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AN ENSIGN FOR THE NATIONS.

Sketch of the Rise and Progress of Mormonism.

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"Seven hundred years before the birth of the Savior, the Prophet Isaiah, gazing down the vista of many centuries, foresaw and proclaimed the coming forth of "a marvelous work and a wonder," out of which the wisdom of the wise should perish and the understanding of the prudent should be hid. The same prophet predicted the setting up of "an ensign for the nations," the assembling of the outcasts of Israel, and the gathering together of the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. Other prophets foretold the same events. The Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments, are replete with references to the great theme of the gathering of Israel in the last dayes, when the children of Abraham, ransomed and redeemed, rendled from their long dispersion among the Gentile and heathen nations, should "fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the West;" there to build up Zion, "the Mountain of the Lord's House," the City of Holiness, unto which all nations should flow, like rivers to their ocean, for participation and enlightenment; that through the power and glory of God that should rest upon her, making her "Zion—the joy of the whole earth," the world might be cleansed from sin and mankind prepared for the Millennial reign of peace and righteousness.

It were well for the student of Mormonism, so-called, to approach the study of the subject with these facts in mind; with these and other predictions of the ancient seers as a mete-wand with which to measure the motives, the aims, the aspirations and achievements of the strange and mighty work founded by Joseph Smith and his followers in direct fulfillment, as they declare, of these ancient sayings of the inspired oracles of God. If he do not, he shall not understand it. It will baffle him at every turn. However wise he may be, his wisdom shall perish; however prudent his understanding shall be hid, in the presence of a problem not to be disposed of by putting it with nickname and opprobrious epithets, a problem mighty and profound, worthy the serious thought, the prayerful consideration of the best and brightest minds of the age.

This article is not intended as an argument for Mormonism. It merely aims to set forth, for the information of the general reader, the main facts of the rise and progress of the strange faith—strange, indeed to the degree that gave it birth—which, beginning less than eighty years ago with an unlettered farm-boy as its only advocate, now numbers among its devotees three hundred thousand souls, which, springing into existence in the backwoods of western New York, has planted itself, where its youthful prophet said it would, in the tops of the Rocky Mountains; it ventures, the "children of Ephraim, the first-born of God, first fruits of the gathering, pointing thus far, as refugees, the track of the retiring sun. Bring upon the "shoulders of the Philistines toward the West" then turning, as their ancestors, "to spoil those of them of the East together." For Mormonism aims not only to build up Zion, a New Jerusalem, upon the American continent; its purpose is also to convert the Jews, to restore the Ten Tribes, and re-build Jerusalem upon the ancient emplacement. This is the divine program, laid down by the Latter-day Prophet, to the end that "the law might go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem;" that the Kingdom of God, for which Jesus prayed, might literally come, and His will be done on earth even as it is done in heaven.

Mormonism is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, restored in primitive purity after ages of apostasy; it is also the restored religion of Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses and other Patriarchs and Prophets; the one true Gospel—for there is but one—everlasting and unchangeable, the same yesterday, today and forever; furnished in the heavens before the earth was created, revealed from God to man in different dispensations, and finally restored, for the last time, in this the dispensation of the fulness of times, spoken of by the Apostles, and seen by John in the Apocalypse. (Rev. xiv: 6, 7.)

THE BOY PROPHET.

Joseph Smith, whose boyish brain—we have been assured by critics of note—conceived this gigantic project, this superhuman undertaking, was a native of Vermont and lived in Lyme, Sharon, Windsor county, in that State, on the 23rd of December, 1805. His father, Joseph Smith, Senior, was a poor but godly people, his sire an honest tiller of the soil—of his ancestors we have been unapprised of their humbler and most primitive character. He was the fourth of ten children, seven sons and three daughters. The little schooling could scarcely write his name, but was an earnest student of the Scriptures and a seeker after truth and light.

His first great spiritual manifestation came when he was scarcely verging upon adolescence, the subject of his soul's salvation, as the result of a religious revival that swept around the village of Manchester, Ontario (now Wayne) county, New York, to which place the family had removed when Joseph was about ten years old. He was now fourteen, and it was the spring of 1820. Seeking for the salvation of the souls of his father's home, the boy knelt in prayer, and besought the great Creator to show him which of all the contending sects of Christendom was the true church of God, in order that he might join it. His simple prayer was marvelously answered. A fierce struggle with the power of evil was succeeded by a glorious vision in which the Father and the Son, the first and second Persons of the Trinity, appeared to him and instructed him regarding the right course. He was told that none of the churches then extant upon the earth was true, that all had gone astray, and of the way, touching for doctrine the commandments of men, drawing near to the Lord with their lips while their hearts were far from him, they had he was not to unite with any of them, but had himself aloof and await further developments.

