

Where the Cannon Family

Came From

and

Why They Are In

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A Talk Given by
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by MARIAN CANNON BENNION

Having lived for more than forty years away from Salt Lake City, the stronghold of the Cannons for more than a hundred years, I look at the family history with the perspective of distance and I want to present to you what I see as of greatest importance to us who are descendants of George Cannon and Ann Quayle.

Where did we come from and why are we here? Through the patriarchal gift in the Church we know we are descendants of Ephraim, son of Joseph who was sold into Egypt, and that we therefore came in the past from Palestine. Whether we came to the Isle of Man by way of Ireland, Scotland, or some other country we do not know. We do know that the Cannons had been Manxmen for hundreds of years before events brought our branch to America. The native land leaves its imprint and the Cannons were genuine Manxmen. What is the Isle of Man and its character? It is a small island 33 miles long and 12 miles wide with a present population of about 50,000. The hills rise to 2000 feet. The scenery is varied and beautiful, the climate very mild where sub-tropical plants are grown without special protection. The island has become a favorite summer resort for the English because of the quaint, unspoiled character of the people and the simple beauty of the land. It lies midway between the east coast of northern Ireland and the west coast of northern England. There

are traces of occupants of the isle of great antiquity. It was occupied by the Vikings about the year 600 and was a dependency of Norway until 1266 when it passed to Scotland. Since 1827 it has been under the British Crown. The ancient open air midsummer-day assembly of the Tynwald (Legislature) was attended for the first time by a British king in 1945. From the Cannon history by John Q. Cannon we read: "Surely there is something to be said for a diminutive land which amid the political revolutions and upheavals through which the world has passed during the last thousand years has preserved its independence unimpaired, still possessing the old legislature, which had its origin before the battle of Hastings, and still retaining in its population of hardly more than half a hundred thousand its old laws and old customs in the center of a mighty kingdom which has been swept by change.—The House of Keys which is the representative branch of the legislature of the Island is one of the most ancient legislative assemblies in the world."

The Island is rich in folklore and legend. The Manx language is now known by very few of the inhabitants. English is generally spoken. But the independent, freedom loving character of the people remains, coupled with a quiet wit and a subtle and keen sense of humor typically Manx. Sir Spencer Walpole writing 50 years ago in his book called "The Manx Note Book" declared: "It should surely be the business of those who love their country, and are proud of its treasured independence, to seize every opportunity of preserving the faded records of the past, just as it should be their business, in the fine language of the poet, 'to take occasion by the hand, and make the bounds of freedom wider yet.'"

In Early Gaelic literature, probably as far back as the 5th century, the title "Inis Falga the Noble Isle, was applied to the Isle of Man. A poem from an 8th century writing expresses the endearing enchantment the little island held for its inhabitants:

"A branch I bear from an apple-tree,
Such as in Emain's land there be,
With twigs of silver and blossoms white,
Like gleaming clusters of crystal bright.
There lieth an island far away,
Round it the wild sea-horses play;
Rising foam-crested from the deep,
Tossing their manes to the shore they leap,
Emain, the isle round which surges swell,
Is it near? Is it distant? Who can tell?
Isle on which Druid enchantments shower,
Changing its aspect from hour to hour."

This then, was the Isle of Man where our ancestors, George Cannon and Ann Quayle, were born and grew up. Shortly after they were married the young couple moved to Liverpool, England, where there were better opportunities for employment. George, we are told, had "mastered the trade of carpenter and joiner (cabinet maker) and he was an industrious and clever workman." One who knew him said he was trustful and generous in responding to appeals from friends and acquaintances for aid. He was always lending to his associates in the shop as well as to needy Manxmen who hunted him up and invoked his help. Besides this he was contributing to the support of his widowed mother and younger brothers and sisters. Nevertheless he and Ann prospered and lived comfortably in a modest style. We have no portraits of them but from their

older children in later years we have this description of them: George Cannon was about 5 feet 10½ inches in height, compact of figure with a weight of about 160 pounds, black hair, blue-gray eyes, and a fair complexion, erect, very energetic, sociable, good-natured and a keen sense of humor. Ann Quayle was plump, about 5 feet, 4 inches in height, weight about 130 pounds, fair complexion, black hair, hazel eyes with brown spots, marvelously full and expressive, in temperament inclined to be nervous, quick in all her movements, and tirelessly industrious. Both were excellent conversationists, the man being genial and pleasantly argumentative without being dogmatic or disputatious, the woman superior in mimicry and repartee. Both were fond of reading but were less inclined to absorb the thoughts of others than to depend on their own. They chose their associates as they chose their books—rather for merit and worth than for mere entertainment and though they might have few of either they were of good quality, and highly prized. As a parent the man was indulgent, slow to anger, always seeking an excuse to spare the rod, while the woman was swift to apply it, was strict in requiring obedience and looked upon too much leniency as a parental weakness. Yet she was a truly affectionate and tender mother, and he was exacting in his insistence upon correct moral conduct and filial behavior. She administered punishment when she thought it necessary, but quickly forgave and made up for her seeming sternness by a more abundant display of love. He omitted the physical punishment but his reproofs so clearly reflected the distress which his children's misdeeds caused him that nothing more was needed to make them deeply repentant of having incurred his dis-

