

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWSTHE MORMON PROBLEM IN
SOUTHERN ALBERTA.

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We have witnessed during the past few years the influx of numbers of people speaking different languages, wearing different features and belonging to different nationalities, to our shores, but none perhaps of these new-comers has excited so much interest and elicited so much comment as the Mormons. The original of this sect was in Missouri from which they were driven by persecution to Utah in the year 1847. There they established themselves, making Salt Lake City their Capital, where they built a Temple at a cost of \$10,000,000. It is held that God's people in every age have been Temple builders, for this reason which applies, however, more to pagan than to Christian lands, Mormonism prides itself on its costly temples and elaborate ceremonial. Salt Lake city is the Mecca of the Mormon people. The chief characteristic of the sect is polygamy, for the practice of which they claim Divine sanction. This really is the only feature which differentiates it from the other bodies, for almost all its other doctrines have been for centuries held and taught by other Christian bodies.

The founder of the system was Joseph Smith, a man of little education, but of much natural shrewdness, who, in the year 1830 at Manchester, N.Y., organized the church as the Church of Jesus Christ, of Later Day Saints, and to whom was revealed by vision its peculiar tenets. Owing to its peculiar system of marriage, it has made rapid progress in numbers, wealth and influence in Utah, and is seeking to extend its operations to other States of the Union. The "Book of Mormon," which Joseph is believed to have received from Heaven, is regarded as of equal authority as the Bible and purports to be a history of the early settlement of North America by tribes who traced their descent from Abraham from whom also the Mormons claim to be descended. This accounts for the importance they attach to the titles of their chief officers, which are evidently borrowed from Jewish times. Mormonism, it is asserted, is not a new religion, but a "new dispensation of an old religion," that such dispensation was rendered necessary, because the whole Christain world had apostatized from Christ, and to Joseph Smith was entrusted the task of restoring to a corrupt world the Gospel which for centuries before, had been lost." It is surely difficult to conceive a more unfounded vagary. Non-Mormon students and writers who have made the matter a special study, positively affirm that the so-called "Book of Mormon" was originally a manuscript written by one Spaulding, in the form of a religious romance, which Joseph Smith fraudulently got possession of and having added a few Biblical phrases, palmed it off as a revelation from Heaven.

It is evident that Mormonism as set forth by Mormon writers and teachers affects to be ultra-cosmopolitan—a religion for the world, the better to secure universal recognition. But while it teaches some of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity, it adds teachings of its own, so alien to the spirit of the Gospel that we cannot but regard it, if not as absolute error, yet as a gross corruption of the truth. It is an eclectic system, combining elements from pagan, Jewish

and Christain sources. These are some of the characteristic tenets of the people who have taken up their residence in Southern Alberta; 20 years ago, they emigrated to this land. For years before that time they had been, as they believed, an oppressed and persecuted people, and it was probably to make for themselves a home where they might live in peace, which prompted them to take this step. The district in which they have settled covers an area of about 100 miles in length and 10 in breadth, embracing one of the most fertile parts of the province. They number 8,000. In the "Mormon belt" there are five chief towns, Tabor, Lethbridge, Raymond, Magarth, and Cardston, in all of which except Lethbridge and more recently Tabor, the Mormon element predominates.

Evidences of Mormon industry and enterprise are apparent on every hand, for despite their peculiar and to many people, objectionable views, they have proven themselves to be excellent pioneers and colonizers. They may be said to be the first to introduce the present system of irrigation into the country, a system which has gone far to transform the arid plains of Southern Alberta into a fruitful garden. The Beet sugar factory at Raymond, with its output of 5,000,000 pounds this last year, was established and is controlled by a Mormon company. As beet growers and farmers, they take a foremost place, and it must be conceded by their energy and enterprise, have done excellent work in the material development of the country. The Mormons moreover, are on the whole, a moral people. Plural marriages, even in Utah, are on the decline, and in Southern Alberta can hardly be said to exist. They have publicly declared their desire to be a law-abiding people; they admire Canadian institutions, are rapidly assimilating and exhibiting all the qualities which go to make good citizens; and we have reason to believe that the narrowness and exclusiveness which their isolation in the past has produced, shall gradually disappear and by social intercourse, and the lessening influence of schools and churches, they shall broaden out and ultimately be led to unite their forces with other Christain bodies in a common warfare against the crying evils of our time, so that Canada shall become not only materially but morally the gainer for their coming.

