

NINETY-EIGHTH
SEMI-ANNUAL
CONFERENCE

of the Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-day Saints

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*With a Full Report of All
the Discourses*



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principles will enable us to go forward and live in humility in accordance with the will of the Lord.

May the Lord bless us that we may train the young men and women especially, that they may be qualified and developed in the observance of these things, and thereby become men and women of integrity, in order that the next generation shall be able to carry on every phase of activity in the most effective way, I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

ELDER B. H. ROBERTS

Senior President of the First Council of Seventy

I call your attention, my brethren and sisters, to what is designated as our Twelfth Article of Faith, which reads:

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

I think by reading this Article of Faith as a text I shall be able in my thinking to be in harmony with the spirit of this meeting by reason of what our president has said, and this meeting may be the dominating influence of the entire conference.

On my way home from the East recently, when passing through Scranton, Pennsylvania, I picked up the current paper of that day, and in it was a statement from the census returns of the United States, taken from the Census Bureau, Washington, that crime was increasing, in proportion, faster than the growth of our population, according to the increase of persons sent to prison. Complete returns from thirty-one states, covering fifty-eight of a total of ninety-nine state prisons and reformatories, listed 27,018 new prisoners received by these institutions in 1926, as compared with 21,054 in 1923, the first prison census year in this country, or an increase of 28.3 per cent. There were 34.1 prisoners for 100,000 population jailed last year, as against 27.9 in 1923.

Then as we came through Denver, I picked up the *Rocky Mountain News*, and in it found a column devoted to crime and its increase. I do not have time to read it, but it would be very enlightening to do so. It would, however, occupy too much time. Let it be sufficient to say that the writer of that special column traced the crime of our country from the highest stations in political life, from those who had been found guilty of crime in the President's cabinet, through governors of states and mayors of cities, down to the lowly stations in life. It constitutes a rather severe arraignment of the present status of the United States in the matter of law observance. One statement was to the effect that according to General Lincoln C. Andrews, former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, there are no less than 40,000,000 drinkers in this prohibition country, and “home-brew is becoming a nation-wide enterprise.”

And so throughout in the column he discusses the question of violation of law and the increase of the volume of it.

Then, on the evening that I arrived home, I chanced to pick up

a Salt Lake paper, and noticed that the Chief of Police in our city was calling attention to "special juvenile delinquencies" in the city, and giving special instructions to the police officers of the city to undertake the arrest of the development of this species of crime. In that article there is a list running through crimes of four days that makes the heart sick, crimes committed upon juveniles, and crimes by juveniles, that no man can read, I am sure, and not be moved by sorrow at the spectacle it represents.

You will see that coming in contact with these incidents, through the public press, on my way home, and just upon my arrival here, brought me in contact with, and reminded me of, the subject that has been under discussion for the last thirty years in this country by publicists, by statesmen, jurists, and various institutions that stand for law and order.

I have been interesting myself in this subject for some length of time. I happened to come upon some notes since arriving home wherein I found a discourse delivered by myself in this tabernacle, in 1924, in which I set forth, after elaborate statistical investigations, the supporting evidence for a statement which had been made by Chief Justice Taft, in 1908, before the Bar Association in New York, to the effect that "the administration of law in our country was a disgrace to civilization." There was much disputation that arose over that statement, which led me to an investigation with, to me, startling results, only to be convinced that our Chief Justice was within the truth in making that very strong statement.

We cannot go into statistics in relation to this subject now, but you will be interested in hearing this quotation from the words of Judge Alfred Talley, of the Court of General Sessions of New York, when introducing into office a new jurist a year or two ago. He said to him in giving him his charge:

"One of the things that you will come to learn is that you have come to the bench of the greatest criminal court in the world, and the oldest court of any kind in the United States, at a time when this country is suffering under an indictment which proclaims it to be the most lawless on earth. You will find that the United States must plead guilty to that indictment. Most of the desperate criminals are mere boys."

And that I think is one of the tragical things connected with the growth of crime, that its increase is chiefly among the youth of the land. Judge Talley continued:

"You will be heartbroken at discovering that the vast majority of defendants are under nineteen or twenty years old, and that is going to be your distressing problem."

Another statement I want to read to you is an excerpt from the report of the Commission of Law Enforcement, presented to a meeting of the American Bar Association in San Francisco, several years ago; and the conditions have not changed since then, only to grow worse. This is the statement:

"Crime and lawlessness in the United States have been steadily on the in-

crease and out of proportion to our growth, and there has been a steady and growing disrespect for law in our nation. This is not a result of the war."

You know we are disposed to blame pretty much all of this spirit of lawlessness to the effect of the great World War. But this authority denies that and offers this in proof:

"We do not find the proportional increase in crime from 1916 to 1922 greater than from 1910 to 1916, (That is the year before we went into the War) and we have not been able to discover that crimes of violence have materially increased in France, in England or Canada during or since the War, although the effect of the War naturally must be more marked in those countries."

There is much more that might be said in evidence of this, but perhaps it is unprofitable, and impossible at least, for me now to discuss the obvious. The testimonials are so overwhelming, the crowd of witnesses is so great that as American citizens we are face to face with the fact *that in our country we are living in an age of lawlessness*; and therefore I deem it important that for ourselves and for the world, as far as we can reach them by proclamation, it should be known that in these mountains, in the Church of Jesus Christ, stands a people pledged to the support of law and of order, and I think Latter-day Saints no less than the world ought to have their attention called to that important truth.

Many reasons crowd in upon our attention that are interwoven with this great theme, the keynote of which President Grant has struck in his opening remarks this morning.

