

CHAPTER XI.¹

THE CONFERENCE AND ITS RESULTS.

*A Mormon mass-meeting—Faces and features—
Great enthusiasm—A living “martyr”—A Mormon hymn—
The poetess—A “president” chosen—He recites the Church history—
First view of Brigham—He curses the Gentiles—A “nasty sermon”—
Coarseness and profanity—Bitterness of other speakers—Swearing in
the pulpit—Exciting the people—Their frenzy and fanaticism—Hatred
against the United States—Foolish bravado—The author gains new
light on Mormonism—A subject to be studied—English and European
Sects of like character—Division of the subject.*

THE semi-annual conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints convened on Tuesday morning, October 6th, in the new Tabernacle, and was to me an occasion of great interest. Long before the hour of meeting, indeed, from early dawn, all the roads leading into the city were thronged by crowds from distant settlements, going up to their half-yearly worship in “Zion.” As I returned from Bear River on the Sunday and Monday preceding, I was passed every hour by long trains of Saints from the northern and northeastern parts of the Territory, and, on reaching the city, found still larger delegations from Utah Lake District, Provo, Fillmore, San Pete, and St. George.

This occasion among the Saints is every way equal to the yearly passover among the Jews, and every one who can possibly leave home makes a visit to “Zion,” and esteems it an honor and privilege to do so.

I reached the building too late on Tuesday morning, and, with many thousand others, was turned away for want of room. The Saints seemed to consider it sufficient happiness to stand around and gaze at the building, and think of what was going on inside; but I was sustained by no such enthusiasm, and consoled myself by getting an early dinner preparatory to securing a seat as soon as the doors were opened in the afternoon. The sight was well

¹ Original chapter page numbers: 278-289.

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worth the trouble. From my seat near the pulpit, and just at one side, I could overlook the whole vast sea of faces. The curtain in the rear had been removed and the entire oval, as well as the space beside the organ, was completely filled by at least ten thousand eager auditors. The rows of high seats on either side of the pulpit were occupied by bishops and elders from distant settlements, some three hundred in all, while the four long seats constituting the pulpit, were occupied by the First Presidency, consisting of Brigham Young, Daniel H. Wells, and a vacant space for the late Heber C. Kimball; also by the Twelve Apostles, the Heads of the Quorum of Seventies, the Church Secretary, Historian and City Elders.² It was the largest collection of the Saints I had yet seen, and I studied it with much interest.

Occasionally I would see a fine cast of American features, but nearly all the faces had that indescribable foreign look, which all can recognize and none portray. In companies of fifties and hundreds they had left their distant homes at the call of the missionary, had given up friends, property, country and religion, as they thought, to follow Christ; had tossed upon the waves in noisome emigrant ships, had turned their backs upon the great and fertile States, and traversed eleven hundred miles of prairie, mountain and burning sand, "to build up the kingdom of God in Deseret." And to these people, all before them to-day was a glorious reality. Feeling as I did, that all this was but part of a great delusion, I could not but reverence the intense faith of these devotees.

The meeting was called to order,³ after which the Twentieth Ward choir sang,

² From the report: "On the stands we noticed President B. Young and President D.H. Wells, of the First Presidency; Apostles Orson Hyde, Orson Pratt, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Geo. A. Smith, E.T. Benson, C.C. Rich, Lorenzo Snow, Erastus Snow, Franklin D. Richards, George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith; John Smith, Patriarch; John Young, E.D. Woolley and Samuel W. Richards, the Presidency of the High Priests Quorum; George B. Wallace and Joseph W. Young, of the Presidency of this Stake of Zion; Joseph Young, Albert P. Rockwood, Jacob Gates and John Van Cott, of the First Presidency of the Seventies; Edward Hunter, L.W. Hardy and Jesse C. Little, the Presidency of the Bishopric; Bishops, presiding Elders, and leading men from settlements the most remote and those at nearer points of distance, Idaho, Utah and Arizona being represented."

³ 6 October 1868, 2:00 p.m. General Conference afternoon session.

