become unto them ministers of help, and aid and guide them into a better condition. We should also desire, if we would be happy and enjoy life, to understand something of the works of God with which we are surrounded. We should understand something of our own organization; we should understand something of the sciences of life. And our delight cannot be made perfect, our success and happiness in life cannot be secured except on the attainment of knowledge that puts us into harmony, to a certain degree, at least, with the things and people of the world. I do not mean, in this respect, that we should harmonize with the evils of the world; but we should know the world that we might be able to minister unto the world. All that the world contains of truth, all that it can teach us that is in harmony with the principles the Lord has revealed for our salvation it is our privilege and duty to acquire a knowledge of. All this you will readily grant, but how is this knowledge to be obtained? We may go to the world, even the most intelligent men of the world, renowned for their scholarship, renowned for their education and their talent, renowned as teachers of their fellow-men and of the youth of the people, and we, as the youth of the Latter-day Saints, would appeal in vain for proper guidance how to read, and how to study, and how to improve ourselves, because they are not in sympathy with the motives which we have in view and with the work that must occupy our lives.

The world cannot prescribe to us a course of reading; but I do not believe that it is in vain for us to prescribe a course for ourselves. With the organization of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Associations, it is possible for us to lay before every young man in this Church a plan by which he may cultivate and educate himself; by which he may learn to know the principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the histories of the world, science and general literature by which he may be improved in manner, in customs and in daily life, by which he may be taught how to control and govern himself, how to educate himself, before his fellow men and the world. And these associations, will not be mutual improvement associations only to the extent that they are found engaged in performing this labor.

Now as the time is limited, I desire, as plainly and as practically as possible, to lay before you a proposition that is being entertained by the officers of the Mutual Improvement Associations intended to introduce a course of reading. Whatever we may have attained to in the matter of intelligence or knowledge, of books, as a rule, the young people of our community are not great readers. There are many of them who never read at all. I am surprised on investigating this matter, rather closely, to find how many among us, who pass muster as intelligent young men, who have never read the first principles of the Gospel; who have never read the Bible, nor the Book of Mormon, nor the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, nor the Pearl of Great Price; who have never read the history of our own country, nor the history of England; who have never taken into their hands a book of science; who are unacquainted with the great writers, and who have no appreciation of the writers of ability among ourselves. There are many who have contented themselves with the little knowledge that they have acquired in school; who have permitted the over-weening desire for wealth to engross their attention; who have let the manual vocations of life consume all their time and attention, without taking time for the cultivation of their minds. And therefore, they are unread and unlettered; and as long as this condition prevails among us, we will fail to realize our great destiny.

We propose to introduce a course of reading that shall be of such a character, that when completed, the attentive reader will have read and studied every principle and doctrine that pertains to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He will have read the histories of the various countries of the world. He will have read in science those truths that we are safe in accepting, without the fictions and theories that are dangerous to the peace and satisfaction of the human mind. He will have become sufficiently acquainted with the general literature of the world to at least have developed within his heart a desire for further reading. He will have laid the foundation for correct habits of reading thoughtfully, reading with method and an aim in view. The desultory reading that many indulge in, the habit that many have adopted, of reading themselves down into utter frivolity of thought, by glancing upon page after page of some work of trashy, light literature, without thought, is ruining the mind that God has given them. It is leading those who indulge in it into bondage, a slavery from which they will not be likely easily to escape.

If we read at all, we should read with attention. The first rule, the golden rule, of the reader is this: READ WITH ATTENTION. The greatest examples of those who shine in the world, of successful readers, are those who have read a book as though they never were to look upon

it again. Edmund Burke was one of such. Daniel Webster was another. He says, in his autobiography, speaking of the period of his youth, that books were so rare that when they got hold of one in their house, they never thought that to read it over once or twice would suffice, but that they were to commit it to memory, and make it their very own. It is better to read but ten pages, and know what we have read than to read a thousand in the manner that is often customary among us.

The course of reading we propose to introduce will necessarily cover a period of four or five years; and we have gone so far as to be able, to-night, to present the works that will be recommended for the first year's reading. These works will be:

a. On Doctrine: The First Principles of the Gospel, by Elder B. H. Roberts, who is engaged in preparing a work specially for our Associations.

b. On Science, Natural Science; a work known as the First Book of Nature, by Prof. James E. Talmage. It will contain, though perhaps not in the order that I shall read, matter that may be described in the following headings: Things, alive and dead—Rocks, and what they have to tell—Crystals, and how they are made—Plants, and how they live—The lessons of the flowers, birds and beasts, bees and butterflies—Man the greatest work of God—The heavens above—The sun, moon and stars—Nature's hymn of praise.

Under such titles as these will be treated, in a simple, easy and comprehensive manner, the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms and a little knowledge of astronomy, enough simply to give us an incentive to read further, and to cause us to pause as we walk through life, and try to understand the things of nature with which we are surrounded.

c. In history, it is proposed that we take up the History of England. There has been written a history of England by Charles Dickens that is regarded as applicable to the condition of the young people of this Territory. It is written in simple language. It is written in a direct manner, designed to attract the attention and hold it with the interest of a story.

d. Of general literature, it is proposed that we shall read selections from the writings of Washington Irving, probably the most distinguished of American authors.

e. Of Home Literature, we will read the Life of Nephil, by President George Q. Cannon.

These five books will constitute the first year's course, and they will be read methodically. They will be read as directed, within the time that is prescribed. This set of books will be prepared and will be introduced into every society. The themes and subjects of which they treat will be more or less elaborated in supplemental articles to be published in the Contributor from month to month.

The exercises in the Mutual Improvement Associations will have a direct reference to the books that we read, and the matter that they contain. Thus, every week we will hear a lecture upon those subjects of which, during the week we are reading; and these lectures will have a tendency to direct and concentrate our minds upon principles that we are reading. Near the close of the season's work, test questions will be sent out which the readers are expected to answer, and which will indicate the attention they have bestowed upon the course of reading, and the fidelity with which they have followed it.

It is expected that these books will be ready for distribution among the Associations on the commencement of their season's regular work, the first week in October. The plan of distribution, the cost of the works, which will be to the Associations merely the cost of making the books and of handling them, will be sent out in ample time to the officers of the associations, who are expected to use their best endeavors to introduce this course of reading, and to see that it is followed faithfully by the members of their respective societies.

What a grand and glorious spectacle it will be, young men and young women of Zion, when it may be said that there are five thousand, a third of the members of the Young Men's Associations, who are pursuing this course, this methodical course of reading; who are reading the doctrines of divine truth, who are reading the sciences of life, of the world; who are reading the history of the past, and are becoming acquainted with the literature of the present time; who are cultivating their minds, and laying the foundation for far more extensive, more comprehensive reading in the future; who are forming correct habits of reading, learning how to derive the best knowledge from books; learning how to secure to themselves those implements that will qualify them as husbandmen in the great field that God has called them to labor in!

This is Mutual Improvement. This is what we are organized for; to learn, to acquire knowledge, to form habits of study, correct habits, by which we may obtain in this life all the information that it is possible for the human mind to gain to advantage. And while obtaining this knowledge, in the practical school of life, under the direction of the holy priesthood of God, we are developing the noblest, the best traits of character, to make us, indeed, men in the image of Almighty God, and capable of bearing the responsibility that He calls us to bear in this life; success-