THE LATTER DAY SAINTS AS A FACTOR IN ILLINOIS HISTORY

BY

ELLEN OLIVIA CARLSON

Filed with the Dean
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS
OF
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS
1925
CHAPTER V

THE GROWTH OF ANTI-MORMONISM.

The surprising growth and development of the Mormons in their community and environs was not to go on uninterrupted. Not only did outside conditions and forces arise and cause their disruption, but internal dissection added to the disturbances and ultimately resulted in the expulsion of the sect from Illinois.

We have viewed the political activities and relations of the Mormons, and have seen that differences between them and their neighbors had a decidedly political character. Although the beginning of the trouble of the Mormons in Illinois was their interference, as a body, in politics; and although politics may be said to have been the most outstanding cause for disturbances, there are other causes which cannot be neglected. Whether these latter were real or not, is not the important issue, for they are none the less important because they affected the course of events. It is difficult to say that certain accusations were false or true; but the fact that really matters is that the people then believed them to be true, and their belief affected the subsequent turn of events and was a factor in swelling the public excitement.

It is a fact that from the hour the inhabitants of Nauvoc organized under their charter with its unprecedented privileges, established their court under the real or assumed powers contained in their charter, and organized their Legion into a separate and distinct military corps, the jealousy and

1 Pease, "The Frontier State", p. 344
band of his followers, called Danites, who were sworn to obey him as God, and to do his commands, murder and treason not excepted; that he had instituted an order in the church whereby those who composed it were pretended to be sealed up to eternal life, against all crimes save the shedding of innocent blood or consenting to it; that this order was told that no blood was innocent blood, except that of the members of the church; that those two orders were the ministers of his vengeance and instruments of his intolerable tyranny, which he had established over his people, and which he was about to extend over the neighboring country.

It is known that fugitives from justice from other portions of the Union fled to Nauvoo, were received by Joe into the Church, and were screened from arrest when the officers of the law sought them. Witness the case of Jeremiah Smith, indicted in the District of Columbia, for swindling the Government out of three thousand dollars, who, after diligent search, was traced to Nauvoo and when arrested by the Deputy Marshal of the District, was taken from him by Joe, and discharged. Thieves and fugitives from justice were protected by the city ordinance which forbade an officer of justice to search for persons or property unless the writ had first been endorsed by Joe and executed by the City Marshal. Thus, they remained in security.

We cannot charge the whole community of Mormons with possessing hearts as vicious and depraved, as those the two Smiths are shown to have had. There were many poor, unfortunate, deluded people there, who were naturally honest and law-abiding, and who.

1 Gov. Ford’s Message, Dec. 21, 1844, Reports to the Fourteenth Assembly, p. 69
2 See pp. 26-27 above
3 Jackson, “A Narrative…”, p. 19
under the influence of good example and upright leaders, would have acted well their part in society. That class, however, was to a great extent uneducated, and easily made the dupes of Smith. They obeyed Joe implicitly. On the other hand, there were a large number of most hardened and abandoned men in the community, who went there, assumed the garb of religion, became the confidential friends of the Prophet, and all for the purpose of acquiring an easy livelihood by dishonest means. Small wonder then, that the neighbors should feel that any sect, or body of men, confiding in such leaders, and following implicitly their directions, could not be other than a scourge to any community.

As early as 1841, charges of immorality, polygamy, and harboring thieves appeared against the Mormons. The former came out largely in exposes written by members who had left the community, and the latter came out through experiences of the neighbors. The most frequent charge against the Mormons was that the rank and file were prone to appropriate the property of their sentient neighbors to their own use. That this did exist among them, to a greater extent than among outsiders, can be clearly demonstrated, though denied on their part.

