

THE FEMALE RELIEF SOCIETY.

A BRIEF SKETCH OF ITS ORGANIZATION AND WORKINGS IN THE CITY OF NAUVOO, HANCOCK CO., ILLS.

BY ELIZA R. SNOW.

[Reprinted from No. 1 of the EXPOSITOR.]

According to authentic testimony, an organization, of which the present Female Relief Society is a fac-simile, has always existed when the Church of Jesus Christ has been fully organized. "Elect lady," as it occurs in the New Testament, has direct reference to the same—alluding to one who presided over this Institution. See 2d Epistle of John, 1st verse.

The first organization of this Society, in the present dispensation, was effected on the 17th of March, 1842, by Joseph Smith, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, assisted by other prominent Elders. His apology for deferring the organization till that period, was the great pressure of duties, labors and responsibilities, which devolved upon him. By his suggestion a meeting was appointed in the Masonic Hall, and a limited number invited.

Perhaps a few extracts from the "Minutes of the Organization," would be interesting,—they are too lengthy for insertion in full:

"NAUVOO LODGE ROOM,
March 17, 1842.

Elder John Taylor was called to the chair, and Elder Willard Richards appointed secretary.

Meeting commenced by singing 'The spirit of God like a fire is burning,' etc. Prayer by Elder Taylor.

When it was moved by Pres. Smith, and seconded by Mrs. Cleveland, that a vote be taken to know if all are satisfied with each female present, and are willing to acknowledge them in full fellowship and admit them to the privileges of the Institution about to be formed. Vote unanimous.

President Smith addressed the meeting to illustrate the objects of the Society; that the Society of sisters might provoke the brethren to good works, in looking to the wants of the poor, searching after objects of charity, etc., to assist, by correcting the morals and strengthening the virtues of the female community, and save the Elders the trouble of rebuking, etc. He proposed that the sisters elect a presiding officer to preside over them, and let that presiding officer choose two counsellors; that he would ordain them, and let them preside over the Society, just as the Presidency preside over the Church; and if they need his instruction—ask him—he will give it from time to time.

Let this Presidency serve as a Constitution. If any officers are wanted to carry out the designs of the Institution, let them be appointed and set apart, as Deacons, Teachers, etc., are among us.

The minutes of your meetings will be precedents for you to act upon.

He then suggested the propriety of electing a Presidency to continue in office during good behavior, or so long as they shall fill the office with dignity, etc.

Motioned by Mrs. Whitney, and seconded by Mrs. Packard, that Mrs. Emma Smith be chosen President; passed unanimously.

On suggestion of Prest. Smith, the Presidentess Elect made choice of Mrs. Sarah M. Cleveland and Mrs. Elizabeth Ann Whitney for Counsellors."

After which the ceremony of ordination was performed: "When Prest. Smith re-

sumed his remarks, giving instruction how to govern themselves in their meetings, what order to observe, how to regulate discussions; etc., etc., and concluded by saying, 'Do not injure the character of any one; if members of the Society shall conduct improperly, deal with them, and keep all your doings within your own bosoms, and hold all characters sacred.'

It was then proposed that Elder Taylor vacate the chair. Prest. Emma Smith and her counsellors took the chair; and

Elder Taylor moved, seconded by Prest. J. Smith, that we go into an investigation respecting what this Society shall be called; which was carried unanimously."

(The discussion which was lengthy and interesting, is wholly omitted.)

"By unanimous vote, Miss Eliza R. Snow was appointed Secretary, and

Miss Phebe M. Wheeler Assistant Secretary, and

Miss Elvira A. Coles, (the late Mrs. Holmes) Treasurer.

Prest. J. Smith said, 'I now declare this Society organized with President and Counsellors, etc., according to Parliamentary usages, and all who shall hereafter be admitted into this Society must be free from censure, and received by vote.'

Elder Taylor addressed the meeting by saying that he is much gratified in seeing a meeting of this kind in Nauvoo; his heart rejoices when he sees the most distinguished characters stepping forth in a cause which is calculated to bring into exercise every virtue, and give scope to the benevolent feelings of the female heart; he rejoices to see this Institution organized according to the law of Heaven; his prayer is, that the blessings of God and the peace of Heaven may rest down on this Institution, henceforth.

After singing 'Come let us rejoice,' etc., the meeting adjourned for one week. Dismissed by prayer."

Before retiring, each gentleman present gave a liberal donation to commence the funds of the Institution.

The following lines were found written on a scrap and lying on an open Bible in the room where, and at the time when, the Society was organized; which have been carefully preserved and transcribed as an appropriate frontispiece to the F. R. S. Book of Records:

"O Lord, help our widows and fatherless children! So mote it be Amen. With the SWORD and the WORD of TRUTH, defend thou them. So mote it be Amen"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)