

KNOWLEDGE OBTAINED FROM HISTORY

A DISCOURSE BY ELDER GEORGE A. SMITH, DELIVERED IN THE TABERNACLE,
GREAT SALT LAKE CITY, NOVEMBER 29, 1857

Reported by J. V. Long

It is, as usual, with a degree of satisfaction that I arise before you this morning for the purpose of offering a few reflections, hoping that my brethren and sisters will exercise faith to that degree that I may be able to speak freely and communicate such sentiments as may be pleasing in the sight of our heavenly Father and a benefit to ourselves.

From my childhood, history has been a favorite theme. I have loved to read historical works; and for the little time I have been enabled to devote to reading in my younger days I acquired some general knowledge of what is termed “profane history,” but only a limited knowledge of what is termed “ecclesiastical history.” It did not please me to read the quarrels of the Popes and the cruelties that were inflicted by the dominant powers upon the weak. Those matters never pleased me so much as to read the movements of nations for the purpose of establishing dominion and extending empire; consequently, I am not prepared to speak as readily of the history of the religious world as I would upon that portion of history that is generally denominated profane—of the political conditions of different nations at different ages of the world.

A revelation given in the early history of this Church requires the Elders to acquire a knowledge of

countries, of things present, of things to come, of things that have been, and so forth. In perusing the histories of Persia, Arabia, India, China, and the nations of modern Europe, I have felt myself more or less actuated in accordance with the instructions given in that revelation.

At the time I could not conceive why it was that the Lord required his servants to acquire a knowledge of those nations and of political subjects; but experience has taught me that he had in it a design of no little importance; for, from the time that the Gospel was first preached, baptism administered, and ordination first conferred the Priesthood upon the heads of men, we have been constantly and continually upon new ground. The officers of the country in which we have lived could never find a law to fit our case; they could never discover any law that would answer their purpose in relation to us.

There was one principle laid down by them, however, that was simple; and that was, that we had to be used up.

The most honorable of all the mobs that have ever been raised against us was that of Jackson County, Missouri; for they came right straight out and plainly acknowledged that the civil law did not afford them a guarantee against the “Mormons;” therefore they would drive them from their