

ELDER ORSON F. WHITNEY

FIFTY YEARS OF SERVICE

There is nothing that I enjoy more, in the way of public gatherings, than the General Conferences of the Church. The present occasion has for me a special, personal interest, in that it marks a distinct epoch in my life. Fifty years ago this very month, at the General Conference in October, 1876, I was called upon my first mission, to preach and teach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I have been preaching and teaching it ever since, both by tongue and pen.

THE CITY OF WILLIAM PENN

My field of labor, during the fore part of that mission, was the state of Pennsylvania, and at the city of Philadelphia a World's Fair was in progress, similar to that which is now being held there. It was the Centennial Exposition. The United States was a hundred years old, and the city of its birth was celebrating the event in befitting style.

It was about four o'clock on the morning of a bleak November day when I landed in the City of Brotherly Love. I had sat up all night on the train from Chicago, not having sense enough to hire a sleeping berth—nor dollars enough, either—and as a result I felt somewhat "rocky." I had no sooner alighted upon the platform than a dapper young fellow stepped up to me and said: "Where would you like to go?"

"To the North Pennsylvania Depot," was my reply—that being the point where I was to take a train for the northern part of the state. I had no desire to visit the Fair, not being in a sight-seeing mood, but only intent upon reaching my destination as soon as possible.

"Jump into my hack," said the young fellow, with the air of the spider to the fly, "and I'll take you where you want to go."

"How much will it cost?" I inquired.

"Three dollars."

"Three dollars for taking me from one depot to another!"

"It's several miles from here," he explained.

"Where is the street car?"

"Oh, there's no street car running at this hour."

At this juncture another fellow came forward, and with a look of "brotherly love" on his countenance repeated the question put to me by his "pal": "Where did you say you would like to go?"

"To the North Pennsylvania Depot."

"Better go with the young man," he philanthropically (or Philadelphically) advised.

Still I hesitated, and was then offered a two-thirds discount.

But just at that moment I saw a policeman standing a few rods away, and remembering a word of counsel given me before leaving home, to the effect that I was not to trust every Tom, Dick and Harry

who might offer to serve me, but apply for information to someone in uniform, I pushed past the two fellows who were bent upon fleeing me, and approaching the officer inquired:

"Where is the street car to the North Pennsylvania Depot?"

"Right around the corner, sir," said he. And sure enough, there it was. I got aboard, paid one dime, and saved two dollars and ninety cents by remembering and acting upon that word of wise counsel. Such was my introduction to the City of William Penn.

It is something of a coincidence, interesting to me if to no one else, that as I enter upon another half century of service—all of which I do not expect to spend in the United States, nor in any other place this side of the Spirit World—another great Exposition, the Sesquicentennial, is in full blast at the famous old town.

THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

One hundred and fifty years ago, on July 4, 1776, the representatives of the Thirteen United American colonies, which up to that time had acknowledged allegiance to Great Britain, met in Philadelphia for the purpose of declaring those colonies free and independent. They put forth the immortal document known and revered as the Declaration of Independence, the preface to the Constitution of the United States, which the Lord has declared in our day to have been established "by the hands of wise men" whom He "raised up unto this very purpose." The signers of the Declaration were fifty-six in number, and some of the sentiments to which they subscribed their names are as follow:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident—that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of people to alter or polish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

"The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object, the establishment of an absolute tyranny over these States. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world."

Then, after enumerating those acts of usurpation and tyranny, the Declaration closes thus:

"We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name and by the authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought

to be, *free and independent States*; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved. * * * And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

AN ACT OF HEROISM

These men were not Latter-day Saints—but they deserved to be. They did not bear the Priesthood, nor did they have the fulness of the gospel, with the gifts and powers of the Holy Ghost. They were not members of the Church of Christ—they had no opportunity to be, for it was not then upon the earth. Yet there was something within them that made them willing to imperil their lives, not for personal profit, not for self-aggrandizement, but for freedom and justice and the rights of man.

Their act was heroic, thrilling. Even to read about it almost brings the tears to one's eyes. One of those men, after signing his name and laying down the pen, said: "Now we must hang together, or we shall all hang separately." And this was no exaggeration. Had they failed, they would have been executed as traitors and rebels. It was their success that saved them, and God gave them that success.

JEFFERSON AND ROUSSEAU

Thomas Jefferson was the author of the Declaration, though some of its phrases were current in that day—common property. Jefferson, heaven-inspired, breathed into them the breath of life and made them live forever. It was a glorious achievement.

