

## AN EPISTLE OF THE FIRST PRESIDENCY

TO THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, IN GENERAL CONFERENCE ASSEMBLED:

Dear Brethren and Sisters:

In the plenitude of God's mercy the Saints are once again permitted in peace to assemble in General Conference to worship the Lord, to extol His goodness, to glorify His name, to hear His word, and to receive such instructions from His servants as the Holy Spirit shall dictate, as well as to transact such business pertaining to His Church as may be presented for their consideration. But as we, your brethren of the First Presidency, are, by the force of peculiar circumstances, deprived on this occasion of your society and you of ours, we deem it consistent with the duties of our calling to address you by letter, and in this way to lay before you that which under more favorable conditions we should have been pleased to have delivered orally.

In the first place, we extend our congratulations to you, as Latter-day Saints and members of the Church of Christ, that affairs with us are so favorable that so many can meet together as you do on this the fifty-sixth anniversary of the organization of the Church, in General Conference. Persecution has raged, and hideous wrongs have been and are being perpetrated against us as a Church, but thus far our enemies have not been permitted to go to such lengths as the persecutors of the people of God did in the days of the first Alma, when they put tasks upon his people and put taskmasters over them and put to death those whom they found calling upon God. Though many of us are deprived of the privilege of meeting together in public, yet a goodly number of you can assemble as you do this day and worship your God and listen to His word; and we all—prisoners, exiles and free—can call upon our God without danger of punishment therefor. Indeed, we need not go to the days of Alma for contrast between the condition of the people of God then and our present condition, to find causes for thanksgiving and praise to our God this day for His mercies unto us. We have only to refer to our own history, to scenes in which many of you have taken part, to find contrasts which should prompt us to bear our present afflictions with patient equanimity. Some of the Saints, perhaps, feel that their sufferings under the tyranny which is now exercised over us in the name of law are very severe, and they may ask how long shall these outrages be permitted to continue? But if they would understand how much worse our positions might be let them recall the scenes enacted in the State of Missouri, when the Latter-day Saints were driven by mob violence out of Jackson County into Clay County, and thence into Caldwell County, and finally were compelled to flee, in the depth of an inclement winter, out of the State, under an order of Lilburn W. Boggs, the Governor, which said "that the Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the State," and this, too, after many of their number had been killed, and the remainder had been robbed of nearly all the property they had in the world; or, recall the treatment the Latter-day Saints received in the State of Illinois, when, after murdering, in the most savage and heartless manner, and while under the pledged honor of the State, the President and Patriarch of the Church, and wounding almost to death one of the Twelve Apostles, mobs organized themselves, burned the houses of the Saints in the outer settlements, destroyed their property and drove them for their lives to the City of Nauvoo; and then, not content with this, brought the whole power of the State to bear upon them to compel them to leave that city and the State and to take refuge, stripped and destitute, in the wilderness, where their enemies hoped internal dissensions, starvation or wild Indians would complete the work of destruction which they were not permitted to accomplish.

However grievous the wrongs under which we suffer to-day, there is much yet to be thankful for. Our land is filled with plenty. No cry of man or beast ascends from our borders to high heaven for the want of food; no beggars plead for alms in our streets, and of destitute soul has denied to him that sustenance necessary to supply his wants. And with these blessings on good food, comfortable raiment and sufficient shelter, we have the inestimable blessing of the peace of God, which He gives to every faithful Saint—peace in our hearts, peace in our habitations, peace in our settlements—a peace which the world cannot give, and which, thank the Lord, it cannot take away. Let your hearts, therefore, Brethren and Sisters, be filled with thanksgiving and praise to our God for His goodness and mercy unto us as a people: He has made promises concerning Zion; He assured He will not forget them. Zion may say, in the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me."

But the Lord replies:

"Can a woman forget her smelting child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me."

At no time has the Lord led His peo-

ple to expect that they would not have to endure trials, or not have their faith fully tested.