There were two excuses or causes for this propensity. One was the extreme poverty of many of them, dragged about, as many of them had been, from place to place, and robbed of their scanty means, to pamper their leaders; and the other was, the teachings of the leaders themselves. It is not to be supposed that the prophet or many of his numerous missionaries meant to

1 Geo. S. Davis, "An Authentic Account...," p. 36
2 Pease, "The Frontier State," p. 344
inculcate theft; but they did teach that "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof," and that the Gentile possessions were soon to fall into the hands of his Saints for an inheritance, and "we are his Saints." Many of the more ignorant among them interpreted these teachings too literally, and anticipated the time when this event was to take place. To them there was no moral offence in anticipating God's time by stealing, if opportunity offered. And it is a well-known fact, that the leaders and officials would generally endeavor to screen those charged with the offence, under the pretext that it was outside persecution.

The fact that these charges of theft had become so frequent, and were evidently having effect in the community, led the authorities to take action upon them. The prophet himself issued an affidavit, November 20, 1841, at Nauvoo, undoubtedly in his own language, sworn to by Mayor J. C. Bennett, stating that he had not encouraged stealing. On the contrary, he stated, "I disfellowship the perpetrators of all such abominations." 1

Two Mormon officers, David Smith and Joseph Holbrook were actually tried for theft after that affidavit. They were punished by having their names "stricken from the rank roll" of the Legion. After the trial the culprit officers heaved big sighs of relief, and escaped the legal punishment due to their crimes; while the people of the county put extra locks on their doors, and pursuers were set at defiance within the Mormon stronghold. 2 Because of the protection given, it was not long before thefts were committed in broad daylight before the eyes of the farmers.

1 Gregg, "The Prophet of Palmyra," pp. 189-190
2 Ibid, pp. 194-5
themselves, who were powerless to prevent depredations. ¹

Travellers through the vicinity were warned of the Mormon lawlessness and stealing. One tale they were told was of a farmer who had a pair of valued horses. The Mormons stole one, so the farmer took the mate and rode to Nauvoo to get the other back. He returned home on foot, as the Mormons had stolen his other horse.²

Rumors were circulated to the effect that Joe Smith had established a bogus factory in Nauvoo, for the manufacture of counterfeit money; that he had announced a revelation from heaven, sanctioning polygamy by some kind of spiritual-wife system; and that Smith and many of his followers had practiced upon the precepts of this revelation by seducing a large number of women. It was also asserted that Joe Smith was in alliance with the Indians of the Western Territories, and had obtained over them such a control, that in case of a war, he could command their assistance, to murder his enemies.³ The first and last of these rumors were undoubtedly groundless, but there is too much evidence for the second one to entirely discredit it.

Fortunately for those who were active in creating excitement, there were some truths which gave countenance to some of these accusations. It had been sufficiently proved in a proceeding at Carthage that Joe Smith had sent a band of his followers to Missouri to kidnap two men who were witnesses against a member of his church, then in jail, and about to be tried on a charge of larceny. It was also a notorious fact that he had as-

¹ Pooley, "The Settlement of Illinois", p. 519
² Hubbard, "Family Memories", p. 98
³ Ford's Message, Reports to Fourteenth Assembly, p. 70
saulted and severely beaten an officer of the county, for an alleged nonperformance of his duty, at a time when that officer was just recovering from severe illness. It is a fact also, that he stood indicted for the crime of perjury in swearing to an accusation for murder. It is a fact also, that his Municipal Court, of which he was chief justice, by writ of habeas corpus had frequently discharged individuals accused of high crimes and offences against the laws of the State; and on one occasion had discharged a person accused of swindling the Government of the United States, and who had been arrested by process of the federal courts, thereby giving countenance to the report that he obstructed the administration of justice, and had set up a government at Nauvoo, independent of the laws and government of the State. This idea was further corroborated in the minds of the people, by the fact that the people of Nauvoo had petitioned the Thirteenth Session of Congress for a territorial government, to be established at Nauvoo, and to be independent of the State government.  

