

WHAT JOSEPH SMITH DID FOR THE WOMANHOOD OF THE CHURCH.

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One hundred years permits an observer a fairly accurate perspective by which to measure the history and character of those who began life at the beginning of that period. And although hundreds of years will be necessary in which to tell the tale of the greatness and majesty of the man, Joseph Smith, yet can we arrive at some measure of the truth in this comparatively short time.

What his life and mission did for men, for science, for philosophy, for life in its fullest and deepest sense, others may consider; but the inquiry now and here to be answered is, what did his life and mission mean to the womanhood of the Church, and, therefore, to the women of the world?

First of all, what was the condition of women, socially, politically and religiously, in 1830, when the Church was organized?

In answering this, it should be known that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Joseph was born, the full education of girls was unknown. They were allowed, not very graciously, to attend school when the boys were away and at work. But the same violent opposition to every phase of the Woman's question was then centered on the ultra-liberal idea of permitting girls to acquire any learning but the polite arts of reading and writing, and perhaps a smattering of French and music, with embroidery and fine sewing. More than this, declared preachers and teachers, came of the devil. In the early part of the century, a female seminary was opened. But even then, such strong meat as

mathematics or science was deemed heretical to suggest as food for brains of delicate girls.

Socially, women were just emerging from the long, dark traditions of the Crusades, the monasteries, and the later strait-laced Puritan prejudices against woman appearing anywhere in public life. Yet, socially women had far more opportunities and privileges than educationally, politically, or religiously. For, the way from the drawing room led often into minor powers in state affairs.

Religiously, that is among the sects, the position of woman was more than subordinate. The Quakers were the only ones who acknowledged in any way the right of woman's voice to be raised within church walls.

Therefore, when a young and fearless prophet arose who proclaimed, as a first foundation principle, that women should have the religious franchise, and that all things should be done with "common consent," one need not wonder at the horror which his announcement created.

In the year 1830, in July, the Prophet received a revelation concerning his wife Emma, and in it were instructions and powers that extended to all the daughters of God's kingdom.

Herein she was told "to walk in the paths of virtue before me; to lay aside the things of this world, and seek for a better." She was "to be ordained under the hands of Joseph Smith to expound Scriptures and to exhort the Church, as it shall be given thee by my Spirit."

And what were the results? What has "Mormonism" and Joseph Smith done for me, for my sisters—for all women?

Where would I, my sisters, my mother, yea, all women of this people be, if Joseph Smith had not been born, if he had not translated the Book of Mormon, established the Church, built Kirtland, Far West, Nauvoo, consecrated temples, given endowments, established commonwealths, and finally rendered up his own life on the altar of sacrifice, returning from his contemplated trip to the Rocky Mountains, to go like a lamb to the slaughter? Can you think where we would have been? You and I? Will your mind obey your imagination, and picture for you what might have been and what now is?

Who would have established a splendid, independent woman's organization, giving her every right to progress, advance, and grow along every true and natural line? Where would be our Woman's Relief Society, Mutual Improvement Associations, and the Primaries, but for him? Our elective franchise in Church and state? For Brigham Young never would have reached the Rocky Mountains, if Joseph Smith had not pointed the way? And if these men had not come, what class of people would have come?

Think of it, every woman, young or old; ponder it well. What debt do you owe Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the living God? What has he done for you? And how may we repay this debt, this obligation? Only by love and loyalty to him, and obedience to the principles which he taught.

We only remember that which is constantly before our eyes, within the hearing of our ears, and upon our lips in speech. The memory of the Savior himself would perish from the earth were he not spoken of and written about constantly. Why are the Scriptures so necessary to the people's spiritual health? Because they tell us of God and his hand-dealings on earth. And surely, the memory of any man would speedily fade, were not books written, pictures painted, and monuments erected to keep memory green.

Then you and I, sisters, can help, ever so little it may be, but still help, to keep the grass above Joseph's grave green in our hearts and the hearts of our children. Let us talk of him, write about him, and love and honor him daily and hourly.

One key: Whenever a meeting drags, or is spiritless, let any one get up and testify to the mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and see how quickly light will dispel the darkness. If a missionary in the field would have his mettle tested to the utmost, let him boldly testify to the truth of Joseph's message to the earth, and to the majesty and power of that man. There was a time when it took more courage to testify of Christ. But now, the mere knowledge of him is almost covering the whole earth, and it is easy to speak of him and his refulgent earth-mission. Just now, the storm centre of truth broods over the name and memory of Joseph Smith, and his new testament of the character and power of the Savior. It is because Joseph Smith testifies of the Christ

as he is, not as he is supposed to be, that men hate him. Was not the same conditions existent in Judea nineteen hundred years ago?

