

His Acquaintance With the Deceased—Incidents in the Latter's Life Since He Joined the Church

Remarks by Elder Wilford Woodruff, delivered at the Funeral Services of Elder William Pitt, in the 14th Ward Assembly Rooms, Salt Lake City, Sunday Morning, Feb. 23, 1873.

My friends here kindly granted me the privilege of making some opening remarks on this occasion. I had an appointment in Ogden today, but when I heard of the death of brother Pitt, I felt as though I wanted to attend his funeral. If I had heard that one of my own family had dropped dead I should not have been more surprised than I was when I heard of the death of brother Pitt. I was conversing with him in the street, I think the day before he was hurt, and he was then, apparently, cheerful, comfortable, well and happy. When I heard that he was dead, I immediately went to his house, visited his family and saw his body. I will say that I seldom or ever give way to weeping, either for the living or the dead, but upon this occasion, when I saw his body lie cold in death, all the early scenes of my acquaintance with him in the Herefordshire mission rushed upon me like a whirlwind, and I confess that I manifested a good deal of weakness in giving way to weeping before the family. Solomon says there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to rejoice; and there are times when reason will excuse weeping. Anthony said, "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him," yet Anthony did, on that occasion, portray before the Senate and citizens of Rome the virtues of Caesar in his public life. We have come to bury brother Pitt, and I do not consider it wrong to speak of the virtues and good deeds of the dead any more than of those of the living.

My first acquaintance with brother Pitt was of such a character as to cause the formation of ties between us of no ordinary nature, as it is, I may say, with all the associations of the Elders of Israel. The world know nothing about these ties. The ties they form together are very different from those formed between the servants of God, who are associated together in the Holy Priesthood and by the power of the Holy Ghost and the inspiration of the Lord our God. These are ties that no men comprehend unless they occupy the same position that we occupy. I have found this in my whole career with this Church and kingdom. I love the brethren and the Saints of God, because we are associated together in a great, noble and Godlike cause; and these associations are to ourselves, and what more can a man do than lay down his life for his friend? How many are there in this room and in this Church and kingdom, who, in case of necessity, would be willing to lay down their lives to save their brethren? There are thousands of them.

I wish, and feel that it is my privilege, to refer to my first acquaintance with brother Pitt, whose body lies before us today. The history of the Herefordshire mission is before the world and before the Church, and I wish in a few words to refer to that mission, for it was there that I became acquainted with brother Pitt. Brother Taylor and I were the first two of the Quorum of the Twelve who arrived in England in 1840. Brother Taylor went to Liverpool, and I went to the Staffordshire potteries. I labored there with brother Alfred Cordon, who is now in the spirit world. We were preaching almost every night, and we baptized some nearly every meeting. It was a very good mission.

Some eighty miles from there, in Herefordshire, there were people who had never seen a Latter-day Saint, and never heard the Gospel. Some six hundred of them had broken off from the Wesleyan Methodists, and called themselves the "United Brethren." They were under the presidency of Elder Thos. Kington. They were searching for light and truth. As a body they had called upon the Lord, and had advanced just as far as they could with what light they had. They prayed to the Lord that he would open the way before them, that they might advance in the things of his kingdom. While in this position I went one evening to fill an appointment in the Town Hall, at the town of Hanley. There was a very large congregation, and I had appointments out for two or three weeks in that town and adjacent villages. As I went to take my seat the Spirit of the Lord came upon me and said to me, "This is the last meeting you will hold with this people for many days." I was surprised, because I did not know, of course what the Lord wanted me to do. I told the assembly when I rose, "This is the last meeting I shall hold with you for many days." They asked me after meeting where I was going. I told them I did not know. I went before the Lord in my closet and asked him where he wished me to go, and all the answer I could get was to go to the South. I got into a stage and rode eighty miles south, as I was led by the Spirit of the Lord. The first man's house I went into was John

