

DESERET NEWS

WEEKLY.

TRUTH AND LIBERTY.

WEDNESDAY, - MARCH 28, 1877.

THE CONFERENCE.

THE holding of the April conference at St. George will be a change from the custom since the settlement of this region. That city is between three and four hundred miles from this city, which is a long way, and much of it not over the best of roads, for the people living down there to come to conference in this city. Those who would come, and come regularly, have been put to this inconvenience, expense, and loss of time twice a year for as many years as they have resided in that part of the Territory. The journey and visit to one conference would occupy about a tenth of the year for its performance, and this demand coming every year, and twice a year if they came to conference, it can be readily seen that it has been no small tax upon them. This year they will be exempt from this inconvenience, the conference being announced to be held in the chief city of that part of the Territory. We have no doubt the Saints thereabout will greatly appreciate this arrangement and enjoy the conference services, the first general conference they will have had at home there.

On the other hand, those of the residents in the northern part of the Territory who wish to go to conference, and who are prepared to do so, have the privilege of visiting that portion of the Territory and taking such part in the services as may be. But the great bulk of the northern people, as a matter of necessity, will stay at home, and we have no doubt will cheerfully accord to the southern brethren and sisters the privilege of having the conference held in the south the present season.

LEE'S LAST SPEECH.

THE "last dying speech and confession" of John D. Lee, as reported to us, is one of those peculiar utterances of a guilty man on the confines of eternity who cannot slide the guilt off his own shoulders upon the shoulders of somebody else, yet who is anxious to place a portion, at least, of the responsibility for the same upon some other person, indirectly if he cannot directly, and who flounders about like a drowning man catching at any straw that may choose to float by.

Though he says nothing in the most remote degree really implicating the leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the crime for which he forfeited his life, yet he mentions the President of the Church in a manner which some consider suggestive of the idea that it was in consequence of his teachings that Lee committed the great crime for which he was condemned to die. As other persons, for what reason they themselves should best know, have directly asserted the responsibility of President Young for the Mountain Meadows Massacre, we may say a few words on this subject, and we ought to say, preliminarily, that we owe President Young an apology for mentioning him in this connection. Nor should we have done it, were it not that his name has been dragged into prominence in an unwarrantable and reckless manner in many discussions concerning this most repulsive affair.

Let us go back to the times when the massacre occurred. They were peculiar times. There were no railroads then, no telegraph, no pony express, no mails. The mails had been stopped by government orders. The general government had sent a large and splendidly appointed army on the way to Utah. What for? So far as the people here could learn, it was to disperse and destroy them, and hang the leaders. These and worse things were the reported boasts of the soldiery

around their campfires across the plains. What was the reason for all this display of the pomp and circumstance of civil war? Simply that ambitious, disappointed, and corrupt officials had borne false testimony at Washington against the people of this Territory, had filled the administrative ear and the public ear with absolute and vile falsehoods of a provoking and aggravating character concerning the situation in these valleys and the character and disposition of the people. Excitement was the rule everywhere in the States regarding the "Mormons," and everywhere in Utah regarding the intentions of the Government and the army towards the people here. The passions were aroused—here, for self-defense and self-preservation; there, for vengeance. Martial law was the rule. The people here were in arms to defend their lives, their liberties, their wives, their children, and their religion.

When we consider all these things, the wonder is that the people here generally were so forbearing, so self-controlled, so easily won over to pacification as they were. The Territory was remote. Months were required to convey intelligence to and from Washington, and then it was a most dangerous service, after the mails were stopped. Cruelties at which those of a Claverhouse or an Alva would have paled, might have been perpetrated by prejudiced officials, infuriated soldiers, and reckless camp followers, months before the authorities at Washington could have been cognizant of the atrocities. These things were apprehended by the people of these valleys. These were the feelings of the people at that time. The settlements were remote, sparsely peopled, and in the midst of an Indian country. The Indians were excited and some of them "mad" because of needless provocations and reckless cruelties by passing "Americans." The very emigrant company slaughtered at the Meadows went through the settlements cursing and swearing at the "Mormons," blaspheming and reviling at their religion, breathing out threatenings and vengeance and slaughter towards them, vowing that they would lie by until the army had come in and then turn around upon the settlers with determination of blood and rapine, also abusing and aggravating the Indians by poisoning animals and water.

Even under these dark and threatening circumstances, and when there was little breadstuffs in the country, and no prospect of raising another crop, the settlers were instructed to furnish passing emigrants with the provisions they actually needed, but no grain for animals to eat (the animals of the settlers being fed grain seldom and sparingly), and to let the companies pass by peaceably and safely. Some companies were actually escorted by "Mormons" to protect them from the Indians.