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“My soul is full of peace and love,
I soon shall see Christ from above,” etc.⁴

Prayer was offered by Elder Erastus Snow,⁵ followed by a quartette by the Brigham City choir,

“Pray for the peace of Deseret,”⁶

after which Elder John Taylor addressed the meeting.⁷ Taylor is one of the early converts to Mormonism, and enjoys a high reputation among them, having been with Joseph Smith in many trying scenes. With another brother, he was with Joseph and Hyrum at the time they were killed in Carthage jail, Hancock Co., Illinois. According to the popular Mormon account, as the mob commenced firing, Joseph said to Taylor, “I shall pass away, but you shall live to tell the tale to children’s children.” At that mo-

⁴ From the report: “The 20th Ward choir sang ‘My soul is full of peace and love,’ with Hallelujah by Brother J.J. Daynes.” See also, “Hymn 181” (L.M.) – Psalmody No. 61; see *Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1905/24th edition), 191.

⁵ From the report: “Elder Erastus Snow prayed.”

⁶ From the report: “The Fishburne choir sang a quartette -- “Pray for the Peace of Deseret.”

⁷ From the report: “Elder John Taylor spoke of the character of our Conferences, and the objects for which we assembled together in such a capacity. The subjects dwelt upon at such times are not confined to that which is usually called religious by the sectarian world, but comprise everything that relates to man’s welfare, happiness, prosperity and existence all of which is embraced in our religion. The subject of trading, spoken of in the forenoon, would bear considerable investigation. It had been a principle acted upon by all nations to adopt measu[r]es calculated to further the general good. Our position is such a one as many nations have been placed in at some period of their existence. Nations make treaties of commerce, appoint cou[n]suls [sic] and take other steps to protect their trade and commercial relations. Special advantages are conferred upon various industries; protection is extended to home manufactures and prohibition is exercised to a greater or less extent against imported goods. No one questions the right to do thus; no one thinks of bringing charges against any people or nation who try to further their own interests in such a manner. We are not a nation, but as a part of this Republic and in our Terri[t]orial condition we hold political relations with the general government. We are somewhat different from other communities. Our religion has brought us together; our faith unites us; yet we have rights which we cannot neglect and be justified. Numerous and strong reasons were adduced by Elder Taylor why we should not trade with those who have tried and continue to try to injure us; and why we should support ourselves, do our own trading, our own merchandising, and build up the Territory that is our home. This is done by political organizations and by religious societies all through Christendom, and we have an equal right with others to protect ourselves and our own interests.”

ment Hyrum fell dead. Joseph cried, "Oh, my dear brother Hyrum!" and sprang into the window. A second volley was fired, when Joseph exclaimed, "Oh, Lord, my God!" and fell into the street. Of the same volley, four shots wounded Taylor in as many places, and a fifth—an ounce ball from a yager musket—struck him squarely in the breast, and buried in an English lever watch⁸ which had run without interruption for ten years, stopping the hands exactly at 5 o'clock, 16 minutes, and 22 seconds, P.M., which is marked among the Saints as the solemn hour of the Prophet's death. On the fall of Joseph, the mob rushed around the building, and the fourth brother, who was unhurt, carried Taylor down stairs and to a place of safety. A Mormon tradition adds, that at the same time a gigantic Missourian, with his face blackened, ran forward to cut off Joseph's head, for which a reward had been offered; but as he knelt, knife in hand, on the body of the Prophet, a flash of lightning darted from the clear sky between him and his victim, and shook the knife from his grasp. This incident, which is the subject of a sensational engraving often seen in the Mormon dwellings, rests upon the statement of one Daniels, the only witness of the assassination not connected either with the Mormons or the mob. He joined the Mormons soon after, and, at the request of the Apostles, published his account. He was afterward "cut off" from the church, but they still cling to his testimony. The watch which marked the hour so precisely, is kept as a sacred relic in the city. Taylor, though shot nearly all to pieces, recovered entirely and is a healthy, venerable-looking old man of sixty years. He gave a rather able address, reciting some of the

⁸ The following was published in 'The Church News' on 25 September 2023: "In 1998, further research and investigation by the Church History Museum concluded the watch had not been hit by a bullet. Historians adopted the theory that the damage was caused by a windowsill that President Taylor fell onto after being shot. This became the dominant version of the account for many years. Still seeking answers, historians used available forensic methods to study the watch in 2020. They reviewed research articles previously written about the watch; had X-rays taken of the watch's components; and performed field tests in which watches of a similar age and manufacture were shot, dropped and struck with rocks or wooden boards. They also examined reports from various other scientific analyses, including electron microscopy—using a electron microscope to magnify an object's image. Despite the exhaustive tests, historians couldn't definitively determine how President Taylor's watch was damaged."

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early trials, and urging the Saints to be industrious and self-sustaining.⁹

The choir then sang the following hymn, composed by Miss Eliza R. Snow,¹⁰ the Mormon poetess:—¹¹

“OUR PROPHET, BRIGHAM YOUNG.”

