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IN DEFENCE OF THE MORMONS

Strong Criticism of the Action of the Presbyterian General Assembly

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("JANEY CANUCK")

THE discussion with regard to Mormonism and polygamy will not down. The subject seems so important that early last summer the "Canadian Courier" sent a special commissioner to Southern Alberta to write a series of articles on Mormonism in Canada. That commissioner was Miss Nan Moulton, a well known Winnipeg journalist. Her instructions were to describe things as she saw them, and to speak on behalf of the Mormons or condemn them as the evidence warranted. She found them a peaceful, progressive and hard-working people, but she also discovered that in their colleges and churches they were preaching polygamy. As for the practice of polygamy, she found that if it were being done it was carefully hidden. On the whole her investigation made her feel that Mormonism, as a religion, was a menace to Christianity if not to Canadian civilization as a whole.

The Presbyterian Church has taken up the fight and is encouraging opposition to Mormonism as a religion. As recently as October 6th a lecture on the dangers of Mormonism was delivered in a Presbyterian church in Ottawa, by a man who claims that his father was a Mormon with two wives. He stated that the Mormons have not and cannot stop polygamy. "To do so would be to acknowledge that Joseph F. Smith is a false prophet."

The following article, by a well-known Alberta writer, living in the city of Edmonton, presents the other side of the case. Mrs. Murphy is as good a witness as Nan Moulton. Their conflicting testimony only goes to show that this is a peculiar case and one well worthy serious study.

THE recent, ungenerous, hasty and ill-considered action of the Presbyterian General Assembly of Canada in regard to the Mormon Colony of the Province of Alberta has been received in Western Canada with extreme disapprobation.

The Assembly has placed itself on record in favour of an active campaign against the Mormons. Mark you! not because the Mormons are law-breakers (for they are probably the most law-abiding community in Western Canada), but because the principles of their religion is not wholly to the taste of the General Assembly. This is the identical spirit of the Galilean's self-willed disciples who said of a certain miracle worker, "We forbade him because he followed not with us."

Perhaps I made error in saying "the identical spirit." Substituting the word "Mormon" for "Carthage," the spirit is rather that of Cicero, who ended all his speeches with the declaration *Delenda est Carthago*—"Carthage must be destroyed."

He who runs may read that the General Assembly has been drawn into a regrettable and untenable position, and has need to whistle in its dogs with as much despatch as possible. The position it has assumed is not consonant with the spirit of Protestantism. Not many years have passed since six women who embraced the Roman Catholic religion were expelled from their country by the Swedish government. It is markworthy that in England, the most pronounced opponents of Catholicism drew up an address protesting against this intolerant action of the Swedes, which address was signed by the Archbishop of Canterbury. In it the expatriation of the women was denounced as an outrage on the first principles of Protestantism. As a result of this address, the women were recalled and the Swedish law straightway amended. As this case would seem to be analogous, in some respects, to the campaign the Assembly has declared itself in favour of, I here submit it for their respectful consideration. Too many people have had to lay down their lives for the vindication of liberty of opinion in matters religious for us to hold the prin-

ciple lightly, and it should not be necessary for any Protestant body to be so reminded.

Neither is it consonant with the national spirit of Canada. Canadians must not array church against church, or direct feuds against those under our own roof-tree. Such a course is the sowing of dragon's teeth that will presently arise and rend the national life. Without our gates, we have welcomed all classes, all nationalities, all creeds, irrespective of their political or religious opinions, the only act of disability being against the Chinese. The sole restriction we lay upon those who have come into our country is that they shall implicitly obey the laws. Should they fail in this particular, it is the duty of the State to punish them and not that of any church.

Before being allowed access to Canada, the Mormons agreed with the Federal Government to obey the Canadian law by abstaining from the practice of polygamy. If they have failed in the keeping of this agreement, the church has merely to bring the instances to the attention of the Hon. C. R. Mitchell, of Edmonton, the Attorney-General of the Province of Alberta, who must see to it that the charges are investigated by the Royal North-West Mounted Police.

Have the Mormons kept this agreement and obeyed the law?

