

TITHE OF THE TITHES

When the prophet returned to Salt Lake from the conference in Brigham City, he left the town divided into four wards with a newly appointed bishop presiding over each. Prior to the conference the whole town had been under one bishopric. Clem's Grandfather Welch was the new bishop of the Fourth Ward. It was the practice in those days for the bishop to receive a small percent of all tithing received in kind. The tithing was brought into the tithing office yard and stored in the bishop's storehouse for distribution to the widows and the needy. Produce of all kinds, including apples and grain, potatoes, eggs, butter, and hay had to be kept from spoiling and used as needed.

After the bishop had taken his six percent, the remaining ninety-four percent was doled and distributed according to his judgment, for he was the "judge in Israel," responsible for the temporal welfare of his flock. Some bishops were overly conscientious, with a strong sense of duty to the less fortunate who looked to them for succor. John Welch was typical of this class putting the interests of others before the needs and comforts of himself and family when it came to his share of the tithing.

Although most of the saints tithed themselves consistent with the spirit of the law, there were some who schemed conformity to the letter, allowing themselves to be lese valiant than their bishop. Like Cain of old they "brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord for which the Lord had not respect." Occasionally there were bushels of culled fruit or loads of water-weighted hay. All was accepted without question and each man left to live with his own conscience.

As one of the active workers and directors of the order, Welch had means to provide in part for his family without always taking advantage of his pastoral privilege. He did rely on the tithing allotment for some produce to sustain the family, however.

Clem remembered of an evening sitting occasionally by the hearth while visiting the grandparents. The old bishop would say to his grandson, "Clemie, go over to the storehouse cellar and get a few eating apples for us, but pick out the wrinklers and the wormies. Leave the best for the widows." Similar instructions were repeated near noontime on any given day when a younger sister was sent to get potatoes. "pick out the wrinkled and the sprouters: save the best for the widows."

Some years later the thought occurred to Clem, "pshaw and confound, the Welch family has been eating rotten apples and potatoes as long as I can remember".