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The Evidence of Prophecy

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE EVIDENCE OF PROPHECY.

In the journal of William Clayton, under date of May 18th, 1843, is the following entry, relating a conversation that took place between Joseph Smith and Stephen A. Douglas, at the house of Sheriff Backenstos, at Carthage, Illinois :

“Dined with Judge Stephen A. Douglas, who is presiding at court. After dinner Judge Douglas requested President Joseph to give him a history of the Missouri persecution, which he did in a very minute manner for about three hours. He also gave a relation of his journey to Washington City, and his application in behalf of the Saints to Mr. Van Buren, the President of the United States, for redress and Mr. Van Buren’s pusillanimous reply—‘Gentlemen, your cause is just, but I can do nothing for you;’ and the cold, unfeeling manner in which he was treated by most of the senators and representatives in relation to the subject, Clay saying, ‘You had better go to Oregon,’ and Calhoun shaking his head solemnly, saying, ‘It’s a nice question—a critical question; but it will not do to agitate it.’

“The Judge listened with the greatest attention, and then spoke warmly in deprecation of Governor Boggs and the authorities in Missouri, who had taken part in the extermination, and said that any people that would do as the mobs of Missouri had done ought to be brought to judgment; they ought to be punished.

“President Smith, in concluding his remarks, said that if the Government, which receives into its coffers the money of citizens for its public lands, while its officials are rolling in luxury at the expense of its public treasury, cannot protect such citizens in their lives and property, it is an old granny anyhow and ‘I prophesy in the name of the Lord God of Israel, unless the United States redress the wrongs committed upon the Saints in the State of Missouri and punish the crimes committed by her of-

ficers, that in a few years the Government will be utterly overthrown and wasted, and there will not be so much as a potsherd left, for their wickedness in permitting the murder of men, women and children, and the wholesale plunder and extermination of thousands of her citizens to go unpunished, thereby perpetrating a foul and corroding blot upon the fair fame of this great republic, the very thought of which would have caused the high-minded and patriotic framers of the Constitution of the United States to hide their faces with shame. *Judge, you will aspire to the Presidency of the United States; and if you ever turn your hand against me or the Latter-day Saints, you will feel the weight of the hand of the Almighty upon you; and you will live to see and know that I have testified the truth to you; for the conversation of this day will stick to you through life.*" He appeared very friendly, and acknowledged the truth and propriety of President Smith's remarks."

This prophecy was first published in Utah, in the *Deseret News* of September 24th, 1856; it was afterwards published in England, in the *Millennial Star*, February, 1859.^p In both instances it is found in the History of Joseph Smith, then being published in sections in those periodicals. Stephen A. Douglas did aspire to the Presidency of the United States, and was nominated for that office by the Democratic Convention, held in Baltimore on the 23rd of June, 1860. When in the convention he was declared the regular nominee of the Democratic Party, "The whole body rose to its feet, hats were waved in the air, and many tossed aloft; shouts, screams, and yells, and every boisterous mode of expressing approbation and unanimity, were resorted to."^q

When Mr. Douglas first began to aspire to the Presidency, no man in the history of American politics had more reason to hope for success. The political party of which he was the recognized leader, in the preceding Presidential election had polled 174 electoral votes as against 122 cast by the

^p Mill. Star, Vol. xxi, No. 9.

^q See Cooper's "American Politics," Bk. I, p. 86.

other two parties which opposed it; and a popular vote of 1,838,169 as against 1,215,798 votes for the two parties opposing. It is a matter of history, however, that the Democratic party in the election of 1860 was badly divided; and factions of it put candidates into the field with the following result: Mr. Abraham Lincoln, candidate of the Republican party; was triumphantly elected. He received 180 electoral votes; Mr. Breckinridge received 72 electoral votes; Mr. Bell 39; and Mr. Douglas 12. "By a plurality count of the popular vote, Mr. Lincoln carried 18 states; Mr. Breckinridge 11; Mr. Bell 3; and Mr. Douglas but 1!"^r Twenty days less than one year after his nomination by the Charleston convention, while yet in the prime of manhood—forty-eight years of age—Mr. Douglas died, at his home in Chicago, a disappointed, not to say heart-broken, man.

Let us now search out the cause of his failure. Fourteen years after the interview containing the prophecy with which this chapter opens, and about one year after the prophecy had been published in the *Deseret News*, Mr. Douglas was called upon to deliver a speech in Springfield, the capital of Illinois. His speech was delivered on the 12th of June, 1857, and published in the *Missouri Republican* of June 18th, 1857. It was a time of much excitement throughout the country concerning the Mormon Church in Utah. Falsehoods upon the posting winds seemed to have filled the air with the most outrageous calumny. Crimes the most repulsive—murders, robberies, rebellion, and high treason—were falsely charged against its leaders. It was well known that Mr. Douglas had been on terms of intimate friendship with Joseph Smith; and was well acquainted with the other church leaders. He was therefore looked upon as one competent to speak upon the "Mormon Question," and was invited to do

^r See tables in "American Politics," Bk. vii, pp. 22, 26; also, History U. S. (by Alexander H. Stephens), p. 559.

so in the speech to which reference is here made. Mr. Douglas responded to the request. He grouped the charges against the Mormons which were then passing current, in the following manner :

“First, that nine-tenths of the inhabitants are aliens by birth who have refused to become naturalized, or to take the oath of allegiance, or do any other act recognizing the Government of the United States as the paramount authority of that territory [Utah];

“Second, that the inhabitants, whether native or alien born, known as Mormons (and they constitute the whole people of the territory) are bound by horrible oaths, and terrible penalties, to recognize and maintain the authority of Brigham Young, and the government of which he is head, as paramount to that of the United States, in civil as well as in religious affairs; and they will in due time, and under the direction of their leaders, use all the means in their power to subvert the government of the United States, and resist its authority.