He did as he was directed, but mentioning having told a friend—a Methodist minister—what he had seen and learn in the grove, he became, as the rubbers of his vision appeared, an object of the bitterest persecution. "It's all of the devil; there are no such things in these days," was the cold comfort meted out to him by his ministerial friend. But others did not stop at that. They slandered the boy and persecuted him, and succeeded in enraging the pious and respectable, and his very life was at times saved by the bullet of the ambushed assassin.

THE GOLDEN PLATES.

Three years passed. Young Joseph, still persecuted, still affirmed the truth of his vision. Then, one fine night—September 21, 1823—having retired to rest, after pleading with the Lord for forgiveness of his sins and a further manifestation of divine favor, he received another heavenly visitation, this time from an angel named Moroni, the last of a line of Prophets who had ministered to an ancient people called Nephites, descendants of pre-historic America. Moroni revealed to the boy prophet that the record of the Nephites, engraven upon plates of gold, and accompanied by the Urim and Thummim—by means of which it might be translated—was concealed in a hill, called by the ancients Cumorah, where he, Moroni, at the behest of his father Mormon, the compiler of the record, had hidden it fourteen centuries before. The hill, which was near to the village of Manchester, was shown to Joseph in vision. Thither he proceeded, on the day following his interview with the angel, and obtained, by divine permission, his first view of the plates and the interpreters. They were deposited in a stone box, embedded in the earth near the summit of the hill. There, on the 22nd of September, 1827, after four years of probation and discipline to prepare him for the work assigned him, Joseph Smith received from the Angel Moroni the golden plates, with the Urim and Thummim, by means of which he translated and gave to the world the record known as the Book of Mormon.

The plates were of uniform size, about eight inches in width, seven, or a little thinner than ordinary tin. They were bound together by three rings running through one of the edges, forming a book about six inches thick, one-third of which was sealed. This part was not to be opened; the time not having come for its contents to be known. The unsealed plates, which could be turned like the leaves of a book, and were covered, both sides, with strange characters, "small and beautifully engraved," were those which were translated by means of the Urim and Thummim. These were two precious stones set in the rims of a silver bow and fastened to an ancient breastplate.

THE TRANSLATION.

The Prophet's first assistant in the work of translation was Martin Harris, a farmer of Palmyra. In February, 1828, while on a visit to his young friend, at Harmony, Pennsylvania—where Joseph then resided, at the home of his father-in-law, Isaac Hale—Martin was shown some of the characters, which Joseph informed him he had copied from the golden plates and translated. Martin received permission to take these characters to the city of New York and submit them to the learned men of the metropolis. He showed them, according to his account, to Dr. Charles Anthon, of Columbia College, and to Dr. Mitchell, another scholar. Both stated that the translation was correct, and the characters, which were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Syriac and Arabic, true and genuine. Dr. Anthon gave the Palmyra farmer a certificate to that effect, but took it back and destroyed it on being told, to his incredulous amazement, that Joseph Smith had received the plates containing the original characters from an angel. Martin, convinced of the genuineness of Joseph's claim, returned to Harmony, and began to act as his scribe in the work of translation.

The reputed method of the task was as follows: The Prophet, scanning through the Urim and Thummim the golden pages, would see appear, in line of the mystical characters engraved thereon, their equivalent in English words. These he would repeat, and his scribe, separated from him by a veil or curtain, would write them down. A peculiarity of the process was that until the writing was correct in every particular, the words he had given would remain before the eyes of the translator, and not disappear. But upon the necessary correction being made, they would pass away and be succeeded by others. In this manner the Book of Mormon was translated.

Joseph's principal assistant in the work of converting the Nephite record into English was a young man named Oliver Cowdery, who came to him after an estrangement had taken place between him and his relatives, Joseph, through the latter's disobedience, as a result of which a portion of the translation had been temporarily lost. Oliver was a school teacher, who had heard of young Joseph and his remarkable claims while boarding at the home of his father, Joseph Smith, Sr., at Manchester. The Prophet's first meeting with Oliver Cowdery was at Harmony, Pa., on the 5th of April, 1829. The latter's voluntary services as a scribe and secretary were immediately accepted, the translation was now resumed and pushed rapidly to completion.

THE PRIESTHOOD RESTORED.

On the 15th of May, 1829, Joseph and Oliver were engaged in prayer, when an Angel Priesthood by an angel of God, John the Baptist, who appeared to them while they were in the woods of the Susquehanna, near Harmony, Pa., on the 5th of April, 1829. The latter's volunteered