As regards the spiritual results of the Mormon system, we cannot write so certainly or hopefully, for the system is materialistic. It materializes God, emphasizes the material side of life, caters to the sensuous, while, contrary to Paul's idea, its "Kingdom of God" in the future, as in the present, is to be a kingdom of "flesh and blood." For this reason we regard the establishment of non-Mormon churches, in the "Mormon belt," emphasizing the more spiritual side of Christianity and showing how God still reveals Himself to His Church and people and the test of such revelation, as deserving of every encouragement, and hail with satisfaction every evidence of spiritual progress. In all the towns to which we have referred we have non-Mormon churches or preaching stations, where the attendance is increasing and the interest deepening, and doubtless in the near future these churches shall make their influence felt in moulding public sentiment and impregnating the incoming settlers with Christain principles.

In Tabor and Raymond there has been during the past summer, a large influx of families, chiefly from Great Britain, who have made an important addition to our non-Mormon congregations. In Magrath some 30 families are expected to come in, in early spring, which shall materially change the ecclesiastical complexion of the town. We have as yet, no church in this town, our weekly service being held in a school-room, for the use of which, we are indebted to Mormon trustees. Our people, however, have just recently purchased a site for a church and with the Home Mission grant, which we hope to receive, we trust that ere long, this pressing need shall be supplied, which we are convinced shall give a decided impetus to the cause of Christ in that community. In the prosecution of this work, our supreme aim should be not to antagonize, but to cultivate, not to inflame passion, but to stimulate thought, not to proselytize, but to bring men to Christ. The best way to destroy error, is to proclaim the truth. Experience has shown the wisdom of seeking out some common ground, some truths in which we all can agree, and then proceeding by appeals, to reason and intelligence to the desired conclusion. By this method prejudice is disarmed, misunderstanding removed and the mind unconsciously prepared to receive the truth. Persecution is always a tactical blunder, as well as an offence against the principle of the Gospel. The Gospel of Christ disclaims the use of force. Love has always been and still is, its most powerful weapon. The Spirit of God is "a spirit of power and love and a sound mind."

Meantime by "teaching the truth in love," by a spirit of charity and forbearance, by showing the superior fruits of a genuine Christianity, as seen in the daily lives of its professors, the Mormon problem would be simplified and ultimately solved, and the time brought nearer when, unlikely though it may now seem, negotiations would be opened up for the admission of even the Mormon church into the union which is now being considered; and in a grand united Christendom the Mormon prophets' dream and the Christian's prayer would some day find an answer. "The Manse," Raymond, Alta., 21st Jan., 1908.

Keeping pace with the growth of Sudbury, the nickel centre in Ontario, is the development of the Presbyterian Church there. St. Andrew's Church, which is under the ministerial care of the Rev. Dr. Bayne, formerly of Pembroke, Ont., is especially flourishing, and at the annual meeting a few days ago the attendance was the largest on record. Fifty-eight families have been added since the induction of Dr. Bayne within a year past, almost doubling the congregation, and the services have been so crowded that it has been necessary, as mentioned some time ago in these columns, to hold the evening gatherings in the Opera House. The board of management elected are the following: S. E. Wright (secretary-treasurer), A. D. Meldrum, R. R. McKessock, D. M. Brodie, John McVittie, J. F. Black, and G. F. Sinclair; auditors, G. E. Buchanan and R. A. MacPherson. The week evening meeting is a special feature with Dr. Bayne, and he has solved the problem of how to get the people out on Wednesday evenings.