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THE MORMONS AND THEIR PROPHET

Messrs Editors- Permit me in your columns to spread before the public what I consider an authentic account of the new sect called Mormons,and of its acknowledged PROPHET, Joseph Smith. As I was ascending the Ohio river, on the 18th of April last, among my fellow passengers was the Rev. William Smith of Nauvoo,a Mormon preacher,and brother to Joseph Smith,the Mormon prophet. Curiosity led me to make many inquiries,all of which he promptly answered,and apparently with great ingenuousness. I then retired and committed to writing the substance of his statements. The next day, I read to him what I had written. He pointed out one or two slight mistakes, added some things not before mentioned,which I noted down,and he then pronounced the whole correct. That entry in my Journal,with some enlargement to render it more intelligible, is as follows:

Joseph Smith,now 35 years of age,is the eldest of five brothers,all born at Norwich,in the state of Vermont. The family originated in the south part of New-England,but my informant could not tell precisely where. In the year 1816 or 1817,the whole family removed to the state of New-York, and lived sometimes in Palmyra,and sometimes in the adjacent town of Manchester. They were in rather low circumstances,and followed farming. About the year 1823,there was a revival of religion in that region,and Joseph was one of several hopeful converts. The others were joining,some one church, and some another,in that vicinity,but Joseph hesitated between the different denominations. While his mind was perplexed with this subject he prayed for divine direction,and afterwards was awaked one night by an extraordinary vision. The glory of the Lord filled the chamber with a dazzling light, and a glorious angel appeared to him,conversed with him,and told him that he was a chosen vessel of the Lord to make known true religion. The next day he went into the field,but he was unable to work,his mind being oppressed by the remembrance of the vision. He returned to the house,and soon after sent for his father and brothers from the field;and then,in the presence of the family--my informant one of them--he related all that had occurred. They were astounded,but not altogether incredulous. After this, he had other similar visions,in one of which the existence of certain metalic plates was revealed to him,and their location described--about three miles off,in a pasture ground. The next day he went alone to the spot,and by digging discovered the plates in a sort of rude stone box. They were eight or ten inches long,less in width,about the thickness of panes of glass,and together made a pile of about five or six inches high. They were in a good state of preservation,had the appearance of gold,and bore inscriptions in strange characters on both sides. He brought them home,but was unable to read them. He afterwards made a fac simile of some parts of the inscription,and sent it to professor Anthon of New-York city. The professor pronounced the characters to be ancient Hebrew corrupted,and the language to be degenerate Hebrew,with a mixture of Egyptian. He could decypher only one entire word. After this,Joseph Smith was supernaturally assisted to read and to understand the inscription;and he was directed to translate a part of it. The pages which he was not to translate were found to be sealed together,so that he did not even read them and learn their contents. With an assistant to correct his English,he translated so much of the inscription as now makes the Book of Mormon. He kept the plates a long time in his chamber,and after translating from them,he repeatedly showed them to his parents and to other friends. But my informant said that he had never seen them. At length he was directed to bury the plates again in the same manner--which he accordingly did.

The Book of Mormon is Mr. Smith's professed translation of the inscription on the plates;and it bears the name of MORMON,because a Jewish christian of the 4th century,bearing the name of Mormon,is the alleged

author of the inscription. The book is historical. It gives account of a company of Jewish christians of the tribe of Joseph, who left Judea by divine direction, a little before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, under the guidance of Lehi, their priest and prophet. This little band, after wandering long and far, came at last to America, and planted themselves in the western part of the present state of New York. So long as their christian characters remained unsullied, they were prosperous; but when their piety degenerated, they became split into parties, were assailed by their heathen neighbors, conquered, and either exterminated or enslaved, and thus ceased to be a christian people. Of these divine judgments upon them they were forewarned by their prophets, but without effect. Before their overthrow in the 4th century, Mormon, their priest and prophet, was directed to write their history, to inscribe it on plates, and to bury those plates in the place where, in 1827, a revelation guided Joseph Smith to search for them and to find them.

Mr. Smith, with no great difficulty, persuaded his parents, his four brothers, and a few others, to acknowledge his prophetic character, and to embrace his views; but from the mass of people he met with ridicule and opposition. At the end of three or four years he could number only a hundred followers. Afterwards he was more successful; and now--A D 1841--he has perhaps 15,000 adherents. A large body of them reside at Nauvoo, in the state of Illinois, where Mr. Smith himself lives and has fixed the the center and capital of the sect. The rest are scattered over the United States, and in Europe. Three heralds of the sect are now laboring in England, Scotland and Ireland, where they meet with much success. About one hundred English Mormons lately arrived at Nauvoo. As soon as the sect began to multiply, Mr. Smith was guided by a revelation to organize the new church. The whole body is under three presiding elders, of whom Joseph Smith is the chief and the prophet. Subdivisions of the sect have their presiding elders, and single churches or associated bands have theirs. The people also assemble, and have a voice in all ecclesiastical matters. They have annual and other meetings for business. At Nauvoo a large temple, more than 100 feet long, and 4 stories high, is now building. It is intended for the accomodation of the yearly meetings of the sect, and for other public uses, in particular, for a high school, in which preachers may be educated. The sect has numerous traveling preachers, called Helpers; of whom my informant is one. He is now thirty years old; and he appeared to be a sincere believer in the book of Mormon, and an honest, upright man, yet deficient in education. The sect do not throw all their property into a common stock, but each man enjoys the fruits of his own industry. For public objects taxes are assessed. The general rule is a tithe of each man's income.

In their religious doctrines, or creed, the Mormons agree perfectly with the Campbellites, except in two particulars. First: They regard the Book of Mormon as a true history, and an inspired work. It is not in their view a new Bible, or a book which is to introduce a new dispensation, and to supersede the use of the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It is only another inspired volume, having for its chief aim to record the history of those Jewish Christians who wandered to America and became lost in the 4th century. Yet being written at an early period of the church, and by an inspired man, it throws additional light upon the Bible, and upon primitive Christianity, which last it is the sole aim of the Mormon preachers to restore. Hence they hold the Bible in profound reverance; from it they ordinarily take their texts for sermons; and its true meaning they profess to unfold. Yet the Book of Mormon they believe sheds new light on some subjects which are not fully explained in the Bible: for example, the mode of baptism is not clearly ststed in the New Testament; but the Book of Mormon shows that it should always be by immersion.

Secondly: From the Campbellites the Mormonites differ by believing that all real Christians receive the Holy Ghost,with all those spiritual gifts which are mentioned in the New Testament. They likewise believe that inspired prophets have appeared in the church quite down to modern times: that Joseph Smith is such a prophet: that he has divine revelations from time to time,by which he is guided in this revival of pure primitive Christianity.

Such,for substance,were the statements of the Rev. William Smith. I offer no comments upon the alleged facts; but merely say,that I have aimed to report these facts truly,without any coloring whatever.

JAMES MURDOCK.

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(This is the version of this article as it was reproduced from the Congregational Observer, in the Peoria Register And North-Western Gazetteer of September 3, 1841, with corrections made by Dale Morgan, to make it check with the original in the Observer.)