Then, up with the standard of truth, and honor and glory to the standard bearer, who went down to his grave in the battle with death and hell, holding that banner aloft as he chanted a hymn to God and Christ! We thank God that our eyes may still see, our ears still hear, and our lips still speak the praises of our "prophet, priest and king."

In conclusion, let us give some extracts from the teachings of this great man to the Woman's Society, which he, under revelation from God, had established on March 17, 1842, in Nauvoo. A perusal of the minutes, kept by the Secretary, Eliza R. Snow, gives a wonderful insight into the liberality and justice manifested by Joseph Smith towards women and womanhood. Let young elders and bishops note the breadth and scope given to all women by the teaching of the Prophet.

One may learn more of a man's attitude on any question by reading what he says, himself, than by reading what others say about him. Hence it is that the reading of the Scriptures is far more profitable than reading any number of commentaries and stories about them.

Let us go to the fountain head for light:

The meeting was addressed, March 17, 1842, by President Joseph Smith, to illustrate the object of the society—that the society of the sisters might provoke the brethren to good works, in looking to the wants of the poor, searching after objects of charity, and administering to their wants—to assist by correcting the morals and strengthening the virtues of the community, and save the elders the trouble of rebuking; that they may give their time to other duties, etc., in their public teaching. * * He proposed that the sisters elect a presiding officer to preside over them, and let the presiding officer choose two counselors to assist in the duties of her office—that he would ordain them to preside over the society, and let them preside just as the presidency preside over the Church; and if they need his instructions, he will give it from time to time. * * * If any officers are wanted to carry out the designs of the institution, let them be appointed and set apart as deacons, teachers, etc., are among us.

President Smith gave an initial donation of five dollars—a gold piece to commence the funds of the society, and said that whatever he gave in charity would hereafter be given through this society.

He then suggested the propriety of electing a presidency to continue in office during good behavior, or so long as they shall continue to fill the office with dignity, etc., like the first Presidency of the Church. * * * Said that all difficulties which might and would cross our way must be surmounted, though the soul be tried, the heart faint, and hands hang down * * * There must be decision of character aside from sympathy. Must all act in concert, or nothing can be done. Said that the society should move according to the ancient priesthood, hence there should be a select society separate from all the evils of the world, choice, virtuous, and holy—said he was going to make of this society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch's day, as in Paul's day—that it is the privilege of each member to live long and enjoy health. * * * He spoke of the commission given to the ancient apostles, "Go ye into the world," etc.,—no matter who believeth, these signs, such as healing the sick, casting out devils, etc., should follow all that believe, whether male or female. * * * It is the privilege of those set apart, to administer in the authority which is conferred on them, and if the sisters should have faith to heal the sick, let all hold their tongues. * * * There could be no sin in any female laying hands on the sick. * * * It is no sin for anybody to do it that has faith—or if the sick have faith to be healed by the administration. * *

* * * He said that they were going to be left to themselves—that they would not long have him to instruct them—that the Church would not have his instructions long, and the world would not be troubled with him a great while, and would not have his teachings—he spoke of delivering the keys of this society and of the Church—that according to his prayer God had appointed him elsewhere. He exhorted the sisters to concentrate their faith and prayers for, and place confidence in, those whom God had appointed to honor, whom God has placed at the head to lead—that we should arm them with our prayers—that the Keys of the Kingdom are about to be given to them. * * * You must put down iniquity, and by your own example provoke the elders to good works. * *

* * * Not war, not jangle, not contradiction, but meekness, love, purity, these are the things that should magnify us. Evil must be brought to light—iniquity must be purged out—then the veil will be rent, and the blessings of heaven will flow down * * * This society is to get instructions through the order which God has established, through the medium of those appointed to lead, and now I turn the keys to you in the name of God, and this society shall rejoice. * * * Let kindness, charity, and love govern your work henceforward. Don't envy sinners. Have mercy on them. Let your labors be confined mostly to those around you, in your own circles; as far as knowledge is concerned, it may extend to all the world, but your administration should be confined to the immediate circle of your acquaintance, and more especially to the members of the society. * * * If any have a matter to reveal, let it be in your own tongue. Do not indulge too much in the gift of tongues, or the devil will take advantage of the innocent. You may speak in tongues for your comfort, but I lay this down for a rule, that if anything is taught by the gift of tongues, it is not to be received for doctrine.

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