1 The Saints were not slow to refute the stories against them and their slanderous and sarcastic manner and language makes one doubt the truth of them. In almost every case the reason given by them for the circulation of evil stories was that their enemies used them as weapons to "stop the march of truth, to raise prejudice in the minds of the people," and to bring upon them "the wrath and indignation of a people who knew nothing respecting them," save what "they learned through the medium of a corrupt press." People were "jealous of their progress," or they were "persecuting them for righteousness sake." Certain statements

1 Gov. Ford's Message, Reports to Fourteenth Assembly, p. 70
against them were merely "the climax of iniquity," and gave evidence of "corruption the most foul, and a heart as black as sin and the devil can make it." Some of the stories were so dreadful, according to their editor in London, that he termed them "a tissue of lies, got up by a malignant and depraved heart for the worst and most diabolical purpose," which made the editor "blush for humanity." ¹

Antagonism to the sect did not culminate in mere animosity — there was action and organization against them, which augmented with time, and made it absolutely impossible for the Saints to remain in the vicinity.

As early as Dec. 10, 1842, the Mormon opposition had resolved itself into legislative action. On Dec. 10, a resolution was made in the Senate for the repeal of the Nauvoo city charter and the Nauvoo Agricultural and Manufacturing Association charter. The preamble indicated that the people of Illinois had become exasperated at the universal and impolitic powers granted the Mormons by the previous Legislature. The Mormons were said to have openly set at defiance the laws of Illinois by refusing to surrender Joe Smith upon the requisition of Governor Ford, by arresting Smith from the hands of the officers of Illinois authorized to take him by legal process; and discharging him by a pretended trial before the Municipal Court of Nauvoo.

¹ From "Times & Seasons", June 15, 1841, in Millennial Star, Vol. II, pp. 74-75
² Senate Journal, Thirteenth Assembly, p. 55
CHAPTER VI.

THE MORMON WAR.

During the winter of 1843 and spring of 1844, several prominent leaders in the Church grew more and more dissatisfied. The breach between them and Smith seemed to the extent of organizing a new church, and one was instituted in April and May, with William Law as president. (He did not claim any prophetic attainments, however.) It was decided to establish a newspaper in the city as their organ, and with it attack the prophet and the leaders of the church. Accordingly, in May, a printing press and materials arrived by steamer from St. Louis, were landed, hauled into the city, and set up without hesitation. This event caused great excitement, however, both in the city and in the neighboring country.

At the same time, Mr. Francis Higham, one of the seceders, began civil action in the Hancock Circuit Court against Smith for slander. When the capias issued was served by the sheriff, instead of entering bail for his appearance, Smith obtained a writ of habeas corpus from the city court and was set at liberty.

President Law boldly denounced the prophet from the platform in the city; while the other seceders were busy among the people in and out of the city.

The newspaper was called "The Nauvoo Expositor," and its purposes, as set forth in the prospectus, which was circulated extensively, were:

"The unconditional repeal of the city charter; to correct the abuses of the city power; to advocate disobedience to political revelations."

Its purpose was to oppose the prophet Smith, and reform the abuses of which he was claimed to be the author.

The paper was issued under date of June 7, 1844. It accused the Smiths of embezzling church funds, of enticing immigrants too hastily in order to sell them property at exorbitant prices and of then leaving others to provide them with work to support themselves. It denounced the activity of the church in politics and the procedures in freeing by writs of habeas corpus issued in the municipal court, persons arrested by the United States Marshal. More damaging still, it again accused the Smiths of the deliberate seduction of women and the secret practice of plural marriage.1

The first issue of the Expositor was its final one. It was issued on Friday, and on Saturday, June 8, the city council was in session considering what should be done. They deliberated all that day and all of Monday, and at six o'clock in the evening passed a resolution declaring the Expositor a nuisance, and instructing the Mayor to cause it to be abated — which he did about eight o'clock the same evening.2

It does not appear that any person was tried, or that any of the owners of the property had notice of the proceeding, or were permitted to defend in any way. No jury was called or sworn, and most of the witnesses were permitted to give their evidence without being under oath. There existed no general ordinance in the city defining such a press to be a nuisance; and the Common Council possessed legislative authority only, and could under no pretense sit in judgment as a court.3

1 Pease, "The Frontier State", p. 361
2 Gregg, "Prophet of Palmyra", p. 242
3 Ford, in Reports to Fourteenth Assembly, p. 68