pleasure. Both were of a religious and inquiring turn of mind but neither was satisfied with the sects and denominations which they saw warring against each other. In her biography their daughter Ann wrote: "My father did not believe in any of the sects of the day, although he had been brought up in the Church of England. His sister Leonora joined the Methodists, feeling she could enjoy herself in class meetings. My father told her he could confound her religion in a short time, "but," said he, "if you enjoy it, Nora, it is all right with me. The gospel is not upon the earth but it is coming."

George Cannon expressed his pride in his family name and a deep desire to see it honorably perpetuated. He had noted with regret that generation after generation there were fewer born to bear it. Many of the children died young or in maturity did not marry. Many family names in the Island had become extinct. He loved children and therefore the birth of each child was a great source of joy to him. Their first child, George Q., was born in January 1827, Mary Alice, December 1828, a son unnamed, who died soon after birth, was born in the summer of 1830, Ann, January 1832, Angus Munn, May 1833, John Quayle, March 1836. This boy died when 3½ years old of brain fever, and the whole family grieved deeply over his loss. "Such a boy," exclaimed the stricken father in writing to his sister, "my hard heart was softened with the death of this child, but I shall see him yet." David Henry was born April 1838, Leonora, the youngest, September 1840. All were born in Liverpool. Meantime there occurred the event which changed the whole course of their lives.

When Lord Aylmer was appointed Governor General of Canada in 1832 he took with him a Mr. Mason as private secretary. Mr. Mason's daughter invited Leonora Cannon, sister of George, to go with them as one of the family. Leonora at first declined but she had a dream which she interpreted as directing her to accept the invitation. She accordingly accepted and arrived in Toronto where she soon met a young Englishman, John Taylor, a class leader of the Methodist Church. To his first proposal of marriage she gave a negative answer but again a dream caused her to accept him.

In the Spring of 1836 Parley P. Pratt who had been ordained a member of the Council of the Twelve of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the year before, was contemplating the situation he found himself in—deeply in debt for a house and lot (a former house he owned had been destroyed by fire a few months before), and with a sick wife. He knew not what to do—whether to go on a mission, the duty of a member of the twelve, or to stay at home and endeavor by industry to sustain his family and pay his debts. His autobiography gives this account: "I had retired to rest at an early hour one night and was pondering my future course when Elder Heber C. Kimball and others came to my house. Being filled with the spirit of prophecy they blessed me and my wife and prophesied as follows: 'Brother Parley thy wife shall be healed from this hour, and shall bear a son, and his name shall be Parley—He shall do a great work in the earth in ministering the Word and teaching the children of men. Arise, therefore, and go forth in the ministry, nothing doubting. Take no thought for your debts nor the necessaries of life, for the Lord will

supply you with abundant means for all things. Thou shalt go to Upper Canada, even to the city of Toronto, the Capital, and there thou shalt find a people prepared for the fulness of the gospel and they shall receive thee and thou shalt organize the Church among them, and it shall spread thence into the regions round about, and many shall be brought to the knowledge of the truth and shall be filled with joy; and from the things growing out of this mission shall the fulness of the gospel spread into England, and cause a great work to be done in that land.' ”

This prophecy was the more marvelous because being married 10 years they had never had any children and for nearly six years his wife had been consumptive and considered incurable. In a few days he was on his way to Canada. At Hamilton on Lake Ontario he met with a new problem. The lake had just opened and steamers were plying between Hamilton and Toronto. Two dollars would take him by boat in a few hours but he was a stranger and had no money. Many times he had received answers to prayers but now it seemed hard to exercise faith because he was among strangers. The Spirit seemed to whisper to him to try the Lord and see if anything was too hard for Him, that he might know and trust Him under all circumstances. He went to a secret place in the forest and prayed to the Lord for money to enable him to cross the lake. Then he entered Hamilton and commenced chatting with the people. Many minutes had not passed before he was accosted by a stranger who inquired his name and where he was going and asked him if he didn't want some money. He said yes, and the man gave him \$10 and a letter of introduction to John

Taylor of Toronto where he arrived the same evening.

