
(Reviewed by Russell R. Rich, professor of history of religion at Brigham Young University. Dr. Rich is a specialist on the schismatic groups of the Restoration.)

In September 1969, the leaders of the Reorganized LDS Church published Volume Five of their Church history. The first four volumes included the history through the year 1890 and were authored principally by Heman C. Smith, who served as both Church Historian and one of the Twelve Apostles. Volume Five is a history of the Church from 1891 through 1902, compiled by F. Henry Edwards, long-time counselor in the First Presidency. Married to Alice Smith, great granddaughter of the Prophet Joseph Smith, he is highly revered by the membership of the Reorganized Church. He was called to be an Apostle in 1922, and in 1946, as a counselor to Israel A. Smith, third president of the RLDS Church. Then in April 1966, his function was changed to that of "writing and teaching." Relieved from his duties in the First Presidency, it was possible for him to have time to compile such work as Volume Five.

Close family ties and years of devoted Church service have earned Mr. Edwards the confidence of the Reorganized Church officials as well as complete access to Church documents and records and minutes of the meetings of the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles. He has drawn heavily from *The Saints' Herald*, official organ of the Church, and is frank to admit in his preface that this volume is not an impartial record, as the material in the book was selected from a mass of material available, and that selected has been influenced by the author’s "interests and prejudices." This is
a commendable recognition and should apply to all historians, although many may not be as frank in admitting it.

Volume Five follows the same format as the four earlier volumes, considering each year separately. Consequently, each year covers a multitude of topics, many of which are also covered in succeeding years, rendering Volume Five somewhat repetitious and tedious in places. However, the book was written principally for the membership of the Reorganized Church (which increased 92% in the twelve-year period covered) and for the benefit of "the local and general ministry and . . . the local and general administrative officers." For this reason also, Mr. Edwards devoted "considerable space" to legislative and administrative matters, including much detail in some cases and even some minutia which serve well the people for whom the book was written, but detract somewhat from interest for other readers.

Occasionally throughout the volume, Mr. Edwards relates an event from the history of the LDS Church. In some cases, the reason for including this material is not clear, as its only connection seems to be that it was chronologically contemporary. In other instances, the author's purpose is plain; but the material presented is hardly in agreement with the facts available to him. For example, in regard to the Kirtland Temple Lot Suit, Mr. Edwards states, "One of the major concerns of the Saints in 1890, now that they were confirmed in the possession of the Kirtland Temple. . . ." (p. 55). This appears to be just a passing, incidental statement but is inserted for the purpose of continuing to promote the long claimed and much publicized fallacy that the Reorganized Church actually won this suit, when in reality they lost it, in spite of the fact that no one appeared against them to argue for the defense.1

On May 6, 1942, Israel Smith, a lawyer in private life, wrote a letter to the County Recorder in Painesville, Ohio, in which he requested a copy of everything pertaining to the suit, stating, "This should include originals, summons, returns, substituted service, proof of publication, etc., and all entries, including final judgement and decree."

1The reviewer has twice been to the courthouse in Painesville, Ohio, where he made photostat and typewritten copies of all of the material pertaining to this suit, including three letters from Israel Smith when he was a counselor in the First Presidency of the Reorganized Church.
Considering Mr. Edwards' close family ties, his intimate association with Israel Smith, and his being a student of Church history, it is difficult for one to understand how he could have failed to recognize that the Reorganized Church lost the suit. In the suit, the lawyer for the plaintiff put forth a set of statements as to what he desired the court to find; but, when the judge rendered his decision, he did so in these words:

And the court finds that said Smith had no title to said property except as the trustee of said Church and that no title hereto passed to the purchasers at said sale and that said parties in possession have no legal title to said property. And the court further finds that the legal title to said property is vested in the heirs of said Joseph Smith *in trust for the legal successor of said organized church* [italics are the reviewer's] and that the plaintiffs are not in possession thereof. *And thereupon the court finds as a matter of law that the plaintiff [Reorganized Church] is not entitled to the relief prayed for in its petition. And thereupon it is ordered and adjudged that this action be dismissed as the costs of the plaintiff.*

Another example is found in his discussion of the Jackson County Temple Lot Suit. Mr. Edwards does not personally say that the doctrine of polygamy had no existence until after Joseph Smith’s death; but he quotes newspaper articles that say so (page 240), which serve the purpose of promoting the idea. Yet, Mr. Edwards had full access to the private files in their Church Historian’s Office which contain an abundance of evidence showing that plural marriage was introduced by Joseph Smith. One of these references is the *Latter Day Saints’ Herald* for January 1860, volume 1, No. 1, in which articles appear that make it plain that it was Joseph Smith who introduced plural marriage. One of the articles, in speaking of Joseph Smith’s repenting of his connection with polygamy ends with the statement that “If Abraham and Jacob, by repentance can obtain salvation so can Joseph Smith.” Later referring to these articles (p. 412), he passes them off saying their “arguments had been met many times.” However, Mr. Edwards is only following the policy of the Reorganized Church, whose officers are fully aware of the facts but have never been will-

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*For an excellent analysis of the whole suit, read: Paul F. Reimann, *The Reorganized Church and the Civil Courts* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Utah Printing Co., 1961), 296 pages.*
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ing to admit to the general membership of their Church that Joseph Smith did introduce plural marriage. One can only wonder why. There are other places in the book where a vigorous defense for the “Reorganized” position is presented, and certainly this is to be expected; but one does wonder why it should be necessary to spend so much time defending their position if the leaders themselves are confident of it.

In discussing “Succession,” Joseph Smith III is quoted (p. 361) as saying, “It makes me decidedly 'tired,' to have men who think themselves to be possessed of ordinary good sense to ask me 'Did your father ordain you to be [italics are the reviewer’s] his successor?' Where [sic] they know he was living and occupying the position himself? [sic] How could a successor be ordained to the office until it was vacant?” Yet, further on (page 456), Mr. Edwards states that James Whitehead “was present in Nauvoo in 1843 when Joseph Smith, Jr. blessed his eldest son, Joseph III, to be [italics mine] his successor in the prophetic office.”

One point of particular interest to members of the LDS Church is an 1891 statement by President Joseph Smith III (p. 89) in which he said, “The attitude in which the Utah people now stand before the world calls for a judicious action on the part of the Reorganized Church. It is my conviction that there are men in those valleys who hold legitimate priesthood, and who will have to be recognized.” This is in line with later statements (page 385, 490) made at joint meetings by representatives of the Reorganized Church and Church of Christ (Temple Lot) that there may be individuals in different factions who hold the priesthood.

Better preparing the reader to understand some of the administrative problems presented, Mr. Edwards explains that a “common understanding of their distinctive functions during this period” (1891-1892) was never fully achieved between the Presidency of the Church and the Twelve Apostles. However, the statement should have also applied to other administrative bodies, as quite often the reader is given the impression that other quorums were also confused over the problems of jurisdiction and responsibility, until a condition of what one might call “organized confusion” is presented—not in the book but among the administrative quorums of the Church. One must be aware, however, that this was a formative period in
the history of the RLDS Church, causing multiple problems to arise.

Adding considerably to its usefulness, the book contains a subject index and a biographical index, both of which appear to be quite thorough. The vocabulary is well chosen and expressive, leaving no doubt in the reader's mind as to what the author is trying to say. The project appears to cover thoroughly the history of the Reorganized Church for the period designated. Mr. Edwards has succeeded in accomplishing the purposes for which he wrote the book.