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HISTORY OF THE MORMON CHURCH

The history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from the time of its organization in 1830 to the present has been told by various authors, and it is available to all who desire to become familiar with it. It will therefore be referred to in this treatise in brevity only.

After the organization of the Church knowledge of the opening of a new gospel dispensation spread, and the membership of the Church rapidly increased. The first gathering place of the converted members was at Kirtland, Ohio, where the first temple built by the Church was erected. It was dedicated to the Lord in March, 1836.

Soon after, converts to the doctrines of the Church began to gather at different points in the State of Missouri, where in the beginning they were made welcome by the earlier settlers. The Mormons were largely people from New England and other eastern States, who worked together and voted together for the men of their choice. They were abolitionists, and this with their union in both temporal and spiritual matters was displeasing to the old settlers, who soon manifested a disposition to rid the State of these people who had come among them, bringing a religion which was new to them and customs which were opposed to their own.

In reply to this opposition, the Mormons published the following declaration of the principles for which they stood:

"The Constitution of our country formed by the fathers of liberty. Peace and good order in society. Love to God and good-will to man. All good and wholesome laws, virtue and truth above all things, and aristarchy live forever. But woe to tyrants, mobs, aristocracy, anarchy, and toryism, and all those who invent or seek out unrighteous and vexatious lawsuits, under the pretext and color of law or office, either religious or political. Exalt the standard of democracy, down with that of priestcraft, and let all the people say Amen! That the blood of our fathers may not cry from the ground against us. Sacred is the memory of the blood which bought for us our liberty."

The crisis came upon election day, August 6th, 1838. Two weeks before the Mormons had been notified by Judge Morin, candidate for election to the State Senate, that they would not be permitted to vote. Upon arrival at the election booth about a dozen members of the Church found Colonel William Peniston, who had already led an attack on the Mormons, mounted upon a barrel harranguing a large number of Missourians. He accused the Mormons of high crimes and misdemeanors, and declared that if they were permitted to vote the old settlers would soon lose control of the politics of the State.

This resulted in a mass attack upon the members of the Church, who defended themselves so well that the crowd soon dispersed. John L. Butler, some of whose descendants are at present in Utah, tearing a rail from a nearby fence, used it with such effect that the

polls were cleared of the attackers, and Butler told the boys to come up and vote.

Peniston and others went before the civil courts and made affidavit that the Mormons to the number of five hundred were arming and collecting in Davies County to wreak vengeance for some imaginary injuries and to intimidate and drive from the State all of the old settlers and possess themselves of their lands. Governor Lilburn W. Boggs called out the state militia and issued an order to General John B. Clark from which I quote the following: "The Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the State."

Joseph Smith and other representative members of the Church were placed under arrest. On the night of November 1, 1838, Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Amasa Lyman, and others were arraigned before a so-called court martial, in which Sashiel Woods and Samuel Bogart, who wrote Reverend before their names, took part, and the following order was issued:

"Brigadier-General Doniphan: Sir: You will take Joseph Smith and the other prisoners into the public square of Far West and shoot them at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

SAMUEL D. LUCAS,

Major-General commanding."

To this order General Doniphan replied:

"It is cold-blooded murder. I will not obey your order. My brigade shall march for Liberty tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock, and if you execute these men, I will hold you responsible before an earthly tribunal, so help me God.

A. W. DONIPHAN,
Brigadier-General."

The determination of the old settlers to drive the Mormons from the State of Missouri became more pronounced. Open attacks were made upon them; people were killed, property destroyed or confiscated, until finally their petitions to the State and Government for protection being ignored, the members of the Church, several thousand in number, left Missouri in the winter of 1838-9, and fled to Iowa and Illinois, leaving behind them property valued at not less than two millions of dollars.

At the time of the exodus from Missouri, Joseph Smith and a number of other leading men of the Church were held prisoners, so that the responsibility of leadership, in this hegira from their homes, devolved upon Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve.

The majority of people reached Quincy, Illinois, where they were hospitably received by the citizens. A mass meeting of citizens was called at which resolutions were passed denouncing the treatment the saints had received at the hands of the people of Missouri, from which the following is copied:

"Resolved, that we regard the acts of all mobs as flagrant violations of law, and those who compose them individually responsible, both to the laws of God and man, for every depredation committed upon the property, rights, or life of any citizen.

"Resolved, that the inhabitants upon the western frontier of the State of Missouri, in their late persecution of the people denominated Mormons, have violated the sacred rights of conscience, and every law of justice and humanity."

Freed from prison, Joseph Smith rejoined the body of the Church and again assumed leadership.

He selected the village of Commerce, on the east bank of the Mississippi river to be the place where the scattered saints should gather. The name of the village was changed to Nauvoo.

Missionaries were sent out with the result that many new converts were added to the Church, and Nauvoo soon became the most populous city in the State of Illinois. Fine homes, some of which still stand, were erected, a temple was reared, and large areas of virgin land brought under cultivation.

The rapid growth of the city, the unusual increase in the membership of the Church, the union and industry which characterized the activities of the people, and above all their attitude in relation to politics, which was to vote unitedly for men and measures best adapted to their aspirations and condition, alarmed the people of Illinois as it had done those of Missouri.

