

AMMON, THE SON OF MOSIAH.

Religion must be active, alive aggressive or it has no use in the world, its adherents must be living embodiments of its creed or they are worse than useless. A shallow, ring-striped, milk and water faith, with self-coddling, kid-gloved professors never moved the world nor brought salvation to human souls. The deep-seated, honest faith of the subjects of King Mosiah was made of sterner stuff than nineteenth century compromises between pseudo-science and dried up morality, popularly esteemed as Christianity, and the lion-hearted Ammon was a being of far different stamp to the majority of the bouidoir seeking, mamby-pamby, "plate passing" professors of the jangling creeds that compose "Mystery Babylon." There are strong characters in history that we reverence, there are spiritual or intellectual giants that seem to common humanity to be something more than mortal, there are others whose grandeur of character we revere, there are still others whose sweetness of disposition we love. To this last class belongs the magnanimous, self-denying Ammon. We may have pride in his unflinching courage, admiration for his unflinching faith, but above all we love his almost womanly tenderness, and his life-long devotion to the good of his fellows. Ammon, above all other sentiments of his heart, loved his fellow men, and as love begets love, so we are forced to love him in excess of that which we admire or respect amongst his characteristics.

Ammon's early life gave but little promise of its future unfolding. Born and reared amidst the godly examples of his father's priestly court at Zarahemla, he tore away the natural restraints that the good king imposed, he derided his piety, he scoffed at his priesthood, he spurned his worthy example, and in the self-sufficiency of his early youth he poo-pooed as old fogyism the glorious doctrines which the law of Moses foreshadowed. Educated by his loving father in all the wisdom of his country, he used that education to the basest purposes—the distortion of the truth and in opposition to righteousness. Even worse, he defiantly combatted his father's royal will, and rode rough-shod over his country's laws. He joined to him his three brothers, and also the eloquent, intellectual and courageous Alma, and together they opposed the church, abused its ordinances, ridiculed its holy promises, and persecuted its believers. No doubt in all this they were as sincere as Saul of Tarsus; but sincerity is but a poor excuse for injuring one's fellow beings or for rebellion against God's law. If Mosiah's sons did not know any better than to do as they were doing, it simply amounts to this, that they had neglected their opportunities, and if they cannot be condemned for insincerity, they certainly can for wilful ignorance and opportunities unimproved.

Frequent and fervent were the prayers offered by Mosiah and the elder Alma in behalf of their rebellious sons, and those prayers prevailed with Him who sits on Heaven's eternal throne. A holy angel was commissioned to descend from the courts of glory to this nether earth, and warn Ammon and his companions with more than human power of the folly and the blindness of their ways. He met them on the road as they sallied forth to wreak fresh vengeance on their Christian fellow-citizens. At his approach the earth shook; all nature trembled at the presence of the representative of the Majesty on high. His voice sounded in thunder tones on their astonished ears, as he reproved, admonished and taught them. The essence of divinity entered their souls, they knew, they felt, they realized that there was a God and that they had been fighting against him. The sense of their own utter unworthiness filled their hearts, remorse and anguish reigned supreme therein, they condemned themselves as the most vile of sinners; but by and by the bitterness of their remorse was swallowed up in their faith in the coming Christ, and they determined by God's help, to their utmost strength, to undo the evil that their previous course had wrought. These resolutions they faithfully carried out. If they had been energetic in their wrong-doing they were yet more active in their works of restitution. They journeyed from city to city, from land to land and everywhere bore triumphant testimony of the incidents of their miraculous conversion, and in no equivocal tones sounded the glo-

rious gospel anthem of love to God, salvation to mankind.

Each Nephite city visited, each Nephite land aroused, each Nephite church strengthened, the sons of Mosiah still remained uncontent. Away beyond the wilderness were thousands of benighted souls, tabernacled in darkened skins, fit types of the ignorance that dwelt therein. But Ammon and his brothers keenly felt that degraded, bloodthirsty and loathsome as these men might be, they were the children of one common earthly father; in more than sentimental name their brethren, and like themselves the subjects of their heavenly Father's care. To carry to them the knowledge of the wonders of salvation's scheme, to teach them the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, to proclaim to them the good tidings of great joy of the coming of a universal Savior, was doubtless a mission of peril untold, of difficulties unconceivable. When the less zealous churchmen heard them recite their hopes and give expression to their intentions, they openly ridiculed the project, or quietly shrugged their shoulders in incredulous narrowness of mind. The leopard might change its spots, the skin of the Hamite might be washed white, but to convert the Lamanite, preposterous! The good king himself wavered. Day after day, his now obedient sons sought his consent for their departure, but the dangers besetting such an apparently Quixotic attempt were ever present in his mind, yet to deny them the privilege of carrying salvation to so many thousands of the House of Israel, contained too grave responsibilities for him to assume. Wisely he sought the Lord. Encouragingly the Divine answer came, it was full of joyous inspiration to all concerned. Said the Almighty: "Let them go up, for many shall believe in their words, and they shall have eternal life; and I will deliver thy sons out of the hands of the Lamanites."