We do not write this to vindicate President Young, but for the information of the public. He needs no vindication, it having been indisputably established and well and generally known that he was not cognizant of the massacre until it was over, and that his constant instructions as Governor, in that time of danger and excitement, were of a precisely opposite character to any proceeding of that kind, being emphatically in favor of the most conciliatory policy and bloodless measures, first, last, and all the time. Every citizen of those times knows that the constant, ruling, standing instructions of Governor Young, in those perilous times, were to bear and forbear, to act strictly on the defensive, not to shed blood so long as it could possibly be avoided, and then only in the last extremity of self-defense. Consequently he could not possibly be in anywise responsible for the massacre, any more than General Lee, or Jackson, or J. E. Johnson were for the alleged inhumanities of Andersonville or the depredations of the jayhawkers of Missouri, or the Federal Government for the gross immoralities of Judge Drummond or the judicial illegalities and fanatical perversions of McKean. The true principles of "Mormonism" are no more responsible for the massacre than the principles of true democracy are for the assassination of Lincoln or the attempted assassination of Packard, or than the principles of true republicanism are for the carpet-bag misrule, the official plunderings, and the returning board frauds of late years.

All causes suffer more from the follies and crimes of foolish professed friends than from the overt acts of open and pronounced enemies. The indiscretion, rashness, and ill-directed zeal of adherents are often more damaging than the vigorous assaults of opponents. Patience and prudence in the times that try men's souls are rare virtues. Hasty imprudence and rash aggressiveness are far more common. Active resistance is always more easy, more alluring, more fascinating, than passive resistance.

If Lee's fanatical and misguided zeal led him to commit crimes of a heinous nature, it was because of his erroneous and distorted views of true principles, and not the legitimate fruits of the principles themselves operating upon an honest heart.

The doctrines of the Church are diametrically opposed to the shedding of innocent blood. "Thou shalt do no murder," is a divine command. "The murderer hath not eternal life abiding in him," is a divine precept. So distinctly is this principle understood among the Latter-day Saints that they regard as nonsense the belief of many religionists that a murderer can step from the scaffold to heaven. They do not believe there is any forgiveness for that sin. It must be atoned for by the criminal himself, as the Scripture says—"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."

So far as Lee is concerned, the Church and the people are gratified with the fact that justice has been done. It was their desire to have it done much sooner. That it was delayed so long, was none of their fault nor wish.

AND WHY NOT YEARS AGO?

THE execution of John D. Lee took place nearly twenty years after the crime, which he expiated with his life, was perpetrated. The question is pertinent and suggests itself—Why was he not tried, convicted, and punished many years ago?

The answer is plain and simple—Because no proper efforts were made to that end by the officers of the law during all that long interim of nearly two decades, excepting in regard to the proceedings which resulted in the consummating event of yesterday (March 23).

Why were not judicious steps taken earlier to judicially investigate the whole affair and ferret out and punish the real criminals? Because such did not appear to be the intention of the federal officials whose business it was to look after such things. During nearly all of those twenty years, one thought, and one thought alone, seemed to be uppermost in the minds of those officers who controlled judicial action in this connection, and that one thought was how the responsibility of the whole affair could be effectually saddled upon the leading authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If they could not saddle it there, they did not care to saddle it anywhere. If that could not be done, nothing was desired to be done. If that could have been done, it would have been done years ago. But it never was done, because it could not be done. It never will be done, because it can not be done. The innocent can never be proved guilty, because such a thing is an impossibility. It is a contradiction in terms. It is not possible, because it would be a contradiction in facts, which never can be.

THE PLACE OF EXECUTION.

IN regard to the taking of John D. Lee a hundred miles or so away from the place of trial to the place where his crime was perpetrated, in order that he might be executed there, the questions may be asked—Is it usual to execute criminals at the places where their crimes were committed? If it is not, then why was that course pursued in the particular instance under consideration?

It may be stated that the course spoken of was very unusual, if not unprecedented. The authorities of New York, of Chicago, of San Fran-

cisco, of St. Louis, of London, etc., do not take criminals to the precise places where their crimes were committed, in order to execute them there. Such a course, if attempted, would be generally condemned, and for various reasons. It would be considered an unnecessary expense. It would be considered an exhibition of an unworthy spirit, altogether gratuitous on the part of the officers of the law. It would be regarded as an unnecessary stretch of executive severity. It would be looked upon as a manifestation of a passionate and determinate spirit of revenge, rather than as the execution of calm, inflexible, impartial, deliberate justice. It would be viewed as indicative of a desire to take something more than the life of the criminal. It would be looked upon as a refinement and excess of cruelty more worthy of the dark ages than of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It would be looked upon as a penal policy worthy of the Spanish inquisition, rather than of the officers of the law in the greatest republic the world has seen.