“Third, that the Mormon government, with Brigham Young at its head, is now forming alliances with Indian tribes in Utah and adjoining territories—stimulating the Indians to acts of hostility—and organizing bands of his own followers under the name of Danites or destroying angels, to prosecute a system of robbery and murders upon American citizens who support the authority of the United States, and denounce the infamous and disgusting practices and institutions of the Mormon government.”

Mr. Douglas based his remarks upon these rumors against the Saints, in the course of which he said :

“Let us have these facts in an official shape before the President and Congress, and the country will soon learn that, in the performance of the high and solemn duty devolving upon the executive and Congress, there will be no vacillating or hesitating policy. It will be as prompt as the peal that follows the flash—as stern and unyielding as death. Should such a state of things actually exist as we are led to infer from the reports—and such information comes in an official shape—*the knife must be applied to*

*this pestiferous, disgusting cancer which is gnawing into the very vitals of the body politic. It must be cut out by the roots, and seared over by the red hot iron of stern and unflinching law. * * Should all efforts fail to bring them [the Mormons] to a sense of their duty, there is but one remedy left. Repeal the organic law of the territory, on the ground that they are alien enemies and outlaws, unfit to be citizens of a territory, much less ever to become citizens of one of the free and independent states of this confederacy.*

“To protect them further in their treasonable, disgusting and bestial practices would be a disgrace to the country—a disgrace to humanity—a disgrace to civilization, and a disgrace to the spirit of the age. Blot it out of the organized territories of the United States. What then? It will be regulated by the law of 1790, which has exclusive and sole jurisdiction over all the territory not incorporated under any organic or special law. By the provisions of this law, all crimes and misdemeanors, committed on its soil, can be tried before the legal authorities of any state or territory to which the offenders shall be first brought to trial, and punished. Under that law persons have been arrested in Kansas, Nebraska, and other territories, prior to their organization as territories, and hanged for their crimes. The law of 1790 has sole and exclusive jurisdiction where no other law of a local character exists, and by repealing the organic law of Utah, you give to the general government of the United States the whole and sole jurisdiction over the territory.”

The speech of Mr. Douglas was of great interest and importance to the people of Utah at that juncture. Mr. Douglas had it in his power to do them great good. Because of his personal acquaintance with Joseph Smith and the great body of the Mormon people then in Utah, as well as their leaders (for he had known both leaders and people of Illinois, and those whom he had known in Illinois constituted the great bulk of the people in Utah, when he delivered that Springfield speech), he knew that the reports carried to the east by vicious and corrupt men were not true. He knew that these reports in the main were but a rehash of the old exploded charges made against Joseph Smith and his

followers in Missouri; and he knew them to be false by many evidences furnished him by Joseph Smith in the interview of the 18th of May, 1843, and by the Mormon people at sundry times during his association with them at Nauvoo. He had an opportunity to befriend the innocent; to refute the calumny cast upon a virtuous community; to speak a word in behalf of the oppressed; but the demagogue triumphed over the statesman, the politician, over the humanitarian; and to avoid the popular censure which he feared befriending the Mormon people would bring to him, he turned his hand against them with the result that he did not destroy them but sealed his own doom—in fulfillment of the words of the Prophet, he felt the weight of the hand of the Almighty upon him.

It was impossible for any merely human sagacity to foresee the events predicted in this prophecy. Stephen A. Douglas was a bright but comparatively an unknown man at the time of the interview, in May, 1843. There is and can be no question about the prophecy preceding the event. It was published as before stated in the *Deseret News* of the 24th of September, 1856, about one year before the Douglas speech at Springfield, in June, 1857; and about four years before Douglas was nominated for the Presidency by the Baltimore Democratic Convention.

Moreover, a lengthy review of Mr. Douglas' speech was published in the editorial columns of the *Deseret News* in the issue of that paper for September 2nd, 1857, of which the following is the closing paragraph addressed directly to Mr. Douglas:

“In your last paragraph [of the Springfield speech] you say, ‘I have thus presented to you plainly and fairly my views of the Utah question;’ with at least equal plainness and with far more fairness have your views now been commented upon. And inasmuch as you were well acquainted with Joseph Smith, and this people, also with the character of our maligners, and did know

their allegations were false, but must bark with the dogs who were snapping at our heels, to let them know that you were a dog with them; and also that you may have a testimony of the truth of the assertion that you did know Joseph and his people and the character of their enemies (and neither class have changed, only as the Saints have grown better and their enemies worse); and also that you may thoroughly understand that you have voluntarily, knowingly, and of choice sealed your damnation, and by your own chosen course have closed your chance for the Presidential chair, through disobeying the counsel of Joseph which you formerly sought and prospered by following, and that you in common with us, may testify to all the world that Joseph was a true prophet, the following extract from the History of Joseph Smith is again printed for your benefit, and is kindly recommended to your careful perusal and most candid consideration."