The King could no longer withhold his consent and the four God-fearing youths, with a few other faithful fellow servants of the Lord, whom they had chosen, started for the land of Nephi. They took with them their bows and arrows and other weapons, not to wage war, but to kill game for their sustenance in the wilderness. Their journey was a tedious one; they lost their way and almost lost heart, and indeed were on the point of returning when they received Divine assurance of their ultimate success. Nerved by this assurance, and with much fasting and prayer, they continued their wanderings, and before long reached the borders of the Lamanites. Commending themselves to God they here separated, each one trusting to the Mighty One of Jacob to guide them to the places where He could best accomplish His holy purposes.

Ammon entered the Nephite territory at a land called Ishmael, over which Lamoni was the chief ruler, under his father, who was king of all the Lamanites. Ammon was no sooner discovered than he was taken, bound with cords and conducted into the presence of Lamoni. It was the custom of the Lamanites to so use every Nephite they captured, and it rested with the whim of the King whether he be slain, imprisoned or sent out of the country. His will and pleasure was the only law on such matters.

Through God's grace, Ammon found favor in the eyes of Lamoni, and on inquiry finding that it was his desire to reside amongst the Lamanites, the king offered him one of his daughters to wife. Ammon courteously declined this intended honor and begged to be accepted as one of the king's servants, which arrangement pleased Lamoni, and Ammon was associated with that part of the royal household that had charge of the monarch's flocks and herds.

A glance at Lamanite society may not be out of place. It would appear that in Lamoni's days the will of the sovereign was the law of the land. The king's power over the lives and property of his subjects was unlimited; we read of no constitutions that prescribed or limited his powers. The more degraded portions of the race wandered in the vast wilderness, dwelling in tents (or wickiups) and subsisting on what they stole or killed in the chase. Their counterparts in this age are to be found in the Indians of the great western plains and unbounded prairies of the United States and British North America. The more civilized Lamanites resided in cities, were wealthy in cattle, and followed the occupations general among semi-civilized races—ancient types of the more modern Mexi-

can and Peruvian. Lamoni was rich in flocks and herds, probably the results of the taxation of the people, but even the king's property was not secure from the pervading spirit that he takes who has the power, and that he keeps who can. Marauding bands would watch for the numerous royal cattle as they approached the accustomed watering places, when with yell and prolonged shout they would stampede the herds and drive away all they could beyond the reach of the king's servants, who would gather up what few (if any) they could, and return to the king in the full expectancy of being made to pay for the loss, by the forfeit of their lives. They were seldom disappointed in their expectations, for Lamoni, or some of his predecessors had established a somewhat unique criminal code with regard to stealing the royal cattle. They had adopted the idea that it was easier and cheaper to make the herdsmen responsible for the losses and punish them therefor, than to hunt out and capture those who committed the depredations. It had at least one virtue, it prevented collusion between the thieves and the servants, but it produced much dissatisfaction amongst Lamoni's subjects.

On the third day of Ammon's service, one of these raids was made on the king's cattle as they were being taken to the waters of Sebus, the common watering place. The cattle fled in all directions, and the dispirited servants, with the fear of death before their eyes, sat down and wept instead of attempting to stop their mad career. Ammon perceived this was his opportunity. He first expostulated, then encouraged them, and having sufficiently aroused their feelings, he led them in the attempt to head off the flying herds. With much exertion they succeeded, the cattle were all gathered, but the robbers still waited at the watering place to renew the attack when they drew near enough. Ammon perceiving this, placed the servants at various points on the outside of the flocks and himself went forward to contend with the robbers. Though they were many, he knew that he was more powerful than them all, for God was with him. The idea of one man withstanding so many, was supremely ridiculous to the robbers, but as one after another fell before his unerring aim, they were astonished and dreaded him as something more than human, but enraged at the loss of six of their number they rushed upon him in a body, determined to crush him with their clubs. Ammon, undaunted, drew his sword and awaited the onslaught. Their leader fell dead at his feet, and one after another raised their clubs, Ammon struck off their arms until none dare approach him, but instead retreated afar off.