Soon after this Church was organized His people were told: "for I have decreed in my heart, saith the Lord, that I will prove you in all things whether you will abide in my covenant even unto death, that you may be found worthy; for if ye will not abide in my covenant, ye are not worthy of me." We scarcely need remind you that if you live godly in Christ Jesus, while Satan has power, you will suffer persecution.

In the providence of the Almighty persecution serves a most useful purpose. Every faithful Saint must perceive and acknowledge this. Each one feels its effect upon himself: he sees its effect upon his friends and neighbors. Persecution develops character. Under its influence we all know ourselves better than we did before we felt its pressure; and we discover traits in our brethren and sisters of the existence of which, perhaps, we were in entire ignorance. The persecution from which we have been suffering during these eighteen months past, though very painful, has not been without profit to the Latter-day Saints. It has strengthened and infused new zeal, courage and determination into the faithful. It has also caused many who were careless and indifferent to arouse themselves from their lethargy and to renew their diligence in the work of God. It has also brought to light the hypocrisy of many, and caused them to throw off the mask of friendship and fellowship which they wore and to exhibit themselves in their true lineaments. But it is upon the young of our community that the effect of this persecution has been most marked. Many of the young of both sexes, when all was peace and no war was made upon their parents and friends, seemed to be of the opinion that they could, without any danger to themselves or their faith, be in full fellowship with the world. The names Latter-day Saint and Gentile were alike to them. They appeared to see no reason why they could not be on terms of perfect friendship with both classes. Every Latter-day Saint of experience knows how dangerous it is for children to stand upon this ground. But from this delusive dream they have been awakened by the rude shock of this persecution. The line of demarcation between the Latter-day Saints and the world has been drawn so sharp and distinct that they find themselves (unless they become open apostates) compelled to take sides with their parents and friends; and the difference between their religion and that which is opposed to it is brought home to their hearts and consciences with a force never before known to them. This persecution is driving the rising generation together with surprising compactness. It is making impressions upon the youngest children of the community which the lapse of years can never obliterate. They are learning the truth of the words of the Savior by the painful experience which our enemies are now giving them. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

The Lord has said, that the wrath of man shall be made to praise Him, and in this attack which is being made upon us and our religion we see this verified. Our enemies have designed to destroy the work of God. For this they plot and toil and descend to the depths of infamy. So absorbed are they in their wicked schemes, and so bent upon carrying them into effect, that they fail to look beyond the immediate acts which they perform and perceive the consequences which follow. They harass, annoy and torment men, women and children; they compel men and women to conceal themselves to escape from their cruelties and injustice and tyrannical abuse of power; and they consign other men and women to prison; and from these proceedings they derive great satisfaction, as they look upon them as so many evidences of their success in sapping the foundation of the Church of God and in uprooting our religion. We need not say to you, who have so often witnessed the effects of persecution upon our religion and Church, how fallacious are these hopes of our present persecutors. Instead of crushing the truth, they are advertising it; instead of showing the world how unworthy and contemptible we are, they are, unwittingly, furnishing us with opportunities to exhibit the heroic qualities we possess; instead of weakening or unsettling the minds of true Latter-day Saints, they are stimulating their faith and supplying them with additional proofs of the divinity of their religion. They would have the world believe that we are low, sensual, ignorant and degraded, that our religion is a system of lust; but the thinking people of the world know that there is no necessity to endure that which the Latter-day Saints are now enduring to gratify lustful appetites or desires. Licentious, depraved men and women would not suffer such treatment as Federal officials are now extending to us, and bear all manner of indignities and go uncomplainingly to prison, if they were assured, as we are, by courts and prosecuting officers that the war is against our marriages and not against sensuality if indulged in according to popular methods.

