

SOUTHERN STATES MISSION AFFAIRS.

Address by

ELDER BEN E. RICH,
(President of Southern States Mission)

At the Seventy-Sixth Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Saturday, April 7, 1906.

The territory covered by the Southern States mission is quite large, and includes the states of Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky. We have had a large number of Elders laboring in that district. Recently it has been my privilege to investigate the conditions in some of the islands of the sea. I have visited the Bahama Islands. We have Elders laboring on the Island of Key West, and I have had the privilege of bearing my testimony also upon the Island of Cuba. During the few years I have labored in the South, I think fourteen hundred Elders have labored at various times under my direction. I believe I can count upon the fingers of one hand the number of Elders who have made shipwreck of their missions and been sent home with a dishonorable release. Recently we had the presidents of all our conferences together, and, after culling out from the records of the various conferences the names of Saints whom we had lost sight of, and those whose

standing in the Church was questioned, our reports showed that we had almost ten thousand members of the Church in the Southern States mission.

We have had considerable trouble on a little island by the name of Barker's Island, in North Carolina. Our Elders erected a church there, the Saints having purchased the lumber and floated it over to the island, and the Elders doing the carpenter work. It was one of the nicest churches on the island. But the enemy burned it down, soon after the visit of one of the ministers, who was very much opposed to us, and who recommended the people to take any step to rid themselves of the "Mormon" religion. One of our Elders had started a school there by request, there being no school upon the island, and this seemed to enrage the people, with the result as stated. The school was continued in a private house, and they were informed by a note tacked upon the door that the house would be burned if the school was continued. One of the merchants received a notice that his store would be burned unless he discharged a "Mormon" girl employed there. They thought they would continue the Sunday school in the open air, and now they have received word that they must not do that, or else they will burn the houses of all the Saints

if they continue it. (President Smith asks me if we had received notice that they would burn the air.) I wrote to the Governor of North Carolina, and in answer he stated that he people did not like our faith, but he would see what could be done towards protecting us. I told him, in my reply to his answer, that the people did not like the faith of Christ Jesus, and for that reason they crucified Him. I said that some of my people at home did not like his faith, but his co-religionists were permitted to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences. I reminded him also that there were 1,425 of the people of his state who did like my faith and belonged to it, and we asked him to protect them in the rights guaranteed unto them under the Constitution of the United States. He has sent the papers to the attorney-general, and I believe that we are going to get justice. We do not occupy the same position that the Irishman did when he was told by the judge that justice should be done to him, and he stated that that was what he was afraid of. (Laughter.)

As a rule we receive more protection in the Southern States now than we have had before, and we have been building more churches. In the City of Jacksonville, we have just completed a church at a cost of \$2,500. All the carpenter work has been performed by the Elders. It is nicely seated, and everything bids fair for the building up of a most excellent branch in that part of the mission. I believe that our Elders and Saints are united, but, as I have stated many times, we have not the number of missionaries that we ought to have.

I was interested in the remarks made by some of the First Seven Presidents of the Seventies concerning the mission in the world. They are the ecclesiastical lawyers, to argue the cause of God's plan of salvation before the jury of the world. Whenever one of these Seventies is selected, I do not think it is right for the High Priests to object to his going upon a mission because he is needed at home. You should receive more of your help at home from among the High Priests. That is their

business. You remember the "Mormon" creed as laid down by Brigham Young, "Let every man mind his own business." It is the High Priests' business to preside and work at home. It is the Seventies' business to go into the world and preach the Gospel, and when they are called, let them go.

I rejoice in having the privilege of coming here to worship. In preaching the Gospel in the world we bear testimony to the divine mission of the men who stand at the head of this work, and what I said to the young people a few nights ago in one of the wards I would like to say to you. It is our duty to respect these men, to honor and sustain them, and to remember the word of God which has come down to us through the ages, that He doeth nothing save He reveleth His secrets to His servants the Prophets; and, where there are no visions the people will perish. If we will examine holy writ we will learn the respect that God has for those designated as prophets upon the earth, and also the respect that He commands His angels in Heaven to pay to His prophets on the earth. You read the tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and there you will find an account of as good a man as lived praying to God for information, and he had so much power and influence with the Lord that his prayers came up as a memorial, and God sent a holy angel in response to his petition. When the angel came and Cornelius asked for information concerning what he should do in order to be saved, the angel understood the law of Heaven concerning God's prophets upon the earth. He could have answered Cornelius' question himself, but he knew that God worked through His servants upon the earth, and he could find Peter, and God prepared Peter for the coming of the servants of that good man.

This should teach us the lesson that God works through prophets on the earth, and honors them in their place, that his angels honor them, and that we should honor them and stand by them, and not always be looking for faults. The Gospel makes every man

free and independent. It makes me as free and independent in the sphere in which I live as God is free in the sphere in which He lives. He has given us all our free agency. Even the prophets of God have their free agency, and must be left to themselves at times to act upon that free agency. If it were not so their agency would be nullified. There is another case in holy writ where Saul, who persecuted the Saints, while on his road to Damascus was stricken blind, and he heard a voice saying unto him, "Why persecutest thou me?" "Who art thou, Lord?" "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest." What must have been the feelings of Saul upon that occasion? He immediately wanted to know what he should do. Now, there was Jesus talking to him; Christ knew what he should do, but even He had respect to His servants and prophets, and knew that it was a law of heaven that God worked through them on the earth, and so He told Saul to go to Damascus and there it would be told him what he should do. Then, one of the servants of the Lord who had the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy, received a revelation to go to Saul and tell him what he should do.

These are lessons for you and me, my brethren and sisters; and let us take the motto out of our own eye before looking for faults in others. It reminds me of what I heard Josh Billings once say. He said a friend of his asked him if he had ever heard Ingersoll on the mistakes of Moses, and he replied, "No, I have not; but I could give 25¢ any day to hear Moses on the mistakes of Ingersoll." When you feel like criticizing the authorities of the Church, stand before the mirror and examine yourself. A friend of mine asked me the other day why we did not receive more revelations from God. I took the Book of Mormon, and said, "Here is one: have you read it?" He acknowledged he had not. "Here is the Doctrine and Covenants; have you read that?" No, he had not. "Here is the Pearl of Great Price; have you read that?" He acknowledged that he had not read it all. "Well," said I, "if I was the Almighty I would not say another word to you until you

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