“O God of life and glory!
Hear Thou a people’s prayer,
Bless, bless our Prophet Brigham;
Let him thy fullness share.
He is Thy chosen servant—
To lead Thine Israel forth,
Till Zion, crowned with joy, shall be
A praise in all the earth.

“He draws from Christ, the fountain
Of everlasting truth,
The wise and prudent counsels
Which he gives to age and youth.
Thyself in him reflected
Through mortal agency,
He is Thy representative
To set Thy people free.

“Thou richly hast endowed him
With wisdom’s bounteous store,
And Thou hast made him mighty

⁹ From the Report: “Several rules for the guidance of the moral course of the Saints were then read, and submitted to the vote of the congregation, who unanimously agreed to sustain and live by them. Elder Joseph W. Young testified to the truth and importance of the doctrines advanced to-day. The question is, will we sustain ourselves? He quoted the words of Jesus, ‘He that is not with us is against us,’ and urged the necessity of our being united and faithfully acting u[p]on the principles advanced touching this matter.”

¹⁰ Eliza Roxcy Snow (21 January 1804 – 5 December 1887) was one of the most celebrated Latter-Day Saint women of the nineteenth century. A renowned poet, she chronicled history, celebrated nature and relationships, and expounded scripture and doctrine. Snow was married to Joseph Smith as a plural wife and was openly a plural wife of Brigham Young after Smith’s death. Snow was the second general president of the Relief Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), which she reestablished in Utah Territory in 1866. She was also the sister of Lorenzo Snow, the church’s fifth president. (*Wikipedia: Eliza R. Snow*).

¹¹ From the Report: “The Tabernacle choir then sang the following hymn, composed for the occasion by Sister Eliza R. Snow.”

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By Thy own Almighty power.
Oh, let his life be precious—
Bless Thou his brethren, too,
Who firmly join him side by side,
Who're true as he is true.

“Help him to found Thy kin[g]dom
In majesty and power,
With peace in every palace
And with strength in every tower;
And when thy chosen Israel
Their noblest strains have sung,
The swelling chorus there shall be
Our Prophet, Brigham Young.”

This authoress is one of the “spiritual wives” of Brigham, which class of ladies usually retain their maidenly appellation, sometimes merely adding that of the spiritual husband. She is a very fine, intellectual-looking woman of forty or fifty years,¹² and from her appearance seems made to be loved.¹³

On Wednesday morning¹⁴ Elder George A. Smith, cousin of Joseph, was chosen as First Counselor to Brigham Young, in place of Heber C. Kimball, deceased. Daniel H. Wells is Second Counselor, and these three constitute the First Presidency, at the head of all affairs of the Church.¹⁵

¹² Eliza R. Snow was 64 years old at the time of this meeting on 6 October 1868.

¹³ From the Report: “Bishop E.D. Woolley offered up prayer and the Conference adjourned till Wednesday morning, 7th, at 10 o'clock; a meeting of the pri[e]sthood being called for half-past six o'clock in the evening.”

¹⁴ From the Report: “Wednesday, 7th, 10 a.m. The Tabernacle choir sang the hymn commencing on the 67th page - ‘Praise ye the Lord.’ Prayer by Elder Jacob Gates. Singing by the 20th Ward choir, the Anthem, ‘Zion Awake.’”

¹⁵ From the Report: “President B. Young then said the authorities of the church would be presented to the Conference; and Elder George Q. Cannon presented them in the following order. It will be seen that Elder George A. Smith was cal[l]ed to fill the position of President H.C. Kimball as First counselor to President Young; and Elder Brigham Young, Junr., was appointed to fill the vacancy in the Quorum of the Twelve thus created. Every vote, was, as usual, unanimous. Brigham Young, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, George A. Smith his first and Daniel H. Wells his second counselor [other authorities presented and sustained].”

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President Smith then gave a lengthy account of the early history of the Church¹⁶ from the time Joseph was called to take the golden plates out of the Hill of Cumorah, in western New York, to the expulsion from Nauvoo. He enlarged on their troubles in Kirtland and journey to Missouri. "There two priests organized a mob, and the Lieutenant-Governor called out the militia. The Saints were driven from Jackson County to Clay, and from Clay to Caldwell, which they found occupied by seven persons, all hunters. Far West was built as if by magic. By August 1, 1838, they owned all of Caldwell and parts of neighboring counties, when the mobs came upon them again. The Governor called out fifteen thousand men, but there was no law but mob law, whipping men and ravishing women. Women and children wandered for fifteen days on the burnt prairie, and could be tracked by the blood from their feet. Then the Saints went to Illinois and built the beautiful city of Nauvoo, and while there Joseph Smith went to see the President, Martin Van Buren, who heard his petition through, and then said: 'Your cause is just, but I can do nothing for you.' Soon after this Joseph and Hyrum were arrested and murdered. Then a combination was formed in nine counties to expel us.

