

THE EDITOR'S COMMENTS.

LETTERS OF MORMON MISSIONARIES

The libraries of the world contain no literature like the letters that Mormon Elders write while laboring in the missionary field. These letters bear a character that is unique and has no counterpart in any writings of modern times. They are intensely realistic. They deal with real facts and conditions in plain, homely and truthful language and portray with wonderful fidelity, some phases of human nature that novelists rarely treat, particularly those that relate to practical religion, tolerance and hospitality. They have a true and robust moral tone, and there is a humor in them, rich, dry and droll by turns, but never low nor coarse. The inconsistencies in the characters, theories and conduct of men are portrayed with wonderful accuracy, though the writers probably fail, in many cases, to realize how well they are doing this.

These letters show how sensible, practical men of fair intelligence but lacking extensive reading and a collegiate training, view men and things in the closing years of the nineteenth century, in the different countries from which they write. Descriptions of what the writers have seen and experienced in traveling are often very interesting and instructive, and are none the less so because of the simplicity of the narrative, and the absence of all attempts at rhetorical effect, features which usually characterize a Mormon missionary's letter.

Then there is the love for home and its dear ones; the anxiety for the welfare of those from whom the writer is separated, and his fervent prayers for their preservation from every ill; the half solemn, half jocular reminder to his companions at home that "it may come their turn next;" the regrets over lost time, which inspire to a renewed determination to better improve the future; all these features are often found in a letter from a travelling Mormon Elder.

Then there is romance of a sort that is inimitable, in the accounts the writer gives of his adventures and the vicissitudes and experiences through which he passes. He tells of rebuffs, insults and persecutions, and of friends raised up at a moment's notice, who would risk life itself for his sake, as they some times actually do. Hardships and pleasures are recorded, one after the other, while a charm hangs over the narrative which the reader knows is not due to any art, skill or effort on the part of the writer.

There are volumes of philosophy in these letters. Some of it is homely, and much of it is profound, while a great deal of it is new to the learning of the world, and confounds the wisest men of the world. Conversations are recounted, with their questions and answers, clearly showing that in that department of human knowledge which relates to spiritual things, the teaching and training these Mormon Elders have received, together with the Spirit that accompanies them in their labors, make them the resistless champions and peerless expounders of scriptural truth.

Then there are the faith and devotion of these itinerant advocates of a despised cause. With a courage which mounts to the heroic, they subdue their pride, sacrifice self-interest, leave business, home and employment, become strangers in strange lands, and

depend for food, like the sparrows do, on the God that made them; because He has commanded them so to travel and proclaim His Gospel. Then follow the testimonies which the writers bear, of their inward personal knowledge of the divinity of the work in which they are engaged, corroborated outwardly by the miraculous healing of the sick, and many signs and wonders.

It is impossible that such writings as these, published among civilized peoples, can fail to aid in moulding the thought of the age. Such testimonies over the signatures of honest, earnest, heroic men, whose lives and sacrifices so powerfully attest their truthfulness, must, in the very nature of things, command the credence of the honest everywhere. The methods and the agents that God has chosen, are, after all, best adapted of any that could be conceived or found, for the accomplishment of his purposes.

TEMPERANCE AND THE BIBLE.

A contributor to the Logan Journal, writing about the temperance question, reviews sundry passages in the Old and New Testament bearing on the subject and then comes to this gloomy conclusion:

"After all this, can any man tell on which side of the question the Bible stands? Is it not on both sides? It is a witness as ready to swear for plaintiff as defendant; a guide pointing east and west at the same time, to the great astonishment of the bewildered traveler. Right and wrong are alternately on the sides of drinking and abstaining, and a man who seeks for information in the Bible on this subject, is farther off when done than when he began."

Deplorable, if true! For if the sacred records are so ambiguous; if they give forth such an uncertain sound upon a question of great importance, what faith can be placed in them in other respects? Fortunately the Bible is quite clear on the temperance question, as on everything that pertains to the moral conduct of human beings, and a statement to the contrary should not be permitted to pass by unnoticed in our mountain homes.

The fact is that in the Bible the evil consequences of drunkenness are set forth very strongly in the history of Noah, Lot and Belshazzar, for instance, while the virtue of total abstinence is emphasized in the history of Samson, Daniel and John the Baptist. The royal sage, in the Proverbs, lays down this rule (Prov. 31: 4-7) that strong drink is not for kings, nor for princes but for those who are in distress as a means of forgetting for the time being their misery. Was there ever a stronger argument advanced for temperance? It is here plainly stated that strong drink is not for those who have responsible positions in life, and the inference is that it unfits them for the duties of those positions.

But, besides such examples and declarations there are principles enunciated which if applied to the question under consideration leave no doubt as to what is right or wrong in the matter. One of these reads:

"Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give no occasion of stumbling, either to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the Church of God. I Cor. 10:31, 32."

Here is another:

"Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report * * * these things do. Phil. 3:8, 9."

This covers the whole question. What is to the glory of the Almighty, and what is a stumbling block to His children—the drinking traffic, or the temperance cause? Is it the former or the latter of which we can truthfully say that it is honorable, pure, lovely and of good report? There is really no ambiguity, no pointing two ways as to what is right or wrong in this matter.

PROGRESS IN KNOWLEDGE.

On Oct. 28 the semi-centennial of the founding of the Sheffield scientific school, the scientific department of Yale college, was celebrated. Dr. Daniel C. Gilman, president of John Hopkins university, delivered an address which was the leading feature of the occasion. The speaker traced the growth and development of human knowledge in its different departments during the last half of this century, and made a very interesting and impressive showing. He referred to the studies and disclosures of Darwin on the origin of species, Spencer in philosophy, and Lyell, the English paleontologist, who published a startling book intended to demonstrate scientifically the antiquity of man, and cited these writers and others as instances of the remarkable intellectual activity of the middle portion of the nineteenth century.

He gave an interesting though brief sketch of the growth of knowledge in physics, and then said:

"Different minds will place different estimates on the intellectual accomplishments of these recent years. In ordinary conversation the men of the mart will point to an Atlantic cable, an Eiffel tower, a suspension bridge, a continental express train, a man-of-war, a Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse, or a great exhibition. On the other hand scholars of the lamp, like Freeman, will give precedence to the comparative method of study now employed in history, language, politics, economics and religion. But before this assembly I venture to claim that the greatest triumphs of the intellect during the last half-century are these five contributions to human knowledge: The establishment of the principles of evolution; the establishment of the principles of conservation of energy; the development of mathematical science and its application to physics, mechanics, electricity and astronomy; the development of spectrum analysis and the consequent discoveries respecting light and electricity; and the discovery of the nature and functions of bacteria, and of their influence, for weal or woe, upon living organisms. To these may be added, perhaps, the birth of experimental psychology, a child so young that though it seems to belong to the family of Hercules its strength has not been fairly tested."

Dr. Gilman showed that about the middle of this century, which was about the time scientific knowledge began to make rapid strides, the methods and objects of education underwent a great change. Prior to that epoch, classical knowledge had been regarded as the substance of a finished education; but the change referred to brought scientific and practical knowledge to the front, and since that time developments in these departments had been rapid and wonderful.

Such an address as that of Dr. Gilman helps us to better comprehend the