Benbow's. He lives now down here at Cottonwood. I had some conversation with Brother Benbow, and I told him that the Lord had sent me to that place. But without wishing to dwell on this subject particularly I will say that I learned that there were six hundred people there, under Elder Kington, called United Brethren, and that they had been praying to the Lord for guidance in the way of life and salvation. Then I knew why the Lord had sent me to that place—he had sent them what they had been praying for. I commenced preaching the Gospel to them, and I also commenced baptizing, Elder Pitt being among the first who was baptized by me into this Church and kingdom. The first thirty days after I arrived there I had baptized forty-five preachers, which flung nearly fifty preaching places, licensed by law, into my hands; and out of the six hundred belonging to Elder Kington's body all were baptized but one in seven months' labor. I brought eighteen hundred into the Church in that mission, and I will say that the power of God rested upon me and upon the people. There was a spirit to convince and a people whose hearts were open and ready to receive the Gospel. And as Jesus said in reference to John, that all Judea and Jerusalem went out to John's baptism, I felt as if all Herefordshire was coming to be baptized. The third meeting that I held at Brother Benbow's, the rector of the place sent a constable to take me up. I was just about to begin when he entered. I said to him, "Take a chair until after meeting and I will attend to you." He sat down and when I got through he came forward and I baptized him with others. He went back and told the rector, "If you want to take up that man you must go yourself, I have heard him preach the first Gospel sermon I ever heard in the world." Almost every man that came to meeting was baptized.

I did not see Elder Kington for some little time after going there; and when I did see him he came to me as the leader of the people. I laid before him the Gospel. He said, "If it is true, I wish to embrace it; if not, I shall oppose it." I said, "That is right." But I made a covenant with him. I said to him, "If you will go before the Lord and ask him if this work is true, I promise you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that you shall receive a testimony for yourself if you will promise to obey it." He said he would, and he went away to attend to his appointments. The next time he came to Brother Benbow's; a few days afterwards, I asked him if he had enquired of the Lord. He said he had. "What did the Lord tell you?" "He told me it was true; and he then said he was ready to obey the Gospel, and I baptized him. I name this because as soon as Brother Pitt heard this Gospel he obeyed it, and he was one of the leading men in the choir of the Church of England in Dimock. I now wish to relate a circumstance concerning him. The first meeting I held in Elder Kington's house brother Pitt was present. I will say first, however, that Mary Pitt, brother Pitt's sister, was something like the lame man who lay at the gate of the Temple called "Beautiful" at Jerusalem—she had not been able to walk a step for fourteen years; and was confined to her bed nearly half that time. She had no strength in her feet and ankles and could only move about a little with a crutch or holding on to a chair. She wished to be baptized. Brother Pitt and myself took her in our arms, and carried her into the water and I baptized her. When she came out of the water I confirmed her. She said she wanted to be healed and she believed she had faith enough to be healed. I had had experience enough in this Church to know that it required a good deal of faith to heal a person who had not walked a step for fourteen years. I told her that according to her faith it should be unto her. It so happened that on the day after she was baptized, Brother Richards and President Brigham Young came down to see me. We met at Brother Kington's. Sister Mary Pitt was there also. I told President Young what Sister Pitt wished, and that she believed she had faith enough to be healed. We prayed for her and laid hands upon her. Brother Young was mouth, and commanded her to be made whole. She laid down her crutch and never used it after, and the next day she walked three miles. This created a great deal of anger and madness in the feelings of the rector of that town. We had baptized Brother Pitt, and this took one from his choir of singers, and he felt angry. We were holding a meeting at Elder Kington's house one evening, when these things were taking place. The house had very heavy shutters on the windows of the first story. We had these shutters closed, and I rose to preach. The rector came at the head of about fifty men armed with rocks about the size of a man's fist, or larger than that. They surrounded the house, and for about half an hour the house was battered with rocks like a hailstorm, the whole of the windows of the second story being stove in and the glass all broken. I told brother Pitt that I would go and see these men. He said, "No, I will go, you will be injured if you go." He went out into the midst of this mob, of about fifty, I should judge—I do not know the number. He took their names, and the rector was the leader. They stoned brother Pitt back to the house, but as we had finished meeting they left. We had to clear the house of broken glass and rocks before we could retire to bed. I name this because it was one of Brother Pitt's first labors with me, and I will say that from that time until the present he has been a true and faithful servant of God,

and of this Church.

Associations of this kind have been formed by all the Elders of Israel who have gone abroad into the vineyard to preach the Gospel. We go forth and gather strangers to us in the flesh, but they embrace the same testimony and Gospel with ourselves. This was the case with brother Pitt. I do not mourn for him, I did not when I was at his house; but all these scenes and early associations rushed on my mind, and as I gazed upon him, and thought of the way he had been stricken down, taken away from us, when to all human appearance he was but an hour before, as it were, enjoying health and strength and attending to the duties of life, I realized that in the midst of life we are in death.

