

Introductory Preface

THE rise and growth of Mormonism is one of the most remarkable phenomena of the nineteenth century. It is deserving of thorough investigation, whether the investigation be conducted from the point of view of the sociologist, the psychologist, or of the student of politics or of religion. But from whatever point of view it is regarded, a correct understanding of its origin and development can be gained only by the method which is applicable to all similar phases in the life of man; and this method may be described, although somewhat unsatisfactorily, as that of historical and comparative psychology. In Mormonism, as in all religions and religious communities, we have to deal only with peculiar and complex combinations of the same ideas, feelings, motives and deeds, that are common to the entire human race.

This essay of Mr. Riley is a conscientious and painstaking study of the founder of Mormonism, as one among not a few instances of the astonishing results that follow from the concurrent action of the individual man and the favoring opportunity afforded