

ELDER JOSEPH F. MERRILL

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

Brethren and sisters: Some months ago I attended a conference in one of the stakes of the Church at which a returned missionary, in making a report of his missionary labors, said the greatest handicap to the progress of the work in the district where he last labored was the "Mormons" who lived there. Of course this statement seemed strange until he hurriedly explained that certain people who had been reared in the Church, but later departed from its teachings, moved into the district and lived so offensively from the standpoint of good morals and righteous conduct that others, seeing the evil deeds of these so-called "Mormons," were turned against anything "Mormon."

The young missionary went on in his address to stress the value of right living by professed believers as a means of helping the spread of the work of the Lord.

TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

Of course he was right in his statement that we may teach more effectively "by example than by precept." We remember the words of Jesus in the *Sermon on the Mount* when he said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." And as we read in the First Epistle of Peter (2:12) "Having your conversation honest among the gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may by *your* good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

Undoubtedly Peter had in mind, when he wrote these words, the teachings of his Master when he said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Possibly the gentiles among whom the returned Elder worked may also have remembered these words of Jesus and were applying his measuring stick to the so-called "Mormons" in their midst.

But I need not argue the point. To call it to your attention is wholly sufficient. Perhaps there is nowhere a people who accept more literally than we do the doctrine taught by John the Revelator "that they were judged [in the resurrection] every man according to his works." This doctrine is one of our fundamentals.

NOT GOOD LATTER-DAY SAINTS

But I sometimes wonder if we are not inclined to forget it just as we are subject to forget so many other things. We occasionally see persons who appear to be devout, sincere believers, who profess to be Latter-day Saints, who have read and can quote much scripture and yet who, judged by their fruits, fall far short of a good Christian standard. They are slow "to do unto others as they would have others do unto them." They are not generous, they are not honest. Their word is not as good as their bond. They are not loyal to their professed

principles. Their lives, in a measure at least, are only a sham and a hypocrisy. Now, of course, such people are not good Latter-day Saints.

PEOPLE WHO CAN PAY BUT WILL NOT

I sometimes think that a dishonest person should not be fellowshipped in the Church until he repents. A person who can and will not pay his bills, for example, cannot be accepted of God, and therefore cannot have the companionship of the Holy Spirit. I am led to say this because, if we are rightly informed, there are people among us "who can pay but will not." They are taking advantage of the situation that makes it impossible for many honest people to pay their debts and because these cannot, the others conceal their own conditions and will not. I hasten to say, however, that I believe the faults of which I complain are by no means general. That they do exist all too frequently, however, all experienced people will testify. Ask doctors, dentists, and other professional people in Salt Lake City. They have had experiences that try their faith in the honor of many so-called "good people." Dishonesty is one of the sins of which those who are guilty are called to repent.

THE WORD OF A "MORMON"

Some of you, perhaps, have heard President Grant relate the story of a manufacturer in the Middle West who rode up to a street meeting that our missionaries were holding in a city of Indiana and gave the crowd an oral character certificate of the Latter-day Saints. This was many years ago. He told the meeting that the word of a "Mormon" was as good as his bond, that his company had done many thousands of dollars' worth of business with the "Mormons" and had never lost a dollar. It would be extremely creditable to our people if such a statement could be truthfully made of us today by all who do business with us. But I have no hesitancy in saying that real Latter-day Saints have as much financial honor today as they ever had. They accept as truth the declaration of one of Shakespeare's characters that:

"Mine honour is my life; both grow in one:
Take honour from me, and my life is done."

Any man who fails in honor fails to the same degree in being a Latter-day Saint. His life is not as a light set upon a hill that attracts others to works of righteousness.

But let every person realize, however lowly or unimportant he may feel himself to be, still he is not without influence for good or for ill. He is accountable to God for his influence. He is called upon to be "honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous," and to do good to all men. No one in the Church, no matter what his condition, is exempt from living these requirements. No one in the Church, therefore, is exempt from living the "golden rule."

OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS CITIZENS

Now there is another article of our faith, the 12th, to which I desire to call your attention.

"We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers and magistrates, in obeying, honoring and sustaining the law."