Joseph Smith was again harassed with vexatious law-suits. None of the charges made against him were proven. Depredations were committed upon persons and property of Church members who lived away from the city, and were thus exposed to mob violence. Joseph Smith was charged with treason, and on the 25th of June, 1844, he and his brother Hyrum voluntarily surrendered for trial, the governor of the State having personally guaranteed them protection from the mob and a fair trial.

The prisoners were taken to Carthage, where they were placed in jail and their trial set for the 29th.

On the morning of the 27th, Dan Jones called at the jail and was requested by the Prophet to go to Governor Ford and advise him that certain of the Militia who were at Carthage had openly threatened the lives of the prisoners. Jones immediately reported to the governor who replied: "You are unnecessarily alarmed for the safety of your friends, sir, the people are not so cruel."

Jones answered: "The Messrs. Smith are American citizens and have surrendered themselves to your Excellency upon your pledge for their safety, besides they are Master Masons, and as such I demand of you protection of their lives."

In the afternoon of the 27th, without resistance by the guards who had been detailed for their protection, the jail was stormed by an armed mob, Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were shot to death, and John Taylor, who was with them, was severely wounded.

After the martyrdom the mob fled in terror from the scene and the people of Carthage were greatly alarmed. The Mormons outnumbered their neighbors and the people feared retaliation, but Willard Richards, who was with the Prophet at the time of his death reassured them, pledging his word that there would be no act of reprisal. As had been the case on many other occasions, the saints patiently bore the greatest sorrow that had come to the Church since its organization, and in the true spirit of Christianity left their case in the hands of God.

Joseph Smith had been dragged before courts on trumped up charges many times before, but not in a single instance had he been convicted of an unlawful or unchristian act.

It was thought by the enemies of the Church that with the death of the prophet and his brother Hyrum the saints would scatter and the Church become disorganized. In this, however, they were mistaken. As they had done before, the Mormons renewed their efforts, and under the leadership of Brigham Young and his associates the Church made rapid advancement both in numbers and prosperity. Work on the Nauvoo temple was prosecuted with renewed vigor until the building was far enough completed to admit the administration of ordinance work for both the living and the dead, and the edifice was publicly dedicated on the first of May, 1846.

When it became evident that the death of the prophet had not impeded the development of the Church, the fires of hatred again were lighted and blazed with renewed fury. The Warsaw Signal, Alton Telegraph, Quincy Whig, and other papers published by representatives of those who had accomplished the death of Joseph Smith, accused the Mormons of theft, disloyalty, and many other crimes and misdemeanors.

A personal investigation was made by Governor Ford who, in his message to the legislature of the State, referring to his visit to Nauvoo, said:

"On my recent visit to Hancock County I was informed by some of their (the Mormon's) violent enemies that their lar-

ceries had become unusually numerous and insufferable. They indeed admitted that little had been done in their vicinity, but insisted that sixteen head of horses had been stolen in one night near Lima, in the County of Adams. At the close of the expedition I called at this same town of Lima, and upon inquiry was told that no horses had been stolen in that neighborhood, but that sixteen horses had been stolen in one night in Hancock County. This last information being told of Hancock County again changed the venue to another distant settlement in the northern edge of Adams County."

In his message to the legislature of the State, referring to his investigation the governor said:

"Justice however requires me to say that I have investigated the charge of promiscuous stealing, and find it to be greatly exaggerated. I could not ascertain that there were a greater proportion of thieves in that community than in any other number of inhabitants, and perhaps if the city of Nauvoo were compared with St. Louis or any other western city the proportion would not be so great."

On the 15th of September, 1845, Jacob Backenstos, sheriff of Hancock County, was driven from Carthage by a mob of citizens who threatened his life because of his effort to place under arrest certain persons charged with burning the homes and property of Mormons. On the 18th he with a posse of several men determined to make the arrests, but the parties who were charged with the offense had fled to Missouri.

On the 22nd of September a mass meeting was held at Quincy at which it was demanded that the Mormons be expelled from the State, unless they were willing to peacefully withdraw. A committee was appointed to wait upon the presiding authorities of the Church and notify them of the action which had

been taken. After the meeting the Quincy Whig published the following:

"It is a settled thing that the sentiment of the State is against the Mormons, and it will be in vain for them to contend against it, and to prevent bloodshed and the sacrifice of many lives it is their duty to obey the public will and leave the State as speedily as possible."

From the reply of the Church, submitted by its President, Brigham Young, the following is quoted:

"We would say to the committee, and to the governor, and to all of the authorities and people of Illinois and the surrounding States and Territories, that we propose to leave this country next spring for some point so remote that there will be no difficulty between the people and ourselves, provided certain propositions necessary for the accomplishment of our removal shall be observed."

The conditions specified were that time should be given the members of the Church to dispose of their property and make the necessary arrangements for the contemplated journey to the West. This request was not granted, nothing but the immediate removal of the Mormons would satisfy their enemies, and on the 4th of February, 1846, the first of them left Nauvoo, crossed the Mississippi on the ice, and in tears looked back at the city and temple they loved so well, as they turned their faces to the west in another hegira which they prayed would bring them to an asylum where they might be at peace with God and man, which had been their one desire since the organization of the Church.

The suffering endured, the courage manifested, and devotion to the government from which they were unwilling exiles will be told in a later chapter.