For answer, I shall quote from a brochure on Mormonism which has been issued by the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church. "Polygamy," it says, "has not yet openly shown its hand in Canada. Canada's marriage laws are even more strict than the education laws, and the Mormon settlers are generally inclined to respect them. . . . There are many of the younger race of Mormons who will speak out frankly both against the doctrine and its practice, but so long as the Mormon Church refuses to disavow its belief in polygamy, and keep the doctrine as a divine revelation in its sacred books, so long Canada has a right to feel anxious, lest in sheltering this curious sect, she may be nourishing something which may later become a menace to her own peace."

Hearken now to that! These people are not polygamists, but some of them believe in it, hence Canada should not shelter them because, in a problematic future, there is a vague possibility of their practising it.

But why does the General Assembly object to the Mormons? Even the Rev. Dr. McLaren, of Vancouver, who is the leader of the campaign, has confessed that, as a rule, they are a sober and industrious people. No settlers that have come into Canada have been nearly so prosperous in the same period. The Woman's Home Missionary Society have acknowledged this. They write that "The Mormon system of tithing labour for the benefit of the community has made them among the most profitable settlers industrially, that any country could have. Their towns go up rapidly; their farms are admirably managed and both alike are prosperous in a wonderful degree. In Alberta, they are profitably growing wheat and fruit, making beet sugar, and stock-raising, and such good farmers are they, that they have once or twice secured the best prices ever known in Southern Alberta."

Why, then, do the Presbyterians object to them as residents?

Their chief objection would seem to arise from the fact that the Church has not been successful in making converts among them. Their mission to the Mormons has been a flat failure and the Church is now in the position of having to support expen-

sive and unprofitable posts or else retire in humiliation from a field upon which they entered with a very considerable assurance.

My proof of this assertion is to be found in the same brochure quoted above: "To offset the spread of this alien creed," it further states, "the Christian churches of Canada have established churches right in the heart of the Mormon settlements. Our own Church has two mission fields in Cardston and Raymond, with outposts. The work is among the most difficult which the Church has undertaken, the Mormon influence is so overwhelming and the Gentile population so small and so isolated. Yet there is encouragement in the fact that there have been some converts from Mormonism."

The reader may urge at this point that the Woman's Missionary Society may not be sufficiently posted to express an opinion on the matter. The point would not be well made, but, allowing it to stand, I would turn to a paper read by the Rev. A. N. Gordon, of Lethbridge, several years ago before the General Assembly of the Church. Speaking of his pastorate at Raymond, Mr. Gordon says, "Never in all those nine months was I invited into a Mormon house."

This does not sound hospitable, but need not necessarily be urged as a serious plea against the Mormons. It is equally possible that the Mormon elders were not invited into Presbyterian homes. Indeed, it is not at all likely.

Going on to speak of the Presbyterian mission, Mr. Gordon says, "Men appointed to such work must be ready in the Western phrase 'to stay with it.' Some may doubt whether we as a Church should have undertaken the heavy Mormon work. All must agree that having begun and carried it on for years we must not drop it now."

Ever since the Mormons came to Canada, they have, from time to time, been accused of polygamy. It has been charged that they were bringing women from the British Isles and Europe, ostensibly as relatives, but actually as wives. This may be so, but here I wish to emphasize in the most robust manner possible that the charge has never been substantiated—not in a single case.

Now, all may be fair in love and war, but this by no means holds true concerning religion. If we fight, it must be on the square and not like Milton's angels with "villainous saltpetre." I hold it a cowardly act to defame any woman, or any community of women, on the safe but slippery phrase, "It is said." In this view I am supported by all fair, clean-minded Presbyterians, and am persuaded that even those of the Church who have been led into an absurd and illogical position by sectarian interests, or by misinformation, will ultimately come to accept this view of the matter.

Because of certain representations made to the Canadian National Council of Women, I was, two years ago, requested as Convenor on Laws for the Better Protection of Women and Children of the Edmonton Local Council, to make enquiries into the status of women among the Albertan Mormons. At that time one of the documents placed in my hands was a paper on the Canadian Mormons, read before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. In it this clause occurs: "The second woman in a household is always the wife's cousin, or friend, or visitor, or her presence is explained in some other way."

It is evident that the writer of this paper had reason to change his opinions, for, when written to at a later period by me, and asked if this "second woman" became the mother of children, he replied as follows: "I should certainly say it was the habit of the Mormons to introduce a second wife under the guise of a friend, cousin, or servant. Most of the Mormons probably keep the marriage law as