

THE EDITOR'S COMMENTS.

RELIGIOUS DEBATES.

The counsel given by the First Presidency regarding debates upon the doctrines and the validity of the authority of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be recognized by all who have testimony of the truth as timely in view of the circumstances stated. Therein is the expression of a policy which the Church of Christ has pursued steadfastly in ancient as well as in modern times, and it cannot be consistently departed from by those who esteem and honor the Lord as the arbiter in matters that relate to His plan of salvation. As to challenges for debate, it is a common occurrence for individuals or parties who break away from organizations of various kinds to seek to gain notoriety and prestige by contentious discussions with representatives of established institutions in order to be brought into prominence thereby. In pursuing this course they are not liable to loss, because they have nothing to lose; while the possible advantage to them is that by cunning and adroitness in debate they may be advertised as worthy foemen to those to whom they have become apostate, and thus find means of directing general attention to themselves and gaining something at the expense of others.

There may be questions which are of such slight intrinsic importance that debate thereon excites no more than temporary personal antagonism between the parties thereto—a feature regarded with concern by those who desire to avoid contention and promulgate principles of peace. But when it comes to discussing religious matters in that fashion a more serious phase is presented. Religion reaches all that relates to mankind, past, present and future, and agitation thereon stirs the soul to its inmost depths. Such agitation, therefore, as is in harmony with the divine will is that only which produces peace, harmony and brotherly love. That which yields fruit of an opposite nature is contrary to the spirit and genius of the Gospel of Christ. Not being confined to the temporalities of mortal life, true religion overshadows and absorbs all other topics that concern man, and its purity and power transcend all other considerations in time and eternity. Viewed from this standpoint it is to thoughtful, considerate, devotional people a matter far too sacred to be treated as a football whose fortunes and destiny are to be determined by the player who can kick with greatest force or deliver the most cleverly directed blows.

The principles of the Gospel and authority in the Church of Christ are of such grave importance to mankind that self-interest demands for them the most careful scrutiny and inquiry, even to the extent that they be required to present to the believer the highest evidence of divine authenticity—that of direct testimony from the Almighty. But debate is not inquiry; contentious discussion is not investigation; submitting the conclusions of an argumentative contest

to the decision of a board of finite judges is not obtaining a divine and infinite witness of the right. Thrilling eloquence, impassioned oratory or subtle argument never made of the wrong a right; nor does their absence make of a single truth an error. The relative positions of good and evil are not altered by the forensic ability of advocates; and the immutable plan of salvation and divine authority to act therein are unchanged by the prejudices or scholarship of men. The spirit of inquiry, of investigation, of searching for light and knowledge, and of expounding and proclaiming the principles of truth and persuading and leading men and women thereto, is of God. The disposition to court contentious, and sometimes angry, discussion, to challenge to debate wherein not the vindication of truth but the triumph of one or other of the contending parties in the argument is the only object sought or which can be attained, is an inspiration of the evil one, and finds no approval in the Gospel plan or the genius of Christianity. Such a proceeding being in its very nature an assault upon others, its inception is in a desire, not to convince people of the truth, but to bring supposed antagonists into contumely or subjection by a measure of force, and therefore is but a modification of that spirit which, under the guise of religion, so often has lit the fires of persecution and has filled many a martyr's tomb.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized in this dispensation by direct command of the Almighty, given through the Prophet Joseph Smith. It was set up by the God of heaven, "shall never be destroyed," and "shall not be left to other people." Its Apostles, like the Apostles of old, were chosen of the Lord and ordained, that they "should go and bring forth fruit," and that their "fruit should remain." Of its Council of Apostles the Lord said, in a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph Smith, at Nauvoo, January 19, 1841, "I give unto you my servant Brigham Young, to be a President over the Twelve traveling Council, which Twelve hold the keys to open up the authority of my kingdom upon the four corners of the earth, and after that to send my word to every creature." President Wilford Woodruff was a member of the Council at that time. The keys of the authority spoken of yet remain with and are exercised by the Council of Apostles.

The Lord made no blunder in organizing the Church. His work was not done so badly that a few years later a "reorganization" had to be effected by men, and least of all by apostates and seceders from the true fold, in order to get the work right. The originally organized Church—"the only true and living Church upon the face of the whole earth"—still exists and prospers, and will continue to do so. There is no question with its officers or members as to the validity of its authority. This was one reason why, in the contest for the Temple lot in Jackson

county, the Church took no part, being content to await the due time of the Lord for the restoration of that property to its rightful ownership. The authorities were not in the business of submitting any inquiry as to the genuineness of the Church to a human court, especially one presided over by a Missouri judge. A higher Judge already had passed upon that question. It is beyond the domain of human adjudication. The certificated judgment is in the situation and condition of the Latter-day Saints whose present abiding places in the vales of the Rocky Mountains. They alone are fulfilling the destiny marked out for the Church in the prophetic declarations of President Joseph Smith, its martyred Prophet, in laboring according to the revealed Gospel plan for the salvation of the living and the redemption of the dead. Regarding the movements of the Saints, one of his predictions, made during a visit to Montrose, Iowa, and recorded in his journal of August 6, 1842, reads as follows:

"I had a conversation with a number of the brethren in the shade of the building on the subject of our persecutions in Missouri, and the constant annoyance which has followed us since we were driven from that state. I prophesied that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and would be driven to the Rocky Mountains, many would apostatize, others would be put to death by their persecutors, or lose their lives in consequence of exposure and disease, and some of you will live to go and assist in making settlements and build cities and see the Saints become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains."

Occasionally Elders have been pressed closely by challenges to debate, and have felt that they should accept such challenges lest by declining they bring discredit on the cause they represent. If a case occurs that really is of such importance as that, it is of sufficient importance to refer to the presiding authorities for instructions what to do, and the inspiration of the Lord will indicate the procedure to be followed. But on no account should an Elder be the challenging party. Nor should he consent to submit the validity of Church authority to human judgment, or the principles of the Gospel to any other test than that which is given by the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus, when He said to the Jews, "My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me. If any man will do His will, he will know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." The Elders of the Church are not called to teach their own will or doctrine, but to deliver the message of peace and salvation which Christ the Lord has given them, and to Him must they look for its vindication and confirmation.

PRESIDENT BRIGHAM YOUNG.

The early dawn of the present century witnessed the birth of many noble spirits, endowed with superior intellect and destined to give perpetual form to the events of the age, in accordance with their own genius. Whatever changes and cataclysms may