It was a strange procession that returned to the palace; the fears of the herdsmen had been turned to gratulation, and they marched in triumph into the presence of the king, with the arms of the robbers as testimonies of the truth of the story of Ammon's superhuman prowess. Doubtless they did not diminish the telling points in the narrative; the numbers of the band, the courage and strength of the Nephite, were each dilated upon with the vividness of superstitious imagination. When the king had heard their marvelous story his heart was troubled with mingled feelings, and he came to the conclusion that Ammon must be the Great Spirit, of whose existence he had an undefined comprehension. He trembled at the thought that perhaps this spirit had come to punish him because of the number of his servants whom he had slain for suffering his cattle to be stolen.

Notwithstanding his misgivings, Lamoni desired to see Ammon, who acting as though nothing particular had happened, was preparing the king's horses and chariots, as the servants had been directed. When he entered the royal presence, the latter was too filled with emotion to speak to him. More than once Ammon drew to the king's attention that he stood before him, as he had been requested, and wished to know his commands. But he elicited no response. At last, perceiving the king's thoughts, he began to question Lamoni regarding sacred things and afterwards to expound to him the principles of life and salvation, Lamoni listened and believed. He was conscience-struck, and with all the strength of his new-born faith, he humbly begged that the Lord would show that same mercy to him and to his people that he had shown to the Nephites. Overcome with the intensity of his feelings he sunk to the earth as in a trance, and in

this state was carried to his wife, who with her children anxiously watched over him for two days and two nights, with longing heart awaiting his return to consciousness. There was great diversity of opinion among his retainers as to what troubled the king. Some said the power of the Great Spirit was upon him, others that an evil power possessed him, yet others asserted that he was dead, and with remarkable acuteness of smell affirmed "He stinketh." At the end of this time they had resolved to lay him away in the sepulchre, when the queen sent for Ammon and plead with him in her husband's behalf. Ammon gave her the joyful assurance, "He is not dead, but he sleepeth in God, and to-morrow he shall rise again," and then he added, "Believest thou this?" She answered, "I have no witness, save thy word and the word of our servants, nevertheless I believe it shall be according as thou hast said." Then Ammon blessed her, and told her there had not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites.

So the Queen lovingly continued her watch by the bed of her husband until the appointed hour. Lamoni then arose as Ammon had foretold. His soul was filled with ecstatic joy. His first words were of praise to God, his next were blessings on his faithful wife, whose faith he felt or knew. He testified to the coming of the Redeemer, of whose greatness and glory and power and mercy he had learned while in the spirit. His body was too weak for the realities of eternity that filled his enraptured heart, again he sank overpowered to the earth, and the same spirit overcame his wife also. Ammon's rejoicing heart swelled within him as he heard and witnessed these things, he fell on his knees and poured out his soul in praise and thanksgiving until he also could not contain the brightness of the glory, the completeness of the joy that overwhelmed him. Unconscious of all earthly things he sank beside the royal pair. The same spirit of unmeasured joy fell upon all present and with the same results, with one exception, and that a Lamanitish waiting woman named Abish, who many years before had been converted to the Lord, but kept the secret in her own bosom. She comprehended the why and wherefore of this strange scene, she saw the workings of the Almighty through which the untutored minds of the Lamanites could be brought to the comprehension of the plan of salvation. From house to house she sped calling the people to witness what had occurred in the palace. They gathered at her call, but as might be naturally expected their impressions were very conflicting, some said one thing some another, some argued for good some for evil, to some Ammon was a god to others a demon. One man who had had a brother slain at the waters of Sebus, drew his sword and attempted to slay Ammon but was struck dead by an unseen power before he could carry his rash intent into action. So fierce was the contention, so angry grew the controversy that Abish, fearing greater trouble, by an inspiration took hold of the hand of the Queen who thereupon rose to her feet. Her first thoughts were of her husband, she took his hand and raised him up, and ere long all who had been reposing in the spirit stood upon their feet. The king, the queen, the servants, all rejoiced with joy unspeakable, they bore testimony to God's abundant love and goodness, and some declared that holy angels had visited them. Still the contention was not entirely appeased, until Lamoni stood forth and explained to them the divine mysteries of which they were so ignorant. Many believed, others did not, but Ammon had the indescribable happiness of shortly after establishing a church to the Lord in the midst of the people of the land of Ishmael. Ammon's humility, faith and patience was bringing forth its fruit, whilst his soul gathered faith and strength in the fulfillment of the promises of the great Jehovah in answer to the pleadings of his faithful, loving father.