"All men are created equal." This phrase is Rousseau's—he whose pen kindled the fierce fires of the French Revolution. It does not mean, of course, that all men are equal in intelligence and capacity, any more than they are equal in stature or in weight. But all have equal rights to life, to liberty, to the pursuit of happiness, and are entitled to equal opportunities for possession and promotion.

That is America's doctrine, and it is God's doctrine, too—yet to be emphasized when Zion's children, the pure-in-heart, become equal in temporal as in spiritual things, and are of one heart and mind, "every man seeking the interest of his neighbor, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God."

AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN IDEALS

"Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed." That also is God's doctrine—the doctrine of common consent, exemplified at every Church, stake or ward conference, where the names of the presiding authorities are regularly placed before the people, to see whether they will sustain them as their leaders and

teachers. This they manifest by giving or withholding their consent.

Compare this doctrine with the notion once prevalent in European as in Oriental countries, that the king or hereditary ruler of a nation was the owner of that nation, the proprietor not only of the land, but of the people living upon it. They all belonged to him and he might dispose of them as he saw fit, not being accountable to any human power for his actions. When a reigning princess married the monarch of another realm, all her dominions and all her subjects went with her as part of the bridal dowry.

Such was the case when the Netherlands, largely Protestant in religion, passed into the possession of the Catholic king of Spain, who forthwith undertook to convert his new subjects by force, using for that purpose his pillaging and slaughtering armies. The Stuart kings governed England as if it were their personal property, and the controversy that arose brought forth a Hampden and a Cromwell, and cost King Charles the First his head. He had "lost his head" a little while before. The German Kaiser habitually referred to his people as "my Prussians," and even in democratic England the king, according to the custom of centuries, still speaks officially of "my armies," "my navies," "my government."

A wonderful and startling change was wrought when men arose upon these Western shores who dared to say and maintain: We, the people, are the true sovereigns. We choose our rulers, and they are our servants, not our masters, and are accountable to us for the manner in which they govern the commonwealth and administer the laws enacted by our representatives for the general welfare.

LINCOLN AND JOSEPH SMITH

That is the American idea, "government of the people, by the people, for the people," as Lincoln expressed it in his famous Gettysburg speech.

And nothing proves more conclusively that Joseph Smith, God's prophet, was a real and true American, than his reply to one who inquired of him how he managed to govern a people made up of so many different nationalities, with all their varied languages, customs and traditions. Said the Prophet: "I teach them correct principles, and they govern themselves."

The United States is a Republic, in which the people are recognized as the one source of power. The Church of Christ is a Theo-Democracy, in which God speaks and the people say "Amen." It is the Church of God and his people—the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

THE MISSION OF AMERICA

Were I to say that the founders of this Nation builded better than they knew, few if any would question the statement. But if, in addition to that, I should voice my conviction that this great Government was

established purposely to favor the coming forth of the Church of Christ in this dispensation—the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times—many would deem my declaration presumptuous and even preposterous. Great movements are generally so regarded in the beginning.

It was “presumptuous” in Columbus to pit himself against the learned ignorance of his age, and proclaim the earth round, when public opinion held it to be square and flat or shaped like a cheese. But his “presumption” led to the discovery of the Western Hemisphere and the founding of the mightiest nation of modern times. It was “presumptuous” for the American colonies to declare their independence and array themselves against the militant might of the British Empire. But they succeeded, and their “presumption” was swallowed up in victory, amid the thunders of the world’s applause. In like manner it may look presumptuous for a little handful of people, numbering only half a million all told, to claim that a nation originally of three millions and now of one hundred and ten millions, was founded for the express purpose of furthering their God-given mission of preparing the way before Messiah’s second advent. But when the Kingdom of Heaven prevails, and Christ is reigning in person over a glorified planet, such a claim will not be considered presumptuous, preposterous, nor at all out of the way.

All great builders build better than they know. Some realize in part, but others not at all, that they are instruments of Deity, used for carving out his sublime and beneficent purposes.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT

Passing by the patriarchs, the prophets and the apostles of ancient times—all of whom helped to prepare the way for this last and greatest of the gospel dispensations; and dismissing with a word such characters as Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus—the former referred to in sacred writ as the Lord’s “servant,” and the latter as his “anointed”—let us take as an example Alexander the Great.

When I was a child I was taught to sum up this great man’s career by saying: “He conquered the world, but could not conquer himself, and died a drunkard at the early age of thirty-two.” But, I have since learned that Alexander did something more, which is not often referred to—I don’t know why, since it is quite as important as a dissertation on the wine cup and the evils of intemperance. Alexander’s conquests carried the Greek language as far as the borders of India, and that is the language into which the New Testament was afterwards translated. Thus the Macedonian conqueror paved the way, not consciously, but as an instrument of Providence, for the subsequent promulgation of the gospel. While building for himself an empire that was destined to perish with his passing, he helped to lay the foundations of the Kingdom that shall stand forever.