"We appealed to the Governors of the States and were told the law was on our side, but public opinion was against us and we would have to leave. We finished our temple with the trowel in one hand and rifle in the other. Then our city was bombarded for three days and we retreated again. We commenced to cross the Mississippi in the month of February on the ice. While lying on the bank of the river the Lord sent quails into the camp that they could take them with the hand, which kept the people from dying of hunger. In that condition they remained till those who had gone west could return with wagons and take them away; but before this was done many perished."

This history was continued at various times by all the speakers, and in the most exaggerated and inflammatory style. On Thurs-

¹⁶ George A. Smith's lengthy account of the history of the church is preserved in the *Journal of Discourses - Volume 13* (Liverpool, England, Horace S. Eldredge, 1871), 103-124. The journal dates his delivery as 8-9 October 1868.

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day morning I heard Brigham Young for the first time.¹⁷ He is above medium height, well proportioned, fine and portly-looking; with gray or light blue eyes, light brown or golden hair, now sprinkled with gray, clear, rosy skin and sanguine temperament. His voice is quite clear and his enunciation distinct, with considerable of what is termed “presence,” and electric effect upon his congregation. But his style was coarse, in this instance even vulgar beyond the bounds of description. He was evidently either in an ill humor or determined to make the people so, indulging in reminiscences both personal and public, which led him into violent denunciation of all outsiders. When he first arose I was somewhat impressed, and thought I saw one reason for his supremacy, that he was indebted for his power over an ignorant people almost as much to his physical as to his mental superiority. But when he had closed I was utterly amazed, and it seemed incredible that one hundred people could be found, much less a thousand times that number, who should regard him as a “prophet of the Lord.” Afterwards, however, I had the pleasure of hearing him when he was in a calmer mood, when he appeared, to some extent at least, the prophet, priest and king.¹⁸

For the rest of the Conference, which was mainly devoted to the discussion of a general movement to prevent trade with the Gentile merchants, the speakers seemed to vie with each other in bitterness, intemperance of language, and hostility to Gentiles; and all the good opinions of the Mormons I had hitherto formed were utterly dissipated. For the first time in my life I heard the Government and people of the United States denounced, ridiculed and cursed, and the very name of American made a hissing and a byword; for the first time I heard professed preachers swearing in the pulpit, and such expressions as “d—d apostate” flung recklessly about by so-called apostles and priests. The Conference closed, and its bad effect was soon apparent. When I first arrived, there had been an era of good feeling; old bitterness appeared to be passing away, and I was quite convinced that much I

¹⁷ See *Journal of Discourses – Volume 12* (Liverpool, England: Albert Carrington, 1869), 281-289.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 297-301.

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had heard of the feud between Gentiles and Mormons was exaggerated.

In this temper of the public mind the Conference met, passed a decree of non-intercourse with the resident Gentiles, and spared no pains to inflame the public mind. The entire history of the Church was rehearsed, and in the most intemperate style; every act of "persecution," every slight and neglect was dwelt upon to the most minute particulars, and matters of comparative indifference exaggerated clear out of truthful proportion. There was not the slightest hint that the Mormons were anywhere in the wrong, that there was the least palliation for their enemies; not even the charitable assumption that some few of the latter believed themselves in the right. On the contrary, every scrap of history began and continued with the broad assumption, "We are the chosen people of God, to whom He has spoken by the mouth of His Prophet in these latter days, and, being such, of course, the world hated us. There is and must be eternal enmity between God and the devil, so there was and must be between Zion and the children of the devil, to wit, the Missourians and the Illinoisans." And these simple folks, who had come up to the Tabernacle with quiet minds, at peace with each other and all the world, left it with a burning bitterness¹⁹ against all Gentiles; and, as successive speakers recounted their troubles in Missouri and Illinois, they seemed wrought up to a perfect frenzy. In Brigham's "sermon" he threatened dire mischiefs upon the "d—d apostates," and expressed himself as "only sorry for one thing, that God didn't tell us to fight the d—d mobocrats," to which the Tabernacle resounded with shouts of "Amen, Amen!"