When the church was satisfactorily established in the land of Ishmael Lamoni arranged to pay a visit to his father, the great king in the land of Nephi to whom he was desirous of introducing Ammon. However, the voice of the Lord warned his servant not to go but instead thereof to proceed to the land of Middoni, where his brother Aaron and other missionaries were suffering in prison. When Lamoni heard of Ammon's intentions, and the cause thereof, he decided to accom-

pany him. He felt that he could be of service in delivering the prisoners, as Antiomno the King of Middoni was one of his special friends, and likely to grant any favor he might ask. They accordingly started on their errand of mercy, but on their way were surprised to meet Lamoni's father, who grew exceedingly angry when he found Ammon in the company of his son. All the hatred born and nurtured of false tradition and long continued antagonism boiled up in his breast. He listened impatiently to Lamoni's story of Ammon's visit and its fruits, and when it was finished he broke out in a torrent of abuse towards the Nephite "son of a liar," as he ungraciously styled him, and ordered Lamoni to slay him. Lamoni unhesitatingly refused to become the murderer of his most loved friend, whereupon the old monarch in the blind fury of his anger, turned upon his own son, and would have killed him if Ammon had not interposed. Little used to controversy, much less to direct opposition, the king was not mollified by Ammon's interference. Savagely he turned upon him, but youth, strength, dexterity, and above all the protecting presence of the Lord was with Ammon, and he struck the king's sword arm so heavy a blow that it fell useless at his side. Realizing he was now in the power of the man he had so foully abused, he made abundant promises, even to half his kingdom, if his life were spared. This boon Ammon without hesitancy granted, asking only favors for Lamoni and his own imprisoned brethren. The king unused to such generosity and manly love granted all his requests, and when he proceeded on his journey his mind was filled with reflections regarding Ammon's unexampled self-negation, courage and great love for his son. He was also troubled in his heart concerning certain expressions of Ammon on doctrinal points, which opened up ideas that were entirely new to his mind.

Lamoni and Ammon continued their journey to Middoni, where, by God's grace they found favor in the eyes of King Antiomno, and by his commands the prisoners were released from the horrors and inhumanities practised upon them. After mutual congratulations and a season of enjoyment in each other's society, Ammon returned to the land Ishmael to continue his labors in evangelizing its people and to aid Lamoni in building synagogues and in other ways spreading and strengthening the work of the Lord.

The words of Ammon to the old king remained in his memory, they troubled him, they gave him no peace, and so worked upon his conscience that when after a time Aaron and others visited him he received their teachings with joy. The details of his conversion do not properly belong to the life of Ammon, but some of the results do. When the king was converted he sent a proclamation throughout the land forbidding any and all from persecuting Ammon and his fellow-missionaries and giving them liberty to preach anywhere and everywhere that they desired to. Our readers may be sure that this privilege was not neglected. To use Ammon's description of their labors, they entered into their houses and taught them, they taught them in their temples and synagogues, in the open streets and on the lofty hills; but often they were cast out, spit upon, smitten, stoned, bound, cast into prison and made to suffer all manner of afflictions, from which the Lord in his mercy delivered them and from which the king's proclamation afterward protected them. Nor was the result of their labors insignificant, but glorious in the saving of many thousand souls, for unto the Lord were converted the people of the Lamanites who dwell in the lands of Ishmael, Middoni, Shilom and Shemlon, and in the cities of Nephi, Lemuel, and Shinnilon; and they became a righteous, peaceful, God-serving people and from faithful obedience to His law they did never fall away. But the various bodies of Nephite apostates who dwelt amongst the Lamanites universally rejected the gospel message, with the exception of one single Amalekite, and what ultimately became of him we have no record.

History often repeats itself, but we have no recollection of any parallel to the events that followed this marvelous conversion. The Lamanite people now became two as distinct and separate bodies as they and the Nephite had before times been, but with this strange complication, the apostate Nephites now occupied the place and did the work of the natural Lamanites, whilst the