The question then arises, Why was this course taken in this instance? The officers were morally sure of the criminal's life. What more did they wish to have? What more did they desire from him? Did they wish to heap up cheap notoriety to themselves? Did they wish to make political capital out of the execution of the law? Did they wish to harrow and torture the criminal in his last hours by bringing vividly before his mind the harrowing details of his crime? The sentence of the judge did not require this to be done. The terms of the law did not require this to be done. The sentence and the law merely required the life of the prisoner—that he should be shot dead within certain specified hours, of course at a convenient place. But was a place a hundred miles away more convenient than thousands of places much nearer, than scores of places not a mile distant? If not upon the score of convenience, then why all the trouble to take the criminal a hundred miles away? There must have been some cause, and if that cause was not the desire to gain personal notoriety or to make political capital, what was it? Let us try to find it out.

There is one thing that might have been the motive for the adoption of so unusual, so extraordinary a course in executing capital punishment in this instance for crime committed. That motive might have been the desire, by the actual sight of the scene of his crime, and by the consequently revived reminiscences of the occurrences of that crime, to drive the criminal to say something that it was hoped could be used to implicate the leaders of the "Mormon" church in the crime for which he was about to suffer the extreme penalty of the law.

If this was the real motive, and we candidly confess that, of all those above noted as possible, it seems the most likely, then was it a most unworthy motive, one to be severely reprobated, one so cruel and inquisitorial a character as to be absolutely beyond the pale of the authority of the law, and equally opposed to every humane sentiment and feeling. Consequently, it may be asked, How do those officials justify themselves from the charge of exceeding their duty, and from the weightier charge of the most extraordinary excess of severity, amounting to refined brutality, in thus needlessly increasing the mental tortures of the criminal? They can answer for themselves.

One thing further may be said. If the motive for the extraordinary course of the officers of the law, treated of above, were of the inquisitorial character named, the motive was a barren one, the results hoped for were not obtained, the trouble and expense were absolutely needless, were thrown away, and so far as paying in any manner, the journey was a blank failure. The animus of this matter of determining the place of execution evidently belongs to a species of unworthy pettiness, legal irrelevancy, and extra-officiousness to which officers of the law should not descend.

THE LOUISIANA COMMISSION.

THE new commission to investigate the situation in Louisiana,

previous to President Hayes taking decisive action in regard to the affairs of that State, does not appear to please either party. The Republicans do not like it, and the Democrats are reported angry about it. The latter are not well rid of their intense chagrin over the doings of the last compromise commission, the eight to seven arrangement, which left them and their candidate out in the cold so unfeelingly, and very likely they anticipate another eight to seven arrangement by the proposed new commission. The Republicans, perhaps, fear investigation might do them no credit.

The fact appears to be that the Republicans want their way and the Democrats are just as anxious to have theirs. Each wants to obtain the ruling power in the State, and each is determined to have it if possible. As no commission can possibly lead to the gratification of the wishes of both parties, no commission can give very wide satisfaction, and any commission would be likely to unearth some things damaging to both parties.

LEE'S CONFESSIONS.

THE New York Herald and the San Francisco Chronicle, and some other papers copied from them, have a lengthy rambling story, purporting to be an abstract of the confession of John D. Lee, the document signed by Wm. V. Bishop. This may be termed Lee's Confession No. 1.

His confession at the place of his execution may be termed his Confession No. 2.

The abstract or synopsis made and forwarded by Mr. Bishop, doubtless for a round sum of money, as money is always the main idea in sensational literature, purports to be the substance of a much more lengthy story, which Mr. Bishop says he obtained from Lee, and will publish in book form, for the purpose, of course, of raising more money. This will make Confession No. 3.

But number three is not all. Another, and this time the professed identical confession, the genuine document, is already promised and published, as will be seen from the following extract from the Sacramento Record-Union of March 23—

"The New York Herald yesterday printed, and a feeble tender of the Herald in San Francisco was also permitted to print, a thin and garbled and altogether inaccurate statement purporting to be the confession of John D. Lee. The designation given to it was a complete misnomer. It was not the confession of John D. Lee, nor anything like it. It was merely a disjointed and unfaithful echo of some part of that confession, as little resembling the original as any statement compiled from the published accounts of the Mountain Meadows massacre would have been. The only genuine confession of John D. Lee, written by his own hand, and containing his own version of the facts, is in the possession of the Record-Union, and will be given to the public to-morrow. It was like the Herald and its feeble San Francisco tender to attempt to palm off their fraudulent and bogus narration as genuine, but when the real confession appears it will be seen how great a difference exists between the false and the true. It will further be observed that the bogus yarn printed yesterday purports to have been furnished by Bishop, Lee's attorney. Now at the very time this alleged confession was being published, Lee's friends were moving heaven and earth to procure a reprieve for him. The public are therefore invited to believe that his own attorney deliberately betrayed him by putting in the hands of the public facts which must, if they had any influence, militate against his chances of escape from death. Whether Bishop did or did not thus betray his client, however, the fact is certain that the real confession of Lee has not yet been published, and will not be until to-morrow's issue of the Record-Union lays it before the people of the Pacific Coast. What the condemned man did write is at least an intelligible array of facts and motives, and not a bold and confused farrago of such stuff as the New York Herald and