SOME OF THE REMARKS OF JOHN S. REED, ESQ., AS DELIVERED BEFORE THE STATE CONVENTION.

The following is a part of the speech of Mr. Reed, Esq., as delivered at the State Convention, in Nauvoo. We expected according to a resolution passed, to have had the whole; but as Mr. Reed was in a hurry, he was unable to furnish us with any more than the following, which refers more particularly to Gen. Smith’s early history,

Mr. Chairman:—I cannot leave this subject and do justice to my own feelings, and the character of Gen. Smith, without giving a short history of the first persecution that came upon him in the counties of Chenango and Broome, in the State of New York, commenced by that class of people calling themselves Christians.

The first acquaintance I had with Gen Smith, was about the year 1823. He came into my neighborhood, being then about eighteen years of age, and resided there two years; during which time I became intimately acquainted with him. I do know that his character was irreproachable; that he was well known for truth and uprightness; that he moved in the first circles of community, and he was often spoken of as a young man of intelligence, and good morals, and possessing a mind susceptible of the highest intellectual attainments.

I early discovered that his mind was constantly in search of truth, expressing an anxious desire to know the will of God concerning his children here below, often speaking of those things which professed christians believe in.—I have often observed to my best informed friends, (those that were free from superstition and bigotry) that I thought Joseph was predestinated by his God from all eternity to be an instrument in the hands of the great dispenser of all good, to do a great work; what it was I knew not. After living in that neighborhood about three years, enjoying the good feelings of his acquaintances, as a worthy youth, he told his particular friends that he had had a revelation from God to go to the west about eighty miles, to his father’s, in which neighborhood he should find hid in the earth, an old history written on golden plates, which would give great light and knowledge concerning the will of God towards his people in this generation; unfolding the destiny of all nations, kindreds and tongues; he said that he distinctly heard the voice of him that spake. Joseph Knight, one of the father’s of your church, a worthy man, and my intimate friend, went with him. When I reflect upon our former friendship, Mr. Chairman, and upon the scenes that he has passed through in consequence of mal-administration, mobocracy, and cruelty, I feel to lift up my voice to high heaven, and pray God to bless the aged veteran, and that his silver locks may go down to the grave in peace, like a shock of corn fully ripe. In a few days his friends returned with the glad news that Joseph had found the plates and had gone down to his father-in-laws’ for the purpose of translating them. I believe he remained there until he finished the translation. After the book was published, he came to live in the neighborhood of father Knights’, about four miles from me, and began to preach the gospel, and many were pricked in their hearts, believed and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. He soon formed a church at Colesville, his meetings were numerous attended; the eyes of all people were upon him with astonished, O Mr. Chairman, the world was turned up side down at once, and the devil always ready to assist and help
along in all difficulties that arise among men, personified in some of the religionists, begun to prick up his ears, and jump, and kick, and run about, like Jim Crow, calling for rotten eggs to help in the wake; you would have thought sir, that Gog and Magog was let loose on the young man. He called upon the world’s people, (as they are called) but got no help; he then flew about in the sectarian churches, like lightning, and they immediately came to his aid, and uniting their efforts roared against him like the thunders of Mount Sinai. When those fiery bigots were let loose, they united in pouring the red hot viols of their wrath upon his head. The cry of “false prophet! false prophet!!” was sounded from village to village, and every foul epithet that malice and wicked ingenuity could invent, was heaped upon him. Yes sir, the same spirit that influenced the Presbyterians of Massachusetts, about one hundred and fifty years ago, in their persecution of the Quakers, when they first began to preach their doctrines in that State, was fully manifested by those religious bigots who were afraid if they let them alone, their doctrines would come to nought. What was the result of the persecution in Massachusetts?—Why, Sir, warrants were made out by those churches having authority, and the Quakers were tried for heresy. But what was the result of those trials? The sentence of death was passed upon the Quakers for heresy, by those religious fanatics, and three of them were hung by the neck on Bloody Hill, in Boston, to make expiation for that unpardonable crime. “Tell it not in Gath” nor publish it on the tops of the mountains in this boasted land of freedom, that the Puritans of New England, who had fled from the Old World in consequence of religious intolerance, that they might enjoy the sweets of liberty, so soon became persecutors themselves and shed innocent blood, which still cries aloud from the dust for vengeance upon their heads. Let shame cover our faces when we mention the name of freedom in our grand Republic.

O my God! when in one portion of our country blood is flowing for the crime of worshipping our Creator according to the dictates of conscience, or as the spirit directs, and in the other are great rejoicings in consequence thereof; where, I ask, is that boasted freedom for which our fathers fought and bled? O thou who holds the destinies of all things in thine hands here below, return these blessing unto us, that we may keep them as precious jewels, till time is no more. But, Mr. Chairman, I am wandering too far from the subject. I will return to the persecutions which followed Gen. Smith, when his cheeks blossomed with the beauty of youth, and his eyes sparkled with innocence.