Mrs Taylor (Leonora Cannon, of course) received him kindly and went for her husband who was busy in his mechanic shop. To them he made known his errand to the city, but received little direct encouragement. He took tea with them and then sought lodgings at a public house. The next morning he commenced a regular visit to each of the clergy of the place, introducing himself and his errand. He was refused hospitality and denied the opportunity of preaching in any of their houses or congregations. Rather unpromising, he thought, considering the prophecies on his head concerning Toronto. He applied to the Sheriff for the use of the Court House, then to the authorities for a public room in the market place, but with no success. He next repaired to a pine grove just out of the town and kneeling down, called on the Lord, bearing testimony of his unsuccessful exertions: of his inability to open the way and at the same time asking Him in the name of Jesus to open an effective door for His servant to fulfill his mission in that place. He then arose and again entered the town and going to the house of John Taylor had placed his hand on his baggage to depart from a place where he could do no good, when a few inquires on the part of Mr. Taylor inspired by a degree of curiosity or anxiety caused a few moments delay during which a lady by the name of Walton entered the house, and being an acquaintance of Mrs. Taylor's was soon engaged in conversation with her in an adjoining room which Mr. Pratt overheard as follows: "Mrs. Walton, I am glad to see you; there is a gentleman here from the United States who says the Lord sent him to this

city to preach the gospel. He has applied in vain to the clergy and the various authorities for opportunity to fulfill his mission and is now about to leave the place. He may be a man of God. I am sorry to see him depart." Mrs. Walton replied: "Now I understand the feelings and spirit which brought me to your house at this time. I have been busy over the washtub and too weary to take a walk but I felt impressed to walk out. I then thought I would make a call on my sister the other side of town but passing your door the Spirit bade me go in, but I said to myself I will go in when I return but the Spirit said: go in now. I accordingly came in, and I am thankful I did so. Tell the stranger he is welcome to my house. I am a widow but I have a spare room and bed and food in plenty. He shall have a home at my house and two large rooms to preach in just when he pleases. Tell him I will send my son John over to pilot him to my house while I go and gather my relatives and friends to come in this very evening and hear him talk; for I feel by the Spirit that he is a man sent by the Lord with a message which will do us good."

The evening found Brother Pratt quietly seated at her house in the midst of a number of listeners who were seated around a large work table in her parlor and deeply interested in a conversation like the following: "Mr. Pratt, we have for some years been anxiously looking for some providential event which would gather the sheep into one fold; build up the true church as in days of old, and prepare the humble followers of the Lamb now scattered and divided to receive their coming Lord when He shall descend to reign on earth. As soon as Mrs. Taylor spoke of you I felt assured, as by a strange and un-

accountable presentiment that you were a messenger with important tidings on these subjects, and I was constrained to invite you here, and now we are all here anxiously waiting to hear your words."

John Taylor and his wife whose house was the first one Elder Pratt entered, were baptized in May 1836. Mr. Taylor soon became an assistant in the ministry. This was the same John Taylor who later became the 3rd president of the Church. Before long the Taylors joined the body of the Church in Ohio. After being ordained an apostle Elder Taylor was called to perform a mission to England in 1839. He bore a letter of introduction from his wife to her brother George in Liverpool where he arrived January 11th, 1840. He called at the Cannon home and made himself known to the wife and mother, promising to return in the evening when the husband would be home from his work. Although he contented himself during the brief visit with a commonplace exchange of family news and did not state the purpose of his presence in England he profoundly impressed his hostess and as he walked away she remarked to her eldest son: "George, there goes a man of God. He is come to bring salvation to your father's house." In the evening he returned and proceeded to deliver the great message he had been sent to proclaim. He sang for them some of the songs of Zion and left them his testimony and the Book of Mormon. His hearers were thrilled by his words, the wife being a firm believer from the beginning of his remarks. The husband was not unimpressed but desired time for further consideration. As he began reading the Book of Mormon his interest grew with every page until he could scarcely lay it down. He read it far into the night, at meal times and even had it propped open on his joiners

bench where he would read a few sentences as he worked. His solemn judgment after he had read the book from cover to cover was: An evil-minded man could not have written it, a good man would not have written it to deceive—it must be of God. He and his wife were baptized exactly one month to the day after John Taylor's first visit. The Cannon home became headquarters for Elder Taylor and other missionaries, including later Parley P. Pratt while he was in Liverpool. Of these experiences George Cannon said, writing to his sister in America: "I bless the Lord that I ever saw your husband's face and I now see plainly that our dear mother's prayer has not only been answered for you, but has extended to me and my family through you. I see the hand of the Lord so visible in all that has happened to me that I cannot help telling you of it. I was happy in an affectionate wife, promising children, good health, plenty of work, and always a pound to spare—but still there was a want of something which made me feel very low-spirited at times. I strove to pray and to return due thanks for His mercies particularly after some escape from danger of myself or family but when Brother Taylor came to Liverpool and I was sincerely desirous to lead a new life, he had the words whereby I might be saved and though slow of belief at first and not seeing the necessity of baptism, yet God in his mercy opened my eyes."