Dean Farrar, in his *Life and Work of St. Paul*, says: “The

immense field covered by the conquests of Alexander gave to the civilized world a unity of language, without which it would have been, humanly speaking, impossible for the earliest preachers to have made known the good tidings in every land which they traversed."

McCabe the historian dilates upon the same fact as follows: "Alexander was no vulgar conqueror, and his title of Great does not rest simply upon his conquests. * * * Wherever he went he left the Greek language and some portion of Greek culture, as a priceless legacy to the countries through which he passed. This universal spread of the Greek tongue was all powerful in drawing the nations of the old world into a closed and more intimate contact with one another. Greek became the language of commerce as well as of the court. At a later period the Hebrew Scriptures, translated into Greek, were made accessible to the whole world, and the way was thus paved for the mission of him of whom these Scriptures testified,"

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform."

ROME'S UNCONSCIOUS SERVICE TO CHRIST

Dean Farrar again: "The rise of the Roman Empire created a political unity which reflected in every direction the doctrines of the new faith. * * * The gospel emanated from the capital of Judea; it was preached in the tongue of Athens; it was diffused through the empire of Rome; the feet of its earliest missionaries traversed the solid structure of undeviating roads by which the Roman legionaries—'those massive hammers of the whole earth'—had made straight in the desert a highway for our God. Semite and Aryan had been unconscious instruments in the hands of God for the spread of a religion which, in its first beginnings, both alike detested and despised."

THE DIVINE PURPOSE

In due time came Columbus, impelled by the Spirit of the Lord to cross the mighty waters surging between European and American shores. To what end? To prove the earth round, and reach India by sailing west? Yes, that was *his* motive. But the "Divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will," had a higher purpose in view. to which the comparatively small objective of the Genoese explorer was but tributary.

The unveiling of a hidden hemisphere, the discovery of the Land of Zion, the predestined theatre of wonderful events in the last days, events connected with the winding up of the Lord's work upon this planet—the Land where the New Jerusalem is to rise, unto which Christ will come as King of kings, to usher in the reign of peace and right. This was God's purpose, accomplished through Columbus.

The lovers of liberty who followed in his wake and were actuated by the same Spirit, as a further preparation for the great Latter-day

Development, founded upon this North American continent a nation, the mightiest on earth, under whose protecting aegis, the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom, the Church of God came forth, to be nurtured unto the complete fulfilment of its destiny.

ISRAEL AND THE GENTILES

Did the American patriots who framed and signed the Declaration, who established the Constitution and laid the foundations of this mighty commonwealth, realize that they were bringing to pass the predictions of American prophets and the words of Jesus Christ concerning the Gentiles upon this land? No; for the record of those divine utterances was yet slumbering in the earth, awaiting the set time for coming forth. Nor do the Gentile nations of today realize that with their ships and railroads and other means of transportation and communication, they are helping to gather scattered Israel in fulfilment of ancient prophecy: "They shall fly upon the shoulders of the Phillistines toward the West."

THE GLORIOUS FUTURE

Columbus built better than he knew. Wycliffe, Luther, the reformers, explorers and conquerors all, as well as the founders of this Nation, did likewise. And even the Latter-day Saints, with all their knowledge of divine plans and purposes, revealed from heaven, to enable them to execute another phase of God's "marvelous work and wonder," have no adequate conception of its future greatness and glory.

Nor is it necessary that we should have, at this time. Well for us if we diligently discharge the duty of the present hour, and patiently bide the time of Him whose omnipotent and unerring hand is guiding the Cause of Christ to its glorious consummation.

ELDER REY L. PRATT

Of the First Council of Seventy and President of the Mexican Mission

I am happy, my brethren and sisters, to be with you in this conference of the Church, and to be associated again with my brethren and sisters, and with my family, after our absence for nearly a year in South America. To me this has been indeed a wonderful conference gathering. I have been very much interested, and my faith and testimony have been strengthened in the instructions and teachings that have come to us from those who have spoken.

I have been led to reflect that we are indeed a distinctive and a wonderful people, and that there is nothing like our organization and our institution anywhere else in all the world, so far as I have been able to come in contact with things in the world.

Our trip into South America brought to my attention many, many things that were new to me. It seemed that we were in another world, and I observed the practices and the customs of the peoples of the