Those bigots soon made up a false accusation against him and had him arraigned before Joseph Chamberlain, a justice of the peace, a man that was always ready to deal out justice to all, and a man of great discernment of mind. The case came on about 10 o’clock, A. M. I was called upon to defend the prisoner. The prosecutors employed the best counsel they could get, and ransacked the town of Bainbridge and county of Chenango for witnesses that would swear hard enough to convict the prisoner; but they entirely failed. Yes Sir, let me say to you that not one blemish nor spot was found against his character; he came from that trial, notwithstanding the mighty efforts that were made to convict him of crime by his vigilant persecutors, with his character unstained by even the appearance of guilt. The trial closed about 12 o’clock at night. After a few moments deliberation, the court pronounced the words ‘not guilty,’ and the prisoner was discharged. But alas! the devil not satisfied with his defeat, stirred up a man not unlike himself, who was more fit to dwell among the fiends of hell than to belong to the human fam-[550]ily, to go to Colesville and get another writ, and take him to Broome county for
another trial. They were sure they could send that boy to hell, or to Texas, they did not care which; and in half an hour after he was discharged by the court, he was arrested again, and on the way to Colesville for another trial. I was again called upon by his friends to defend him against his malignant persecutors, and clear him from the false charges they had preferred against him. I made every reasonable excuse I could, as I was nearly worn down through fatigue and want of sleep; as I had been engaged in law suits for two days, and nearly the whole of two nights. But I saw the persecution was great against him; and here let me say, Mr. Chairman, singular as it may seem, while Mr. Knight was pleading with me to go, a peculiar impression or thought struck my mind, that I must go and defend him, for he was the Lord’s anointed. I did not know what it meant, but thought I must go and clear the Lord’s anointed. I said I would go; and started with as much faith as the apostles had when they could remove mountains, accompanied by father Knight, who was like the old patriarchs that followed the ark of God to the city of David. We rode on till we came to the house of Hezekiah Peck, where a number of Mormon women had assembled, as I was informed, for the purpose of praying for the deliverance of the prophet of the Lord. The women came out to our waggon and Mrs. Smith among the rest. O my God, Sir, what were my feelings, when I saw that woman who had but a few days before given herself, heart and hand, to be a consort for life, and that so soon her crimson cheeks must be wet with tears that came streaming from her eyes; yes Sir, it seemed that her very heart strings would be broken with grief. My feelings Sir, were moved with pity and sorrow, for the afflicted; and on the other hand they were wrought up to the highest pitch of indignation against those fiends of hell who had thus caused the innocent to suffer.

The next morning about 10 o’clock the court was organized. The prisoner was to be tried by three justices of the peace, that his departure out of the county might be made sure.—Neither talents nor money were wanting to ensure them success. They employed the ablest lawyer in that county, and introduced twenty or thirty witnesses before dark, but proved nothing. They then sent out runners and ransacked the hills and vales, grog shops and ditches, and gathered together a company that looked as if they had come from hell, and had been whipped by the soot boy thereof; which they brought forward to testify one after another, but with no better success than before, although they wrung and twisted into every shape, in trying to tell something that would criminate the prisoner. Nothing was proven against him whatever. Having got through with the examination of their witnesses about 2 o’clock, in the morning, the case was argued about two hours. There was not one particle of testimony against the prisoner. No Sir, he came out like the three children from the fiery furnace, without the smell of fire upon his garments. The court deliberated upon the case for half an hour with closed doors, and then we were called in. The court arraigned the prisoner and said: “Mr. Smith, we have had your case under consideration, examined the testimony and find nothing to condemn you, and therefore you are discharged.” They then proceeded to reprimand him severely; not because anything derogatory to his character in any shape had been proven against him by the host of witnesses that had testified during the trial, but merely to please those fiends in human shape, who were engaged in the unhallowed persecution of an innocent man, sheerly on account of his religious opinions.

After they had got through, I arose and said: “This court puts me in mind of a certain trial held before Felix of old, when the enemies of Paul arraigned him before that
venerable judge for some alleged crime, and nothing was found in him worthy of death or of bonds. Yet, to please the Jews, who were his accusers, he was left bound contrary to law; and this court has served Mr. Smith in the same way, by their unlawful and uncalled for reprimand after his discharge, to please his accusers. ’We got him away that night from the midst of three hundred people without his receiving any injury; but I am well aware that we were assisted by some higher power than man; for to look back on the scene, I cannot tell how we succeeded in getting him away. I take no glory to myself, it was the Lord’s work, and marvellous in our eyes.

This Mr. Chairman, is a true history of the first persecution that came upon Gen. Smith in his youth among professed christians, and in a county heralded to the ends of the earth, as a land of freedom; where all men have the constitutional right to worship as they please, and believe what they please without molestation, so long as they do not interfere with the rights and privileges of others. Yes Sir, a persecution got up through the influence of religious bigotry by as vile a set of men as ever disgraced the family of man. But their devices against him were brought to nought by that overruling power that controls all things and brings to nought the councils of the wicked.—Mr. Chairman, little did I think, that I was defending a boy that would rise to eminence like this man; a man whom God delights to honor as a prophet and leader of his people;—one to whom he has given the keys of heaven and earth, and the power of David, and said to him whatsoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against you. And may he live to put his foot upon the neck of his enemies in love and meekness. I know, Sir, that God has made him a leader of many thousands of people, and may he teach them in meekness, and with that wisdom and judgement that God shall direct.

I add no more.