

calamity, but it was also customary to observe a periodical fast on the tenth day of the seventh month, on the occasion of the annual atonement, when the people were commanded (Lev. xvi: 29) to abstain from work and afflict their souls. There is no evidence in the scripture that the requirement to afflict their souls meant physical torture or punishment, self-inflicted or voluntarily endured; nor, indeed, that such torture would be pleasing to the Lord, as ascetics, ancient and modern, have imagined. It more probably referred only to abstinence from food and drink; to a recalling of sins and oppressions and vanities of which they had been guilty, and to restitution and earnest and heartfelt contrition therefor. The observance of this fast as the Lord required doubtless involved the liberation of captives, the relieving of the oppressed and the assistance of the needy; and that it degenerated until the day was devoted to labor, to pleasure or strife, or to a perfunctory performance of some of the rites pertaining to it, while the true essence of the requirement was lacking, we may reasonably infer from the word of the Lord through Isaiah (Isa. lviii). Israel is represented as reproaching the Lord: "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and Thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our souls, and Thou takest no knowledge?" And the Lord adds:

Behold in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labors. Behold ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. * * * Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and He shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called The repairer of the breach, the restorer of the paths to dwell in.

The observance of fasting and prayer was common in the days of the Savior's ministry, but more so perhaps among the pious Pharisees than the true followers of Christ, who received from their Master this warning: "When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast." * * * But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine

head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in heaven: and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

The lack of formality on the part of the Savior's followers in the matter of fasting proved a stumbling block even to the disciples of John, who upon one occasion appealed to the Master for an explanation of it. While the reply in that instance might lead to the inference that fasting by His disciples while He was with them was not necessary, it was probably an evasion of the question rather than a real answer. For upon another occasion, when His disciples marveled at their inability to cast an evil spirit from one who was afflicted, He gave them to understand that such power was only to be obtained through prayer and fasting.

That fasting was resorted to by the Apostles in their ministry is evident from the allusions to it by Paul and other writers of the New Testament, and that the Lord revealed to them His will as a consequence is apparent from the revelation given after fasting and prayer indicating that Barnabas and Saul should be ordained for the ministry.

That power from the Lord is to be obtainable in this age by the same means could be testified to by thousands of Latter-day Saint Elders who, while abroad among strangers in the service of the Lord, have found comfort, and wisdom, and great spiritual strength as a result of their abstinence and fervent supplication; and similar testimony may be borne of experience at home.

The exact date when the observance of a public fast was instituted in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not recorded, but it is known that fast meetings were occasionally held in the Kirtland Temple, presided over by the Patriarch Joseph Smith, the Prophet's father, who upon such occasions would remain in the temple from early morning until the close of the day, without tasting food or drink. So also at a later period were fast meetings occasionally held in Nauvoo and other places in which the Saints sojourned, generally with some special object in view, upon which the faith and prayers of the Saints were centered.

The appointment of a periodical day of fasting occurred some time after the arrival of the Pioneers in Salt Lake valley. If self-denial is the essential feature of fasting it might be said that during their travels and early occupancy of their mountain home they had observed an almost perpetual fast, for their meagre food supply had enjoined an almost constant restraint upon their appetites.

When the first Thursday in the month was set apart as a general fast day and for sometime afterwards the Patriarch, "Uncle" John Smith, presided over the meetings, and the Saints in Utah, then few in number, assembled in one place of gathering; but as they became more numerous, and new wards and settlements were formed, fast meetings were held in different places and presided over by the several Bishops. They were then, as, indeed, they ever have been, among the most enjoyable meetings held in the Church, and especially rich

spiritual feasts when the Saints were so situated that they could lay aside all temporal cares (and had the disposition to do so, too), and assemble with one accord, bringing their fast offerings with them, that the poor and unfortunate among them might be provided for. The informality of the meetings and the general invitation for all to take part in the services usually had the effect of making the people feel free to do so, and even the most timid and retiring Saints would, upon these occasions, yield to the promptings of the Spirit and arise and confess their faults, bear their testimonies and offer earnest exhortations. Humility, gratitude, reconciliation and love were generally manifest and the gifts of the Spirit frequently enjoyed.

In some respects times have changed here. The Saints are no longer isolated as they once were; nor are they impelled by persecution and oppression to union of effort in worship or in defense either. Worldly cares and diverting associations have greatly increased among them, and the transition from the labors and duties of every day life to the proper observance of the fast day is not the easy matter that it once was. The necessity, however, for united and earnest worship and for spiritual guidance is none the less because all is peace in Zion, because the band of oppression is no longer felt, because of the exacting worldly cares and associations claiming the whole attention of the Saints, even to the exclusion of religious considerations or care for the poor and unfortunate, or because of their being surrounded by and mixed up with people of other faiths. Indeed, every observant person who has the spirit of the Gospel must feel that the circumstances surrounding the Saints have rather increased than diminished the necessity of devotion to religion and a close observance of all the rites and ordinances relating thereto; and he must also notice with sorrow the decadence of the spirit of fasting and praying and remembering the poor on the monthly day set apart for that purpose.

In the branches of the Church organized in many of the foreign missions the custom has been to observe the first Sunday instead of the first Thursday in the month as a general fast day, the Sabbath being a more convenient time for the Saints to assemble than on a week day. And now, in the providence of the Lord, our leaders have counseled the Saints here in Zion to adopt the same rule, the change in circumstances having rendered this change of days manifestly appropriate.

That this counsel will meet with a hearty response from the Saints, and result in a corresponding spiritual revival, is only reasonable to anticipate. "The Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear." He is as ready today as at any time in the past to listen to the fervent, sincere prayer of His people, and when coupled with the self-denial of food and drink, as required on fast day, and a disposition to remember in kindness and relieve the wants of the poor, they are all the more certain of being heard and answered.

As to the philosophy of fasting,