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Chapter XLI

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Abstract: Founding The London Conference—Apostles Kimball, Woodruff And Smith Chosen For The Work—Seeking For A Man With The Spirit Of God—The First Convert—The Elders Hold Open-Air Meetings In Tabernacle Square.

CHAPTER XLI.

FOUNDING THE LONDON CONFERENCE—APOSTLES KIMBALL, WOODRUFF AND SMITH CHOSEN FOR THE WORK—SEEKING FOR A MAN WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD—THE FIRST CONVERT—THE ELDERS HOLD OPEN-AIR MEETINGS IN TABERNACLE SQUARE.

THE next notable movement determined on by the Apostles was the founding of the London Conference. The men chosen for this work were Heber C. Kimball, Wilford Woodruff and George A. Smith. Leaving Manchester on the 4th of August, Heber joined his companions in Herefordshire, whence the three proceeded on to London, preaching and baptizing by the way.

They reached their destination about four o'clock in the afternoon of the 18th, and were kindly received by a Mrs. Allgood, of No. 19, King Street, Borough, who gave them needed refreshments and directed them to lodgings in the neighborhood. Two days later they reported to the *Millennial Star* as follows:

“We are well and in good spirits, and are going to see the people in different parts, and see what we can do in this small world; for London looks like a small world. Give us your prayers and direct your letters as above.”

It was well ordered that three such characters as these, with their indomitable will power and perseverance, added to child-like faith and humility, were sent to break Gospel ground in the British Metropolis. The task was no easy one. London, with all its churches

and cathedrals, its high-priced ministers and princely churchmen, its Bibles, missions, schools, and evangelical agencies of every description, was the devil's stronghold, nevertheless; and the prospect might have dismayed, with its hardships, spirits less valiant, souls less faithful, than those selected for the ordeal.

For days the Apostles wandered through the streets of the great city, viewing its wonderful sights, visiting its places of interest and historic note, and all the while looking for an opportunity to deliver their message, and for souls to receive their testimony. Among other places they went to "Zion's Chapel" and heard the Reverend Robert Aitken, the same great preacher from whom Heber, on his former mission, had won so many disciples in Preston. They were profoundly impressed with his eloquence and the sublime truths he uttered, but to them his efforts were those of one who was "building without the foundation." They had previously heard an Aitkenite preacher at Union Chapel, Waterloo Road, and had also called on the Reverend J. E. Smith, of Lincoln's-Inn-Fields, their object being to find an opening for their ministry.

Still following very much the example of Heber's first mission to England, the three Elders next attended a meeting of the Temperance Society in Temperance Hall, St. George's Row, near the Elephant Castle. Here Elder George A. Smith was given the privilege of making a short speech. It was the first public effort of a Mormon Elder in London, though it was more in the nature of a temperance testimony than the introduction of Mormonism to the metropolis. Subsequently the brethren addressed another meeting at the same place on the subject of temperance, and succeeded in engaging the hall for preaching purposes, though they

were not permitted to occupy it immediately. They gave out an appointment to preach the Gospel there on the 7th of September.

One day, as they were strolling through the streets, "to see if they could find a man with the Spirit of God," Heber accosted an amiable looking stranger and asked him if he was a preacher. He replied that he was, and informed the brethren that he had been in America, and had come to London for the purpose of going to South Australia ; but had suffered much from sickness in his family, having just buried one child, while another was then lying at the point of death.

"Your child shall live," said Heber C. Kimball.

The stranger then gave them some information in regard to places for preaching, and they parted from him. On the same day they called at his house ; he was not at home, but his child was better.

The next day the servants of the Lord went again over the city. This time they found the object of their search ; "a man in whom was the Spirit." His name was Corner. He lived at No. 52 Ironmonger Row, St. Luke's Parish, near the Church. He and his household received the testimony of the Elders and opened their doors for the preaching of the Gospel.

This, however, was not enough ; though the brethren praised God for this manifestation of His favor. They longed to reach the ears of the multitude, and declare to them the message that "burned like fire in their bones." At the expiration of twelve days, finding no immediate prospect for an indoor opening of the kind they were in quest of, they determined to go into the streets and lift up their voices.

