

THE EDITOR'S COMMENTS.

"THE THATCHER CASE."

An article appears in the *Ligan Journal* of Tuesday, August 16, upon "The Thatcher Case," which is so misleading and which so completely obscures and misrepresents the issues that were raised in the trial of that case that we feel it to be a duty to set the public right upon the points involved. The *Journal* says that the trial "has removed all doubt as to whom the rule of discipline applies." * * * In one sense the trial resulted in a vindication of Moses Thatcher. He has always occupied the ground that he does today, and would have unhesitatingly signed the manifesto before its general presentation had its scope been defined as it was during his trial."

We call attention to the foregoing statement, not with any wish to revive controversy or to add humiliation or censure; but because by it the results of the trial are falsified, and Brother Moses Thatcher himself is done a great injustice.

Is it true that in any sense the trial resulted in his vindication? The importance of this point will be evident, and there must be no mistake about it. Some members of the Church, gathering their views from statements alleged to have been made by Brother Thatcher himself and other statements made by his so-called friends, have been led to believe that he might not have been altogether wrong in the attitude which he had assumed. To correct this misunderstanding and to prevent the further spread of an impression wholly wrong, it is of the highest importance to every member of the Church that the truth should be known concerning the result in the case. Repeating, therefore, the question, Is it true that in one sense "the trial resulted in the vindication of Moses Thatcher"? we turn to the proceedings of the High Council, and for an answer quote the opening words of the Stake Presidency's decision.

"We therefore decide that the charges against Brother Moses Thatcher have been sustained."

This decision was not only signed and promulgated by the Stake Presidency, but it was unanimously sustained and endorsed by the entire High Council. Furthermore it was by Brother Thatcher himself endorsed and accepted in full without qualification or mental reservation. And, speaking in his own behalf before the case was closed, he expressed the feeling that no humiliation would be too great for him to do the right thing; with a contrite spirit he was willing to leave the extent of his wrong doing in the Council's hands; he had become convinced that there was no conflict in the position taken by the presiding authorities now in the address on Church discipline and their former position, admitting that he had been deceived and in the dark; as to why he had not been able to see this before, his only answer, he said, was that men were sometimes

too blind to see, too deaf to hear, and their hearts too hard to receive; he expressed thanks for the opportunity of exhibiting his humility, plead for his fellowship and was willing to make any restitution the Council might name for any intentional or unintentional reflections upon the Church authorities.

Surely it would be hard to conceive of a more difficult series of facts out of which to construct a vindication; and no one who is a true friend of Brother Thatcher ought to do him so much wrong hereafter as to make this attempt.

Now as to the *Journal's* statement that "the trial has removed all doubt as to whom the rule of discipline applies," and that Brother Thatcher "would have unhesitatingly signed the manifesto before its general presentation, had its scope been defined as it was during his trial;" in neither the published findings or decision of the High Council, nor in the other records of the proceedings, is there the least warrant for the impression that that body attempted any interpretation of the Declaration of Principles other than that borne upon its own face. It has never needed any interpretation—there is nothing hidden or ambiguous in its wording or meaning. But even if it had been obscure, it would certainly be a novel and unwarranted proceeding for a Stake High Council to have assumed to furnish an interpretation and definition of the scope of a document of that character, issued by the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles, and signed also by all the general authorities of the Church. As above stated, no such attempt was made—the Declaration of Principles stands today as it has stood all the time, squarely and plainly on its merit—not needing today any more than at any time in the past any private or strained or technical explanation or interpretation whatsoever.

But after all, the main point at issue is entirely overlooked by the *Journal* and perhaps by others. Undue prominence is assigned to the part Brother Thatcher's refusal to sign the Declaration of Principles has had in the case and in all his difficulties with his brethren. It is due to the Latter-day Saints to let them know that this was merely one incident and by no means the important one. It came in for consideration in the evidence. Nobody who is familiar with the situation and the feelings that have prevailed during some years past—no one with ordinary knowledge of past events—can hide from himself the fact that there has been misconception, misunderstanding and suspicion in relation to the Church and the attitude of its leading authorities. They have been placed in a false light, their motives have been impugned, their sayings and doings placarded and picked at and bandied about, their most innocent intentions and utterances being distorted into something very sinister. How much the remarks and course of Brother Thatcher have contributed to this condition we need not

now try to estimate; but certainly improper statements were made by him among others long before the issuance of what is termed the Declaration of Principles. The First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles felt that they were being put in a false light before the Church and the world by the statements which were made concerning their utterances and their action. They felt that they were being wronged, and that prejudices were being aroused against them without cause, through misrepresentation and the placing of them in a false attitude. They were deeply grieved at this. It became a matter of serious importance to them, especially coming from the sources which this did. Then it was that the Declaration of Principles was prepared. It was a subsequent development, and is comparatively of recent date. It was sincerely hoped that this Declaration, containing a correct description of the position occupied by the authorities of the Church, would be accepted by those who had contributed to these false impressions as an easy way of correcting them. In all charity it was felt that in this easy manner could the wrong that had been done be made right without requiring any humiliating confession or acknowledgment on their part as to their past course. The preparation of the Declaration of Principles was prompted by the most earnest desire to save from the consequences of their own misdoings all who had been guilty of these wrong statements and arguments. It was not intended to ensnare anybody, or to cause the signers to stultify themselves, or to place them in a false light; but to save them from the consequences of their own conduct, by giving an easy opportunity to set themselves right. How unjust and misleading, therefore, to hold it into prominence as the first and greatest and only stumbling block! As a matter of fact if there had been nothing more than the signing of that Declaration, it is not at all probable that there would have been any trial at all; there are no doubt many who have never signed or voted for that document yet who have never been brought into question as to their fellowship. The most that has been done in such cases is that men in responsible positions in the Church who could not feel to accept the rule of the Church have been relieved of those positions.

This is the great point which we feel that the Latter-day Saints should plainly understand, and upon which it is hardly possible to lay too much emphasis. The refusal to sign was but an incident of the evidence and not the main issue at all; the trial was held for other causes and conduct; the charges were "apostasy and un-Christianlike conduct as exhibited in public speeches, private conversations, in interviews through newspapers, and in other ways;" those charges were sustained by the decision, and that decision was by Brother Thatcher accepted in full and "without qualification or mental reservation." The results cannot, without injury alike to Brother Thatcher and the members of the Church generally, be allowed to be obscured or belittled by pinning all to