

# Notes and Comments

*Edited by Joseph Jeppson*

## THE DISCIPLES OF MORMONISM

*Elder B. H. Roberts, a member of the First Council of Seventy of the Church, in writing the 1906 course of study for the seventies, proposed a new understanding of the manner in which Joseph Smith may have used divine instruments in translating the Book of Mormon. He received many letters challenging or agreeing with his theory and a lively exchange with his critics was printed in the IMPROVEMENT ERA during the first part of 1906 (Vol. IX); the following excerpts appear near the end of one of his responses (pp. 712-713).*

These latter reflections bring to mind some observations I remember to have read some time ago in the philosophical works of John Fiske respecting two classes of disciples or partisans in the world of religious and philosophical opinion, which I think with profit may be reproduced here. By the way, I see the passage occurs in the introduction of *Fiske's Work*, written by Josiah Royce, and is as follows:

Disciples and partisans, in the world of religious and of philosophical opinion, are of two sorts. There are, first, the disciples pure and simple — people who fall under the spell of a person or of a doctrine, and whose whole intellectual life thenceforth consists in their partisanship. They expound, and defend, and ward off foes, and live and die faithful to the one formula. Such disciples may be indispensable at first in helping a new teaching to get a popular hearing, but in the long run they rather hinder than help the wholesome growth of the very ideas that they defend: for great ideas live by growing, and a doctrine that has merely to be preached, over and over, in the same terms, cannot possibly be the whole truth. No man ought to be merely a faithful disciple of any other man. Yes, no man ought to be a mere disciple even of himself. We live spiritually by outliving our

formulas, and by thus enriching our sense of their deeper meaning. Now the disciples of the first sort do not live in this larger and more spiritual sense. They repeat. And true life is never mere repetition.

On the other hand, there are disciples of a second sort. They are men who have been attracted to a new doctrine by the fact that it gave expression, in a novel way, to some large and deep interest which had already grown up in themselves, and which had already come, more or less independently, to their own consciousness. They thus bring to the new teaching, from the first, their own personal contribution. The truth that they gain is changed as it enters their soul. The seed that the sower strews upon their fields springs up in their soil, and bears fruit — thirty, sixty, an hundredfold. They return to their master his own with usury. Such men are the disciples that it is worth while for a master to have. Disciples of the first sort often become, as Schopenhauer said, mere magnifying mirrors wherein one sees enlarged all the defects of a doctrine. Disciples of the second sort cooperate in the works of the Spirit; and even if they always remain rather disciples than originators, they help to lead the thought that they accept to a truer expression. They force it beyond its earlier and cruder stages of development.

I believe "Mormonism" affords opportunity for disciples of the second sort; nay, that its crying need is for such disciples. It calls for thoughtful disciples who will not be content with merely repeating some of its truths, but will develop its truths; and enlarge it by that development. Not half — not one-hundredth part — not a thousandth part of that which Joseph Smith revealed to the Church has yet been unfolded, either to the Church or to the world. The work of the expounder has scarcely begun. The Prophet planted by teaching the germ-truths of the great dispensation of the fullness of times. The watering and the weeding is going on, and God is giving the increase, and will give it more abundantly in the future as more intelligent discipleship shall obtain. The disciples of "Mormonism," growing discontented with the necessarily primitive methods which have hitherto prevailed in sustaining the doctrine, will yet take profounder and broader views of the great doctrines committed to the Church; and, departing from mere repetition, will cast them in new formulas; cooperating in the works of the Spirit, until they help to give to the truths received a more forceful expression, and carry it beyond the earlier and cruder stages of its development.