The urge to gather to Zion soon took possession of their souls. In another letter to his sister in Nauvoo George said: "If it is the Lord's will, I am ready to go any time; and I have as much money as will take us there and perhaps a little to spare." However the Church authorities felt it was desirable that some resident stalwarts remain on hand at the port of sailing to give assistance and encouragement

to their fellow members who halted there in Liverpool before going aboard ship so it was not until two years later that they finally sailed for America. By that time by careful saving they had accumulated enough to pay in addition to their own passage the entire passage money for some of those who made the voyage with them besides helping several others whose funds fell short of the amount required. I wish time would permit us to retrace with them the voyage across the ocean as recorded in Great Grandfather's diary, a glorious document. That and the great things that followed can be told another day. The outstanding fact for us all to be aware of and to remember is that George Cannon and Ann Quayle gladly, literally gave their lives that their children and children's children might live in Zion and partake of the blessings of the gospel. That it was well worth the sacrifice is written in the marvelous record left by the lives of their six young orphans. Of the eldest it has been said: "His seat was indisputably among the mighty, in the highest circles at home or abroad he was not out of place; the leading men of the nations were proud to claim his acquaintance. Not even his connection with a peculiar and unpopular sect and people, of whom he was a powerful and beloved leader, lessened in any degree the respect which his qualities extorted from his contemporaries. On the contrary it is quite probable that this connection enhanced his fame, for it gave unique opportunity to exhibit the sincerity, the steadfastness, the courage which coupled with talents of the first order, could not fail to win the admiration of the intelligent. His own opinion on the subject, often expressed in humility to his family when testifying to them that the gospel was the greatest thing in the world was: "All that I am,

Mormonism has made me." Typical of the spirit of these six wonderful children is the statement of Ann in commenting on the death of her brother George Q.: "It surely is a sad loss to us to lose such a brother. It is as though a nation mourned; but we realize our loss is his gain and we feel proud of him. The Lord has been our friend; He has never forsaken us in the hour of trial, and I trust He never will forsake us, but make our children feel that they are blessed of the Lord, and that He will give them His spirit if they will serve Him while they live upon the earth. This is the desire of my heart."

I am very proud of our strong, capable Great Grandfather Cannon possessed of characteristics so pleasant to live with and of his practical ability as evidenced by the service he rendered in making the coffins for the martyred Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother, preparing the bodies for burial and making the death masks which are now in the possession of the Church. These qualities and others were inherited by his lovable children. His daughters performed heroic services both at home and in church and community. Of my own grandfather Angus Munn Cannon whose branch of the family has met here tonight in honoring his memory President Levi Edgar Young said a few years ago on the occasion of an official visit to New York that Grandfather was one of the most just men he had ever known, speaking of his administration as President of the Salt Lake Stake in the days when that meant being both civil and religious judge of the whole county. I had an experience recently that pleased me very much. I met a young man employed in the County Recorder's Office. He said he had seen my father's name, George M. Cannon, on hundreds of the early deeds in that office and that because of the ac-

curate and comprehensive system of recording employed by father as County Recorder Salt Lake City is one of only 2 or 3 cities in the United States where deeds to property are accepted without further title search and proof.

About 45 years ago the Cannon family was the subject of a scientific study by Dr. E. G. Titus, professor of zoology at the Utah Agricultural College at that time, and Miss Amy B. Eaton of the Cold Spring Harbor Eugenic Research Laboratories, N. Y., and the record was exhibited at the Eugenics Congress at London, England. The chart was so large that a new room had to be built to show it. It occupied a full third of the space of the entire Congress display. Dr. Titus commented that from the standpoint of vitality, longevity, characterized by complete possession of mental faculties, it was the best record ever compiled. This study charted 822 persons, all descendants of George and Ann Quayle Cannon. It recorded their abilities, height, weight, health, time and cause of death. In more than a century only 97 had passed away.

"Thou shalt go to Upper Canada, even to the City of Toronto, the Capital," said the prophet Heber C. Kimball, "and there shalt thou find a people prepared for the fulness of the gospel and they shall receive thee, and thou shalt organize the Church among them;—and from the things growing out of this mission shall the fulness of the gospel spread into England, and cause a great work to be done in that land."

Elder John Taylor's letter of introduction from his wife, Leonora Cannon, to her brother George in Liverpool resulted in the "fulness of the gospel" being brought to the Cannon family and thus they came to America.