This persecution attracts the attention of the world. Its disgraceful features may be concealed for a while from public knowledge, through the lies so industriously propagated by those who are its promoters and instru-

ments; but the truth concerning it is coming to light. For a while the feeling among those ignorant of our true character may have been one of indifference as to our fate, or to any treatment we might receive. As the persecution continues the truth leaks out by degrees. Men and women hear that scores of men, rather than accept the alternative of renouncing their wives and children, pay heavy fines and costs and go cheerfully for long, weary months to prison; and that delicate women, too, rather than betray their husbands and by their testimony involve them in the toils of their persecutors, go willingly to the penitentiary where the greatest criminals are confined. Thinking people read of these proceedings, and their former indifference gives place to interest. But while we acknowledge the hand of the Lord in these wicked acts of our enemies, they are not relieved from the condemnation which will follow them. They would deny us our rights as citizens, and they talk about us and act towards us as though we were not entitled to any such rights; but this is mere impudent assumption and clap-trap on their part. We have rights. We were born free, men and women, and it is a duty we owe to ourselves and our posterity and to all the people of this land that we should contend for and maintain the principles of freedom and transmit them unimpaired and undiminished to those who follow us. We do not ask for this freedom as a favor; we demand it as a right. We are as much entitled to the full rights of citizenship in these mountains as any other citizens who dwell under the flag of the Republic. Under any and all circumstances we are their peers.

Such trials as the Latter-day Saints now undergo in the courts in these Territories are not the trials of ordinary, vulgar criminals. However much those who figure as prosecutors, judges or jurors in these cases may scheme and plot and falsify to reduce them to this level, and to fix the brand of criminality or the stigma of infamy upon our conduct, they cannot deceive the world. This which we are now passing through is to all intents and purposes a religious persecution and nothing else. It will yet be recognized as such by the whole world. Its hideous features, its atrocious character, its travesties of justice, cannot be concealed by any amount of falsification or disguise. Already men are beginning to understand the motives and objects of those who are engaged in it, and history will set its seal of condemnation upon it, and it will yet stand as an ineffaceable blot upon the boasted civilization and liberty of our generation.

The scenes which we are now witnessing in this Territory are the results of a deep-laid and carefully planned conspiracy, which has been in process of formation for years. Its originators knew the elements they had to deal with, and by cunning contrivance they have effected a wonderful combination. Religious and irreligious, ministers in sacerdotal robes and atheistic scoffers, business men of integrity and black-legs, temperance men and drunkards, men of strict morality and plimps and harlots, are crowded together on the platform they have constructed, and they find no inconvenience from each others' companionship. Each is made to believe that it is to his direct interest to combine to destroy "Mormonism." A more motley collection of human beings was never witnessed. Differ as they may upon everything else, there has been one common thought and purpose running through the whole and holding them together, and that is hatred of the religion of the Latter-day Saints and a determination to destroy it and them. The conspirators have appealed to the prejudices of each one to induce him to work in concert for this common end. In the ministers they have found ready and willing allies; in fact, these have been the chief authors and promoters of the conspiracy. The Pharisees in the days of the Savior were no more ready to egg the multitude on to cry out "Crucify him, crucify him," than many of the ministers of our time are to urge Congress to enact measures for our destruction. It is now some years since the sectarian ministers here (with the exception of the Catholic clergymen) combined in a document to Congress, urging that body to legislate against us.

This action they have often repeated since. Destitute of confidence in their own religious systems and their power to cope with the truth which we possess without aid from the secular power, they make the air resound with their clamors for Congress to pass laws to crush us and our religion. They enlist men of their cloth elsewhere in the same unchristian business. It is only a few months since, and at the time the whole machinery of the courts here was being used most savagely in sending men, and women also, to prison on account of their religion, that a deputation of these professed teachers of the doctrines of the crucified Redeemer called upon President Cleveland and presented a memorial signed by upwards of a thousand persons, and, it was said, by some of the most prominent divines in the country, earnestly urging him to enforce the anti-polygamy act! Could the old Pharisees have done any more?