In the light of this declaration every real Latter-day Saint is a good citizen. He is loyal to civil authority, an observer of law, a supporter of those who make and enforce the law. But this is not all. Good citizenship requires something more of a person than to be loyal to authority and to be law-abiding.

We are living under democratic forms of government. This puts certain responsibilities upon the shoulders of the citizens, upon those who enjoy the privileges of the franchise. The voters elect the officers, those who make, interpret, and execute the laws. The government will, therefore, be good or bad depending on the character, wisdom, ability and efficiency of its officers. To have a good government we must have good officers, and to have good officers the voters must do their duty. They must enter politics, that is, take an active part in all those forms, processes and functions needful to elect and stand by and support good officers.

The government cannot be left to professional politicians to elect themselves and to rule in their selfish interests. If this were done the people would suffer from unjust laws, unjustly and oppressively administered. Experience abundantly testifies to this truth.

KNOW THE TRUTH AND FOLLOW IT

Now, if a citizen is to do well his part in securing good government he must be well informed on public questions and problems. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that man cannot be saved in ignorance and that the glory of God is intelligence. These are fundamental doctrines with us. Hence to please our Father in heaven, we must continually strive for wisdom, knowledge, intelligence—we must keep growing in God-like attributes.

Can we vote intelligently and wisely unless we are informed on the questions and candidates at issue? But does not good citizenship require us to vote in this manner? I think so. We then should make a careful study of these questions, study them open-mindedly and as fully and deeply as circumstances will permit. To do this we must not be bound by a spirit of partisanship. Principles and policies should guide us rather than self-seeking politicians. We should follow the truth rather than deceptive propaganda.

But how shall we know the truth? Learn all the facts pertaining to the case, interpret them fairly, justly, truthfully, and with a sincere desire to be wise and to act for the best good of all, at least for the majority. Then we shall not be far from the truth. Good citizenship requires that we shall not be carried away from a safe anchorage by misleading propaganda, fostered by selfish interests.

MISLEADING PROPAGANDA

Let me illustrate: During the past several months and particularly in the Chicago conventions in June of the national political parties the liquor question occupied a prominent place. As I see it, this was the result of an intensive campaign for the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. And for a number of years this campaign has been gathering strength until today it has attained mighty proportions. That it has acquired the character of misleading propaganda I must believe. Do you ask for my reasons for so believing? I will give you a few of them.

One evening last May when I was passing through Butte, Montana, I read in an evening paper that the head of the Montana division of the women's organization for national prohibition reform "appealed to the women of Montana to join and support the organization in its efforts to restore law and order, to safeguard the homes and family ties in the nation through prohibition repeal. * * * The direct objects of this women's organization," the state leader announced, "are the closing up of speak-easies, the abolition of gin mills and roadhouses; putting the bootlegger out of business, taking the profits out of crime, and the restoration of respect for law."

All of them are perfectly worthy objectives and undoubtedly all good people will stand for them. But behold the means by which it is proposed to attain them! Did you ever hear of anything more deceptive? Yet many accept this propaganda, convinced that the objectives and the means are as logically connected as are cause and effect in the natural world. Of course this particular propaganda takes account of two facts. First, that people in general are very forgetful, and second, that millions of voters in America had not yet reached the legal voting age when national prohibition went into effect. From observation and personal experience they know little or nothing of the old saloon days and the almost intolerable evils, linked with, and attendant upon, the liquor traffic. And people are forgetful, very forgetful. Many of the older people now favoring the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment seem to have forgotten the old conditions, and knowing that conditions today relative to liquor drinking are not so good as they ought to be, appear to be ready to "jump from the frying pan into the fire" as a result of the repeal propaganda.

Among other things it is said that repeal will bring back prosperity, reduce crime, stop racketeering and do many other very desirable things. Experienced, as well as informed, people all know that repeal will make all these matters worse, much worse, instead of better. But in times like these any propaganda that promises relief from present ills appears to many as does a straw to a drowning man—a safe support or a secure anchorage. Hence the condition of the times produces the very atmosphere in which wild propaganda of various kinds flourish.