In his associations with this Church and kingdom brother Pitt was leader of the Nauvoo brass band for a long time; he has also been associated with the various bands here; and in his associations with the people he made a great many friends, to whom he was endeared because of his many virtues and good deeds and his disposition and desire to serve God. I am certainly glad to see so many friends gathered together to honor his remains. When I realize that a man like him has lived, heard the Gospel, embraced it and has fulfilled the measure of his day, what can we say about him? Can we mourn because he is gone? Bless your soul, he is with Joseph today, and with others of the Elders of Israel, and he rejoices with them. Whether his spirit is here witnessing his funeral services I cannot say, it is not revealed to me; but suffice it to say that he is happy, and blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, from henceforth saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labors and their works do follow them.

I do not know whether brother Pitt has preached much in the world, but I do know that he has labored for the benefit of the Saints of God. But he will preach now. He has gone to the other side of the veil, and he will preach there to large assemblies of spirits. He has been faithful and he will receive a crown of life. His body will lie in the tomb a few years, and but a few. His death is a loss to his wife and children, and the parting is grievous. But how glorious is the thought that there is a victory over the grave! In Adam all died, but in Christ all are made alive. Christ was the firstfruits of the resurrection. This is a glorious thought to me when I see a Latter-day Saint lie down with the harness on, true and faithful until he has wound up his work.

Out of that 1,800 which we baptized in Herefordshire in seven months, I hardly know one that has turned against this Church. There has been less apostasy out of that branch of the Church and kingdom of God than out of the same number from any part of the world that I am acquainted with.

We are called every day or two to bury some of them. A good many of them are still living. Some of them are Bishops—bro. Clark, bro. Rowberry, and a good many of them scattered all through this Territory. Old father Kington is still living or was the last I heard of him, though near the grave. They are passing away, and when I went to see brother Pitt's body, the thought came to me, Whose turn to go next? Maybe mine, maybe yours, we cannot tell anything about it. These things should be an admonition to us to be true and faithful while we dwell here. The thought that we can obey and be sanctified by the Gospel, and be prepared thereby to inherit eternal life, is one of the most glorious principles ever revealed to man. I thank God that I live in this day and age of the world. I thank God that I have been associated with such a class of men and women as those who are gathered today in the valleys of the mountains. They are the people whom the Lord has chosen. We have a hope that the world knows not of, and it cannot enter into their thoughts. Unless they are born of the Spirit of God, they cannot even see the kingdom of God, and they cannot get into it unless they are born of the water and of the Spirit, hence they cannot share in the joyous anticipations and hopes that we possess. Their eyes, ears and hearts are not opened to see and hear and feel the power of the Gospel of Christ.

Brother Pitt has gone before his family to prepare a place for them. I say to them, let your hearts rejoice before the Lord. You are left alone, he has gone before you, but he will prepare the way. He is not going to lie in the spirit world without having something to do. There those who have gone before us have something to do as well as we have here. They are laboring to prepare the inhabitants of the Spirit world for the coming of Christ, the same as we are trying to prepare the inhabitants of the earth for the same great event.

I do not wish to occupy a great deal of time, but I will say to my brethren and sisters this morning, It is better to go

to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. Death is the end of all men. The living should lay this to heart. My associations with brother Pitt have been of the most joyful and consoling character. We associated together a good while in that land, while I dwelt there; and we have been since, both in Nauvoo and this place. I was always glad to meet him. I met him often in the streets, and we scarcely ever met without referring to former times, and if I can only have as good a glory, and lie down as he has—die the death of the righteous—and have as good a reward, I shall think myself very well off. I consider that when a man has embraced the Gospel, continued faithful, received his endowments and the sealing blessings of God upon his head, as brother Pitt has, he has accomplished the object for which he was created.

In closing my remarks I will say that I am thankful for the associations I have had with brother Pitt, and with the rest of my brethren and the Saints. This is the Gospel of Christ; this is the Zion and kingdom of God. The hand of God is stretched out for the salvation of this people, and however dark the clouds may appear; however strong persecution, oppression and opposition may become to this work, the Lord has, from its commencement, until today watched over its interests, and has sustained and preserved it, and he will continue to do so until its consummation; until Zion arises and puts on her beautiful garments, and all the great events of the last days are accomplished. Then, in the morning of the first resurrection, brother Pitt will come forth, and he and his family will be reunited, and they and all the faithful will receive their exaltation. This is a glorious thought! We should prize our families, and the associations we have together, remembering that if we are faithful we shall inherit glory, immortality and eternal life, and this is the greatest of all the gifts of God to man.

I pray that God will bless you, that he will comfort the hearts of the family of brother Pitt, that he will feed and clothe them, and unite them together, and preserve them in the faith, that when they get through with this world, they may meet their companion and be prepared with him to receive exaltation and glory, which may God grant in the name of Jesus, our Redeemer, Amen.