But while the ministers engaged in the conspiracy through zeal for their own craft and sectarian hate, the moralist and the politician, the debauchee and the drunkard, were drawn into support of the plot by appeals to their interests. The cry of polygamy has made a good battle cry: this has called the fanatic element into line; but underneath and above this question of poly-

gamy, and completely enveloping it, has been the design to destroy our rights as citizens, to take away from us our liberties under the Constitution and the laws, and to obtain the political control of our country, so that, being as voiceless in the affairs of government as the Indians or Chinese, we could be taxed and plundered with impunity, and be lorded over by a set of political harpies who would revel and fatten at our expense. This has been, and still is, the object of all the outcry raised against us, of the innumerable falsehoods with which the public journals have teemed, of the constant appeals to Congress to legislate against us, and of all the outrages in the name of law inflicted upon us by the courts. The same covetousness and envy that led mobs to band themselves together to drive us from our former homes are the sentiments which prompt the present attack upon us and our liberties. Then mobs acted openly and defiantly, regardless of law; now the policy is a more subtle one; it is to reach the same ends under the shelter and pretence of law. It meant robbery and the deprivation of rights under the old system; under the new tactics means the stealing of the political control of the country, to be followed by rapine and spoliation.

Trace up the acts of the conspirators from the treason of the Governor in setting aside the will of the people and his usurpation of the powers of the National House of Representatives, in pronouncing upon the qualifications of one of its members, and giving a certificate of election as Delegate to Congress to a man whom the people had rejected, down through the greater part of the proceedings of the courts, and especially the conduct of the Governor during the last two sessions of the Legislative Assembly, and irrefragable evidences of conspiracy against the liberties of the people are apparent at every step. Every act of the conspirators is consistent with every other act to make their plot a success. While engaged in this nefarious business, they throw dust in the eyes of the nation by making an outcry against polygamy—as if they cared anything about our marriages—in order to conceal and accomplish their deeper design.

The most active tools in this conspiracy have been some of the Federal officials. Their positions have given them opportunities which they have been willing to avail themselves of. The preamble of the Constitution of the United States assigns as reasons why it was framed: "To form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." Most excellent reasons for framing such a charter of liberty, and every officer who acts under it should keep these objects in view. But many of the officers sent here have acted as though they were determined that none of these blessings for which the Constitution was framed should reach us. The sanctity of home, the liberty of person, the modesty of maidenhood, have all been wantonly violated in the effort to punish the Latter-day Saints for their integrity to God and His laws. Instead of seeking to establish justice and insure domestic tranquility, they have sought to array neighbor against neighbor, friend against friend, brother against brother, wife against husband and children against parents, and to loosen and destroy all the bonds which bind man to his fellow-man. Their mission has not been to build up and cement society, but to tear down and break it up. They have taken delight in their efforts to sow dissension and strife, to tempt wives to betray their husbands and to induce husbands, by threats of severe punishment if they refused to comply with their wishes, to disown and forsake their wives, and to discard and bastardize their offspring, and to turn loose, as forlorn outcasts, those whom they had solemnly covenanted to provide for and protect. When these officials commenced their attack upon us and our religion they found our homes filled with love and affection—husbands and fathers devoted to their wives and children, and doing all in their power to make them comfortable and happy; wives and mothers contented and at peace, honoring their husbands and proud of their relationship to them; and children whose respect and obedience testified to the reverence and esteem in which they held their parents. Husbands and wives and children dwelt together without compulsion or coercion. Nowhere on all this broad earth, where matrimonial ties are held to have binding effect, did such complete liberty exist as among the Latter-day Saints. It is true, wives were sealed to husbands by the eternal Priesthood of the Almighty, for time and all eternity; but this union in the first place was only made possible by love, and by love the tie is perpetuated. Women knew their rights, and they knew that they could not be compelled to live with an unworthy man. Happiness reigned in our homes, because freedom reigned there, and all had their full agency. No better proof of this need be adduced than the fact that in the midst of all this persecution, and the many inducements there are offered to women and men to dissolve their family relationships, but few men have accepted the proffered terms and discarded their wives; and to the honor of our sisters be it said, not one woman that we know of up to the present writing has broken her marriage vow and dissolved her relations with her husband and children.