Then follows the interview between Joseph Smith and Mr. Douglas as recorded in the Journal of William Clayton, as published in the *News* a year before Mr. Douglas' Springfield speech, and as now quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

This was boldly accepting the challenge of Mr. Douglas. He raised his hand against the followers of Joseph Smith despite the warning of the Prophet, and they in the chief organ of the church, reproduced the prophecy and told him that he had sealed his damnation and closed his chance for the Presidential chair through disobeying the counsel of the Prophet. The presidential election of 1860 and the death of Mr. Douglas in the prime of life the year following tells the rest.⁵

⁵ Shortly after the result of the election of 1860 was known in Utah, Elder Orson Hyde, one of the Twelve Apostles, then residing in Sanpete County, Utah, wrote to the "Deseret News" the following letter:

"Ephraim, Utah Ter., Nov. 27, 1860.

"Will the Judge now acknowledge that Joseph Smith was a true prophet? If he will not, does he recollect a certain conversa-

It would be mere conjecture, of course, to say what the result would have been had Stephen A. Douglas been true to the Saints—the people of his friend Joseph Smith. But certainly had he been elected in 1860 the Southern States would have had no such excuse for their great movement of secession as they at least persuaded themselves they had in the election of Abraham Lincoln. And had Mr. Douglas in the event of his election followed the counsel given to the government and people of the United States by Joseph Smith in respect to the question of slavery, that evil might have been abolished without the effusion of blood, and no place found in the history of the United States for that horrible conflict known as the American civil war.

The Prophet's counsel here referred to in respect to slavery, was as follows:

“Petition, also, ye goodly inhabitants of the slave states, your legislators to abolish slavery by the year 1850, or now, and save the abolitionists from reproach and ruin, and infamy and shame. Pray Congress to pay every man a reasonable price for his slaves out of the surplus revenue arising from the sale of the public lands, and from the deduction of pay from the mem-

tion had with Mr. Smith at the house of Sheriff Backenstos, in Carthage, Illinois, in the year 1843, in which Mr. Smith said to him: “You will yet aspire to the Presidency of the United States. But if you ever raise you hand or your voice against the Latter-day Saints, you shall never be President of the United States.’

“Does Judge Douglas recollect that in a public speech delivered by him in the year 1857, at Springfield, Illinois, of comparing the Mormon community, then constituting the inhabitants of Utah Territory, to a ‘loathsome ulcer on the body politic,’ and of recommending the knife to be applied to cut it out?

“Among other things, the Judge will doubtless recollect that I was present and heard the conversation between him and Joseph Smith at Mr. Backenstos’ residence in Carthage, before alluded to.

“Now, Judge, what do you think about Joseph Smith and Mormonism?

“ORSON HYDE.”

bers of Congress. Break off the shackles from the poor black man, and hire him to labor like other human beings; for an hour of virtuous liberty is worth a whole eternity of bondage.”[†]

The document from which this counsel is quoted was published in February, 1844. Eleven years later, namely, in 1855, Mr. Ralph Waldo Emerson declared that the question of slavery should be met in accordance “with the interests of the South, and with the settled conscience of the North. It is not really a great task,” said this eminent writer, “a great feat for this country to accomplish, to buy that property of the planter as the British nation brought the West Indian slaves.” He also predicted that “the United States will be brought to give every inch of their public lands for a purpose like this.” This plan suggested by Mr. Emerson in 1855, brought to him no end of praise as a sage philosopher and wise humanitarian. But what of Joseph Smith, whose suggestion preceded that of Mr. Emerson by eleven years? Let another—Josiah Quincy—answer :

“We who can look back upon the terrible cost of the fratricidal war which put an end to slavery, now say that such a solution of the difficulty would have been worthy a Christian statesman. But if the retired scholar [referring to Emerson] was in advance of his time when he advocated this disposition of the public property in 1855, what shall I say of the political and religious leader [referring to Joseph Smith] who had committed himself in print, as well as in conversation, to the same course in 1844? If the atmosphere of men’s opinions was stirred by such a proposition when war clouds were discernable in the sky, was it not a statesman-like word eleven years earlier when the heavens looked tranquil and beneficent?”[‡]

By indulging in these reflections based upon the sup-

[†]Joseph Smith’s “Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States,” *Mill. Star*, Vol. XXII, p. 743.

[‡]“Figures of the Past—Joseph Smith at Nauvoo,” p. 398.

position of the success of Stephen A. Douglas in the election of 1860, I have wandered far from the line of direct argument. I have nothing further to do with the career of Mr. Douglas than to point out in it the remarkable fulfillment of a prophecy which demonstrates the divine inspiration of the man who uttered it.