I shall only take time to note here one, but that one represents a great contributing cause of the growth and increase of lawlessness in our country. It arises from the uncertainty in the execution of the law. Perhaps in the foundation of our government, in establishing the constitution of our country and our state constitutions, the people of that generation had been under the iron heel of oppressive governments so long, that they became extremely anxious to protect the individual against encroachments of tyrannical administration of law, and therefore over-emphasized the rights of the individual and the protection of those rights, and had less concern for the larger rights and the protection of society from criminals. In this spirit the legislation has run in our states and in our nation, viz: to safeguard and to provide every possible means for the protection of the rights of those who are accused of crimes. And these laws, favoring so strongly the criminal, have been so used by skilful attorneys for the defense, that the administration of law has become a science for protecting the criminal from the just judgment and punishment of his crimes.

We have a very prominent case in mind now and of recent occurrence that illustrates this point. Six years ago two men were convicted under due process of law in the state of Massachusetts for shooting down and robbing in full daylight, and in a crowded thoroughfare of the city, two men who were entrusted with a payroll of a manufacturing company. Two men were arrested for the crime, tried under due process of law, and found guilty. I shall not attempt to undertake any

analysis of that case, of course. But they were found guilty. By the skill and cunning of lawyers for the defense, however, delays and appeals, based on exceptions to procedure, and in devious ways, the execution of the sentence was postponed from year to year. The radical element of the community organized for withstanding the execution of the law. They went on from one scheme to another, growing, it seemed to me, more desperate in their determination to thwart the law, and the execution of the sentence in pursuance thereof, and this for seven years from the time the crime was committed. Millions in the United States, aided and abetted by some of the foremost newspapers of the land, begged and pleaded for a mitigation of the sentence pronounced by the court. Fortunately, as I view it—fortunately for the stability of the administration of the law—the state of Massachusetts withstood all these appeals, and at last the law was vindicated, notwithstanding its long delay. I was struck myself with the splendid answer that Governor Fuller made to the dramatic appeal of the wife and the sister respectively of these two condemned men. His answer was, and I believe it will become historic:

“I am sorry. My duties are outlined by the law.”

Governor Fuller refused to interfere with the final execution of these sentenced men.

We have in this case an illustration of one of the great defects of administration of law in the United States, that is, “the law’s delay,” and the uncertainty of punishment. Let that thing continue, and criminals will mock the law.

A touch of divine wisdom comes into this question from the distant past. Solomon left on record this remarkable statement: “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” Eccl. 8:11. The whole consensus of legal opinion upon this subject is to the effect that the uncertainty of the execution of the penalty encourages desperate men in crime.

If it were in harmony with the feelings of the brethren—and I know nothing of what their feelings are on this subject—it seems to me that we could with propriety voice the sentiments of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this conference by a proper resolution making known this our great principle, announcing our conviction of duty in the sustaining of the law, by publishing this Article of our faith in such a resolution. It would be a proper occasion, in the face of these increasing crime waves, to let our country know where the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints stands upon this question.

President Grant, I beg to venture one more thing, even if I trespass a little on your time. I cannot leave this subject without calling attention to an important declaration in the Book of Mormon, incidentally referred to by some of the brethren in their remarks this morning. They are the words of the Prophet Moroni. Harken unto this, Latter-day Saints, and I would like to see this, too, coupled with the resolution to which I have referred, as the message of the American

volume of scripture to the great Gentile nation that now is in control of this land, the U. S., and has great influence throughout the whole continent:

"And he [God] had sworn in his wrath unto the brother of Jared, that whoso should possess this land of promise, from that time henceforth and forever, should serve him, the true and only God, or they should be swept off when the fulness of his wrath should come upon them.

And now, we can behold the decrees of God concerning this land, that it is a land of promise; and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall serve God, or they shall be swept off when the fulness of his wrath shall come upon them. And the fulness of his wrath cometh upon them when they are ripened in iniquity.

For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off."

Now, mark you:

"And this cometh unto you, O ye Gentiles, that ye may know the decrees of God—that ye may repent, and not continue in your iniquities until the fulness come, that ye may not bring down the fulness of the wrath of God upon you as the inhabitants of the land have hitherto done." (Ether 2:9-12).

Only three weeks ago, about now, I had the pleasure of standing upon the summit of the Hill Cumorah in company with President Grant. Being there upon that height of land, which so splendidly commands a view of the whole surrounding country, I could not refrain from recalling the time when Moroni stood upon the crown of that hill with the evidence of the ruins of the civilization of his people about him. And this warning, written in the Book of Ether, let me say, in closing, comes from the prophet of God who was also the historian of the great Jaredite nation, by abridging and translating their history into the Nephite language. This warning comes, then, from the historian of one civilization that had perished about the Hill Cumorah; it came also from the same man who was a witness of the destruction of the civilization of his own people at the same place. I hold that he was competent to speak upon this question, and it is most fitting, and is one of the evidences of inspiration in this Book, that one so competent to speak in warning should be chosen to be God's mouthpiece in warning this great Gentile nation, holding dominion over the land in our day, to beware of their course lest they, too, forfeit their rights to the pride of place they occupy among the nations of the earth. For great as our nation is, it is not above the powers of destruction if it observes not the conditions upon which it may hold its position upon this land.

May the blessing of God so come to the Gentiles that they shall not share the fate of the nations that have preceded them, is my earnest prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

The choir and congregation sang, "The Doxology."

The closing prayer was offered by Elder Elmer E. Taylor, president of the Young stake of Zion.

The meeting adjourned until 2 o'clock p. m.