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Truth and Liberty.

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CHURCH DISCIPLINE.

Elder B. H. Roberts Replies to a Letter on the Subject, Fully Answering Queries and Objections, Pointing out Errors, and Showing Clearly the Attitude of Friends and Enemies of the Church on the Late Address, Miscalled a "Manifesto," and Events Subsequent and Relating Thereto in Church and Political Matters.

The following correspondence embraces a letter written to a Church official by a resident of Ogden whose name is withheld because he did not give express permission to publish it, and a response thereto by Elder B. H. Roberts, made previous to the latter's return a few days ago to his missionary labor in the East. The whole matter is commended to the careful consideration of the NEWS readers, as bearing upon the address to the Church in April, 1896, on the subject of Church officials engaging in politics, and events connected with and subsequent to the address, down to the present time:

THE OGDEN LETTER.

OGDEN, Utah, Dec. 21st, 1896.

Elder B. H. Roberts, Centerville, Utah:

Dear Brother—There seems to be a well defined and growing idea among an important portion of the thinkers of our Church that the leaders are saddling the Lord with some things for which He is not responsible. The feeling exists that the name of the Lord is used too freely when pertaining to matters upon which there ought to be charity. The admitted truism for unity in things essential, liberty in things non-essential, but in all things charity, seems to have been abrogated; at any rate, that is what a great many are thinking, because it appears to be impossible for any man to express an opinion dissenting from the views of the leaders without being threatened with the loss of his ecclesiastical position, and with the fear of concomitant complications in his political or commercial fortunes.

These things are fast destroying the faith of the people, especially of the younger classes, and if their faith is once shaken they will have to live infidel, and will, in all human probability, reach the final resting place believing that God's

authority on the earth has been a phantom—the cloak of designing men.

The true, and best, and only loyalty to the Church in the present unfortunate crisis seems to me to defend the right of free speech which, whatever denial may be attempted, is not a fact in Utah at the present time. Free speech may exist theoretically but not in fact to all intents and purposes.

I have reason to believe that you stand in the front rank of the nobler thought in Utah, and because of your exceptional mental and physical qualifications ought to be the foremost champion of the people in their ability to govern their Church instead of permitting its affairs to be entirely dominated, as at present by a few.

A series of leading articles in the DESERET NEWS published at various times in November sets up the right of the Church leaders, specifying the First Presidency, to "make, alter, change or revoke the laws" of the Church. Confirmatory of this view, (revoking it is to be reasonably assumed the laws of the Church with reference to the attitude of the First Presidency towards civil affairs), the DESERET NEWS presumes to voice the sentiments of the body of the Church in the declaration (see editorial of Nov. 17th last) that the election of a certain man (referring to Moses Thatcher) to the United States Senate by the coming Utah Legislature would be an "insult" to the body of the Church. I say "presumes" because it is impossible that the NEWS can have any means of knowing the sentiments of the body of the Church, although doubtless fully and officially representing the view of one or two leaders.

The Doctrine and Covenants distinctly lays down the principle of Church government by "common consent," a principle which concedes the right of discussion and of dissent. There can be no common consent if the people cannot dissent without incurring the displeasure of the authorities. That dissenters do incur this displeasure if they presume to dissent from the mere whim of certain leaders you are probably as well able to testify to as any man in Utah; the Philistines have been after you more than once.

If the First Presidency has the right to "change, alter, or revoke, or make laws" for the Church, common consent is obsolete, as there can never exist two supreme law making powers in any organization at one and the same time.

If the doctrine of common consent is true, and God has so declared it, and nothing can be done in the Church without it, it is only reasonable to imply that, if the common consent is withheld, there rests no authority in the First Presidency to "make, alter, change, or revoke the laws."

I am one of those who believe every man holding the Priesthood is responsible to God for the conduct of the affairs of the Church, and for its purity. Believing thus it becomes my duty to use whatever ability and influence I may

have in the suppression of wrong-doing in the Church regardless by whom done, realizing that the liability to err is as great in the presiding quorum of the Church as in the lowest. Infallibility is the Gibraltar upon which absolutism is safe, but before which the pillars of liberty crumble to dust.

It is with profound regret that I find myself unable to accept the so-called manifesto as the word of the Lord, or the policy that it is the duty of every member of the church to carry out. On the other hand, I believe it is the duty of every man, viewing the subject as I view it, to do all he can towards its repeal.

That you once held a similar position, whatever change your views may have undergone since, I have every reason to believe, because I was present on April 7th last (the day after the manifesto was read and adopted at general conference, and after it had obtained your signature) at the residence of Moses Thatcher in Salt Lake when you, in connection with some others, administered the ordinance of the sick to Brother Thatcher. You will remember you were mouth. I reported the blessing in short hand, sitting by the side of Brother Thatcher, and you then made use of the following language: "And now, O God the Eternal Father, in all humility we appeal unto Thee in behalf of this brother; and we uphold him before Thee in our heart's best love. We ask Thee, Our Father, to remember all his faithfulness and devotion unto Thee, and to Thy great cause in the earth; to have respect unto this Thy servant, and to give unto us the life of this man, and to the Church of Christ and this man a life of usefulness in the future."

"Our Father, we will not let him go, and we ask Thee to have respect unto the Priesthood and authority which thou hast given unto us. We ask Thee to hear our petition in his behalf. And, O Father, do thou bless him, as in the name of Jesus Christ we bless him, and may health and strength be given unto him from this time henceforth, that he may begin to mend, and that Thy power may rest upon him, that he may become powerful and strong to plead for the rights and liberties of Thy people. To this end we petition Thee, and ask Thee to bless this Thy servant. And, Brother Moses, in the name of the Lord we say unto thee, 'Be thou made whole,' that thy recovery may begin from this hour, and we command it, in all humility; but in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

It is evident that, at this time, your opinion was that the liberties of the people were jeopardized, and in view of the controversy then existing it is but fair to assume that these liberties were placed in jeopardy, in your judgment, by the manifesto which, for reasons best known to you, you had been led unconsciously to sign.

It is probably true that there exists in Utah today a condition which makes it necessary, or in your opinion advisable,