Yet it is to the destruction of these

happy homes that all the efforts of these officials have been directed. In the sacred name of law, and under the guise of a pretended desire to enforce it, they would convert this condition of society, so peaceful and so admirable, into a pandemonium. They have worked to this end with such malignant cunning, such heartless persistence and such unscrupulous disregard of the principles of justice as have no parallel in American history; and that they have not accomplished this result has not been for the want of effort on their part, but because God has been with His people and His Spirit has been poured out upon them to strengthen and sustain them.

No man-made system or organization could have withstood the concentrated hate and violent assaults which have been directed against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Division and weakness would have shown themselves, fatal breaches would have been made in the framework of the system, and the imprisonment or enforced concealment of the leading men would have been followed by a decay of faith and the disintegration of the organization. But the Lord, in establishing His Church, provided against such contingencies as these. He promised—and all have been urged to claim the fulfillment of the promise—that He would give to those who entered sincerely into covenant with Him, a testimony of the truth for themselves, and to bestow His Holy Spirit upon all. It is this promise and its fulfillment that to-day constitutes the strength of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The Prophet Joseph Smith was once asked by a visitor to the city of Nauvoo, the good order and prosperity of which struck him with surprise, how it was that he governed the people so as to produce such admirable results. The memorable reply of the Prophet of God was: "I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves." This was the secret of the good government at Nauvoo, and it is still the secret of the good order and freedom from strife and other evils which prevail among the Latter-day Saints in Utah and throughout all this mountain region where they have control. In what other community in the world could a governor, judges and other appointees act as these officials have done in Utah, without producing anarchy and the complete overthrow of all barriers which are erected for the protection of society and the rights of men? Our enemies are loud in their denunciation of the Priesthood and its influence upon the Latter-day Saints; but that violence and confusion do not reign in this fair Territory to-day is due to the teachings of that Priesthood and their influence upon the people who give heed to them. The people have been taught correct principles, and they govern themselves.

Do we overstate the truth when we say that every good, peaceably inclined citizen of Utah—Jew, Gentile and Mormon—would enjoy more peace, more prosperity, more kindly feelings towards each other to-day if we had no Federal officials at all of the class of many who are now among us? When a governor introduces himself to the world and to the people he is sent to govern, in all his public utterances from the platform, and through the press, as the latter's avowed and bitter enemy, and prostitutes the powers of his high office to defame, malign and injure them, would not the Territory be better without such an officer? When judges openly announce from the bench that a law which is general in its language is to be made special in its application, and so instruct attorneys and juries, and punish with all the severity possible one class of citizens under its provisions while notorious offenders of another class go scot free, and, not stopping at this, go on to the public platform and denounce with voluble and unbridled truculence the class of citizens whose cases they expect to come before them to decide upon—had not the temple of Justice better be closed awhile, than such judges should sit therein? Instead of seeking to insure domestic tranquility, these officers have fomented strife, they have fostered religious hate, they have embittered class against class, they have sought in every way possible to destroy that charity which should exist in every community composed of citizens of different religions and politics. They have adopted and enforced a policy of non-intercourse between citizens. A Gentile citizen who has dared to speak of or treat a "Mormon" citizen as a friend and associate has been denounced and ostracised, and an impassable gulf has been created between them.

Is it any wonder, then, while some of the principal officers sent here to govern and maintain law, are the people's greatest enemies and the most deadly foes to law and order, that prejudice upon all questions affecting us and our Territory should prevail? Or that Congress should be induced, regardless of the Constitution and its guarantees, under the pressure brought to bear upon it by the incessant clamors and misrepresentation of this class to enact measures that would reach such a people as we are described to be? The Edmunds law was begotten by prejudice, conceived in ignorance and brought forth in hate. But its enforcement in these Territories is in the spirit of merciless severity and undiluted malice, and those who prosecute under it have not the excuse which a deceived and blinded Congress might plead for its enactment.

The officials here have gone far beyond the letter and spirit of the law