Another speaker, George Q. Cannon,²⁰ went much farther, and seemed to exhaust all the resources of lingual ingenuity to pro-

¹⁹ Preparing a young family (in 1980-2000) for a three-hour church service proved to be challenging. The teachings of instructors and sermons from the pulpit, when added to this, often resulted in a sense of edginess or bitterness towards our family members. I have consistently believed that the intensity of the messages acted as a *jab at the soul* of our shortcomings. Instead of strengthening our spirituality, it seemed to have the opposite effect, causing stress within the walls of our homes for several hours after the services.

²⁰ Sequentially, it appears that Cannon's speech may have been delivered the day before.

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voke the people to mob violence, without directly advising it.²¹ The great objects of his animosity were the *Reporter*—Gentile paper—and the grammar school of St. Mark’s Associate Mission, the Gentile school of the City. Cannon stigmatized the school as one of the institutions of the devil set up in Zion, and then asked: “Shall such an institution be allowed to go on and inoculate [*sic*] the minds of our children with its damnable and pernicious doctrines?” Which was answered with a universal shout of “No!” “No.”²² He hardly dared to directly advise the people to attack or destroy the *Reporter* office, but related a bit of history, with comments, which, if not intended to indicate violence, had no force that I can perceive. He said when he was a boy in Nauvoo, there was a paper published there by some “apostates” called the “Expositor.” It vilified the Saints, and scandalized their wives and daughters till the City Council declared it a nuisance. About that time the speaker was in the office of the Mormon paper there, and heard Joseph and Hyrum Smith talking about it. Hyrum said, “Rather than allow it to go on, he would lay his body in the walls of the building where it was issued.” The speaker then gave a glowing account of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum, and the many Saints who suffered on account of the “Expositor” till the people were wrought into a perfect frenzy. He then stated that “right here in the midst of Zion a paper was issued, so much like that, he could hardly tell them apart, and the times were so similar he almost imagined himself a boy again.” Then reading some extracts from the *Reporter*, and commenting in an inflammatory style, he said: “In any other community such a paper as this would be gutted inside of five days, and its Editor strung up

²¹ George Q. Cannon – 7 October 1868, *Journal of Discourses – Volume 12* (Liverpool, England: Albert Carrington, 1869), 289-297.

²² David W. Evans recorded Brigham’s words in the *Journal of Discourses – Volume 12* (Liverpool, England: Albert Carrington, 1869), page 294, as: “*And the purpose for which that school was designed was to inoculate the children of the Latter-day Saints with their damnable and pernicious doctrines. Who sustains this institution and who sustains and has sustained this paper? You can answer these questions. Will we patiently submit to these things? Shall we bow ourselves as willing slaves to the yoke they would fasten upon us? (Cries of ‘No, No.’)*.”

to a telegraph pole. To which the excited congregation responded, "Hear, hear," "Here we are," etc.²³

I now began to understand what had at first seemed a mystery to me; that in every State where the Mormons had lived, the people who had at first welcomed them gladly, ended by hating and opposing them. Granting that all the charges against them of petty thieving, counterfeiting and trespass were untrue, such mad fanaticism could not but destroy good neighborhood, and arouse all other violent elements in opposition to their own. Mormonism, which had hitherto been to me a mere amusement or matter of passing interest, now appeared a subject worthy of serious and earnest investigation.

That a vast multitude of people should embrace a wild scheme of religion is no new thing, perhaps no great wonder; the foremost nations of Europe have witnessed greater displays of fanaticism; England had her Irvingites, Muggletonians and devotees of Joanna Southcott; Germany was compelled to slaughter fifty thousand of the fierce Anabaptists of Munster, followers of St. John of Leyden; while the convulsionists of France, and the self-mutilating sects of Russia, have shown more unnatural bigotry than the Mormons. But that a theocratic despotism should spring up in a free republic; that the cool and practical Yankee should turn Prophet, and that after two thousand years of Christain [*sic*] progress, men and women should voluntarily turn back to polygamy, semi-paganism and the "dead works" of a ceremonial law—this is cause for inquiry. Let us then take a brief view of the most characteristic features of Mormonism, arranging them for convenience in the following order:

- I. Mormon society and general views.
- II. Analysis of Mormon theology.
- III. Theoretical polygamy—its history.
- IV. Practical polygamy.
- V. The Mormon theocracy.

²³ Ibid.