It was Sunday morning, August 30th, 1840. Wending their way through the crowded streets and winding

thoroughfares, in search of some public place where they knew the common people were wont to assemble on the Sabbath, to hear all sorts of harangues from all sorts of speakers, the three Apostles, after walking three miles, stopped in Tabernacle Square, "Old Street." A promiscuous assembly had gathered there—men of all creeds and opinions—and an "open-air" meeting was in progress. It was an Aitkenite preacher who was addressing them. Mixing with the multitude, the Elders listened respectfully to what he was saying, and gradually edged their way towards the spot where he was standing.

When the Aitkenite minister had concluded his discourse a Presbyterian preacher took his place and was about to begin.

"Sir!" exclaimed a voice in the crowd, addressing the preacher. All eyes were turned in the direction of the sound. A man stepped forward. It was Heber C. Kimball. "Sir," he said, "There is a preacher from America present, who would like to speak to the assembly when you have got through your service."

The Presbyterian, not to be outdone in courtesy, and perhaps proud of the honor of introducing an American preacher to a British public, addressing the people, said:

"I am informed that there is a minister from America present. I propose that he shall speak first."

The proposition was readily accepted, and the people drew near, alive with curiosity at the novelty of hearing a preacher from America.

Apostle George A Smith was the one selected for the occasion. He mounted the chair resigned by the Presbyterian, and addressed the audience for about twenty minutes.

Next came the Presbyterian, and at the close of his remarks Heber C. Kimball again advanced.

“Will there be any objection to our preaching here at 3 o’clock”? he inquired.

“No; not at all,” answered the Presbyterian. “What denomination do you belong to”?

“To the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” Heber replied.

“Oh, I have heard of them,” exclaimed the Presbyterian quickly, his countenance and whole manner changing. “They are a bad people; they have done much hurt; they divide churches; we don’t want to hear you.”

He then mounted the chair again and said to the people:

“I have just heard that the last man who spoke belongs to the Latter-day Saints.” And then he began to rail against the Apostles and their faith.

After he had thus vented himself, Elder Kimball mildly inquired:

“Will you let me step into the chair to give out an appointment for a 3 o’clock meeting?”

But the minister angrily refused, whereupon Heber raised his voice and informed the people that some American preachers would preach there at 3 o’clock.

A vast congregation assembled at the appointed hour to hear them, the conduct of the Presbyterian and the excitement of the morning having helped to increase it materially.

Elder Wilford Woodruff was the first preacher. After singing and prayer, he read from the first chapter of Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians, the 8th and 9th verses;

“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

“As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”

A direct thrust at apostate Christendom, with its multitudinous variety of “other gospels,” all differing from each other and from the great original.

Brother Woodruff did not fail that day to hold them up a glass wherein they might see the “inmost parts” of Paul’s dread meaning, made applicable in words of telling force to the Christian denominations of that great city.

Then came Heber C. Kimball with his sledge-hammer blows of testimony, driving home the truth of the Apostle’s words, as with a mallet of mighty power. He told them of the great apostasy that had taken place since the days of Paul, and of the restoration of the Gospel in the latter days, closing with an earnest testimony to the divine mission of Joseph Smith, the great Prophet whom God had raised up in the land of America.

The people gave good attention and seemed much interested in what they had heard.

After the meeting Mr. Corner, the person already noticed, invited the three Apostles home to his house; so, withdrawing from the crowd, they went to 52 Ironmonger Row, St Luke’s Parish.

But Heber was not yet satisfied. The inward monitor which he knew never erred told him that his day’s labor was not accomplished. Scarce knowing why, but surrendering himself to the dictates of the Spirit, he retraced his steps and wended his way alone back to Tabernacle Square, leaving Elders Woodruff and Smith at “Father Corner’s,” conversing on the things of the Kingdom.

The crowd had not yet dispersed from the Square, but stood in groups here and there, discussing eagerly

the events of the day, and the strange things told them by the American preachers. As Heber approached he was immediately recognized—and, indeed, his was a presence, once seen, not easily to be forgotten—and the surprised and pleased multitude, thronging round him, besought him to speak to them again.

He willingly complied and addressed them long and earnestly. More powerful than ever was his testimony. He was alone, but the Spirit was with him, and with the Spirit Heber C. Kimball was a host. Breathlessly they listened, and at the close several men whom he had never seen until that afternoon, came forward and invited him home to their houses.

The ice was broken. His testimony had prevailed. The good seed sown by the wayside had taken root, as it were, in the very crevices of the stony pavements of the world's metropolis.