

THE NEED FOR HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

"READ THIS MORMON PROPHECY," pleaded the handbill of the "Mormons for Wallace" organization of San Diego, California, during the recent national election campaign. The "prophecy," allegedly spoken by Joseph Smith, Jr., on June 19, 1844, was credited to Duane S. Crowther's book, *Prophecy—Key to the Future* (1962) and appeared on the handbill as follows:

There will be two great political parties in this country. One will be called the Republican, and the other the Democrat Party. These two parties will go to war and out of these two parties will spring another party which will be the Independent American Party. . . .

The same "prophecy" appeared in *The Independent American*, February 14, 1968, (New Orleans, Louisiana), under the title, "A Prophecy Soon to Come True?" Since then its appearance in other publications has raised the question of its authenticity. The Crowther book used *The Life Story of Mosiah Lyman Hancock* (page 29) as the source of this "prophecy." A typescript of a copy of Hancock's *Life Story*, filed at Brigham Young University Library, Provo, Utah, has been photocopied and now is available for study at the RLDS Archives in Independence, Missouri.

The Life Story of Mosiah Lyman Hancock informs us that he was born April 9, 1834, at Kirtland, Ohio. He began writing his *Life Story* in 1901. In reporting the "prophecy" of Joseph Smith of June 1844 he was looking back fifty-seven years to when he was ten years old. No other known source corroborates this 1844 event as reported by Hancock. His version of the "prophecy" (494 words) attributes to Joseph Smith many more statements than appeared on the handbill or in *The Independent American*, or in Crowther's book. Hancock (*Life Story*, pages 28-29) credits Joseph Smith with predicting:

1. The exodus of Saints from Nauvoo across Iowa to the Great Salt Basin.
2. The Mormon settlement of communities westward to the Pacific Ocean.
3. Government "persecution" of Utah Mormons practicing polygamy.
4. The flight of many of these polygamous Saints to Mexico.
5. Gross economic inequities within the ranks of the Utah Mormon church.
6. The advent of the Republican Party.

7. Conflict between the two major parties; the rise of the Independent American Party.
8. The depletion of the U.S.A.'s resources in foreign wars.
9. Invasion and nearly total defeat of the U.S.A. by foreign powers, but the ultimate rescue of the nation by the elders of the Utah Mormon church.

The Life Story of Mosiah Lyman Hancock (pages 1-77) contains many interesting parallels between these nine predictions of Joseph Smith and Hancock's memory of the experiences, the despair and the hopes of his own life. For example, match the following nine items with the foregoing nine "predictions":

1. Hancock had made the trek from Nauvoo through Iowa to the Great Basin, 1848.
2. He had helped establish settlements in southern Utah and in Arizona.
3. Government officials had "persecuted" Hancock as a polygamist.
4. He had witnessed the flight of polygamous Saints into Mexico.
5. Hancock, poverty-stricken, wrote bitterly about the power of the wealthy in the church.
6. By 1901 he was no doubt aware of the birth of the Republican Party (1854).
7. The two major parties had often "done battle" since Hancock's boyhood. By 1901 many third parties had come and gone, e.g., the Independent National Party of 1876, founded by poor, embittered farmers.
8. Writing in 1901, Hancock could easily recall the bitter public controversy over the U.S.A.'s part in the Spanish-American War, 1898.
9. These sentiments had long been expressed by Utah Mormon leaders.

All right, history buffs—you may wish to consider these questions: Did Joseph Smith, Jr. really "prophecy" on these weighty matters to a ten-year-old boy in the family carpentry shop in 1844? Or did Mosiah Lyman Hancock, with certainty and for deep, personal causes create, in this recital of his own history in 1901, an 1844 "event" that gave him vindication, comfort, and meaning in the closing years of a painful life? In answering these you will be deciding what, if any, meaning this "event" has for you. In San Diego in 1968 the biases of some gave this "event" great meaning. Quite the opposite may prevail elsewhere. How vital is the need for historical perspective!

Saints Herald Feb. 1969