MOTIVATED BY SELFISHNESS

Let me give another illustration of the tendency of the times, that

of more and more people to climb on the financial back of the government or of some other supporting organization. That relief is, and has been, absolutely necessary in thousands and millions of cases we have no reason to doubt. But in some cases, we must believe that demands for relief, at least to the extent it has been demanded, were unjust or contained elements of unfairness or selfishness. The Federal treasury has been the destination of countless raids inspired by selfish motives. And right now are we sure that selfishness does not motivate, in part at least, the amount of help that is being requested of the Federal treasury? But these are loans, you say, and surely no one will borrow more money than he really needs. Well, the relief extended by the Federal government last winter through the Red Cross was not a loan. Did selfishness inspire any individual requests for this aid?

We all know that many people are in trouble at the present time because they borrowed, or at least borrowed more than was really necessary. Are some people trying to borrow Federal money today with secret suspicions or hopes that the loans will never be repaid? Are motives for borrowing wholly good?

Brethren and sisters, for many years Latter-day Saints have been warned from this very pulpit against going into debt, and if they were in debt they were advised to get out of debt as soon as possible. May it not be that many of us are now suffering because we neglected this divinely inspired advice? Shall any Latter-day Saint continue the practice of borrowing unless, indeed, it is really necessary?

SEEKING GOVERNMENT HELP

But to return to our point—that of seeking help from the government, whether it be a local or national government. This search, of course, takes many forms. That governments in times like these (and in certain cases at all times) ought to give the help needful to keep people from suffering for the necessities of life, I do not question at all but think it entirely proper. I said there are many raids upon public treasuries. Do you believe this? If so, what are you going to do about it? We cry “reduce expenditures, cut down taxes.” Yes, we are all in favor of doing these very things except when it appears that doing them will adversely affect us. Then we face about. “Do it to the other fellows but not to us,” seems to be our attitude. Many illustrations might be given but time will not permit me to do it. You can all name them yourselves.

“Soak the rich” is a popular cry, appealing to the unthinking multitudes who seldom stop to analyze it from the standpoint of right and wrong and to reason out what the consequences of such a policy would be. I refer to this cry as another propaganda that a good citizen and certainly a Latter-day Saint should carefully examine before accepting or having anything to do with it.

LIVE BLAMELESSLY BEFORE THE LORD

In these brief moments I refer to a few only of the propagandas

with which the country is being flooded; and I do this for the purpose of urging all with whom I may have influence to live blamelessly before the Lord. To do this requires, I believe, that we shall be true and loyal to our respective governments, as well as to the Church of Christ, of which we are members. Membership in each organization carries duties and obligations. And to discharge these satisfactorily for our best good and for the best good of our fellow men and acceptably to God must we not be clear-headed, thoughtful, studious, well-informed, fair, just, unselfish, and have a love for God as well as for man in our hearts?

NOT THROUGH THE WISDOM OF MEN

We are living in critical times. If there was ever a period during my life when we needed to pray I think it is now. Who is wise among us? Is it not written that "the wisdom of their wise men shall perish?" Of what people and of what period of time did Isaiah make this prophecy? There is none wise among us except as the Lord shall inspire him. It shall not be the wisdom of men that will bring back peace and prosperity to this nation but the righteousness of the people following the lead of men whom the Lord will graciously inspire. All you who hear these words please do not forget them. And so read again and again I beg of you, the message that God gave to this people and to the peoples of the world through his servants, the Presidency of this Church, in their Christmas Greetings, published in the *Deseret News*, Dec. 19, 1931.

To all who hear my voice and to whom these words shall come, may I send an appeal that you will try to be loyal and true to your government and live righteously before the Lord. May our Heavenly Father help us to do these things, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

ELDER SAMUEL O. BENNION

President of the Central States Mission

I bring you greetings from the Saints and missionaries in the Central States Mission, who are loyal to the Church and who are working, I think, as faithfully as could be expected. I am sure, my brethren and sisters, that the work of the Lord is growing and though these times are trying the hearts of men and women both in the field and at home, I am positive that there is an increased faith found among the youth of Zion.

I have had an opportunity to measure in a way the standards of the Latter-day Saints as I find them expressed through their boys and girls whom they send into the mission field. I am sure that faith is increasing and that the younger men who come out now, and the young women also, have a firm testimony of the Gospel. It is true that this testimony has to be developed, but when it is developed it becomes a power within them. It is inspiring to be associated with them.