

THE MORMON QUESTION BY VICE PRESIDENT COLFAX.

The New York *Independent* has the following article from the pen of Hon. Schuyler Colfax.

The demands of the people of Utah Territory for immediate admission into the Union as a State, made at their recent Conference meeting, and to be presented by their delegate at the approaching session of Congress, compels the nation to meet face to face, a question it has apparently endeavored to ignore. I speak of it as "a demand," because the appeal is in sharp and unusual language for a petition. It is claimed as a right, and the refusal to act on previous applications resented as a wrong.

But the discussion of this question will necessarily take a wider range than the application itself. It will embrace in its scope the present condition of that people, and whether Congress owes any duty whatever to its insulted laws, to the officers charged with their execution, and to the law-abiding people resident within the limits of the Territory.

The remarkable conversation between Brigham Young and Senator Trumbull must still be fresh in the popular mind. In it the former person threatened, if the officers of the United States acted objectionably to him, he would eject them from the Territory; and the recent expulsion of prominent members of his church, for doubting his infallibility proves that he regards his power as equal to any emergency and has a will equal to his power. I propose in this article to examine, in the light of history, some phases of the Mormon question, treating of those especially which are the favorite themes of the Mormon leaders.

I. THEIR FERTILIZING OF THE DESERT.

For this they claim great credit; and I would not detract one iota from all they are legitimately entitled to. It was a desert when they first emigrated thither. They have made large portions of it fruitful and productive, and their chief city is beautiful in location and attractive in its gardens and shrubbery. But the solution of it all is in one word—WATER. What seemed to the eye a desert became fruitful when irrigated; and the mountains whose crests are clothed in perpetual snow, furnished, in the unfailing supplies of their ravines, the necessary fertilizer. I need only allude to the constant market they have had for their products—first, by the almost continuous procession of teams crossing the continent, which stopped there naturally for supplies, refitting, etc.; and secondly, by the large demand from the mining regions of Idaho and Montana, of which they were the nearest food-producing neighbor. All this has tended to enrich them; and the church leaders, whose tithings depended on the products of the people, sedulously and wisely inculcated industry. But when we contrast their development, in the twenty-two years since 1847, with the development of Colorado Territory in the ten years since 1859, it does not seem as unexampled as the magnates of their church assume.

II. THEIR PERSECUTIONS.

This also is one of their favorite themes. Constantly is it reiterated by their apostles and bishops from week to week, and from year to year. It is discoursed about in their Tabernacle and their ward and town churches. It is written about in their periodicals and papers. It is talked about with nearly every stranger that comes into their midst. They have been driven from place to place, they claim, solely on account of their religious belief. Their faith has subjected them to the wickedest persecutions by unbelievers. They have been despoiled, they insist, of their property, maltreated in their persons, buffeted and cast out, because they would not renounce their professions and their revelations. I abhor as much as any one can abhor, persecutions of any denomination, or of any people, on account of their religious creed. But history tells us that what they denounce was caused by far different reasons. I do not attempt to decide that the charges against them were all well-founded, for I was not in such close vicinity as to be cognizant of them from my own knowledge. My object, by this historical retrospect, is to show that they were not driven from any region on account of hostility to their religion, as they so persistently assert.

Their church was first established at Manchester, N. Y., in 1830; and their first removal was in 1831, to Kirtland, Ohio, which they declared was revealed to them as the site of their New Jerusalem. Thence their leaders went west to search a new location, which they found in Jackson county, Mo.; dedicated a site for another New Jerusalem there, and returned to Kirtland to remain for five years, avowedly to make money. A bank was established there by them; large quantities of bills of doubtful value issued; and, growing out of charges of fraudulent dealing, Smith and Rigdon were tarred and feathered in 1832. This was the first persecution; and, unjustifiable as such outrages are, this one was based on alleged fraud, and not on religious belief. In January, 1838, the bank failed; and, to avoid arrest for fraud, the leaders fled in the night to Missouri. Their followers joined them there, and were soon accused by the people of "plundering and burning habitations, and of secret assassinations." Nor do these

charges against them rest on the testimony of those who had not been of their own faith. In October, 1838, T. B. Marsh, ex-President of the Twelve Apostles of their church, and Orson Hyde, one of the Apostles, made affidavits before an officer in Ray county, Mo., in which Marsh swore, and Hyde corroborated it:

"They have among them a company consisting of all that are considered true Mormons, called the Danites, who have taken an oath to support the heads of the church in all things, whether right or wrong. I have heard the prophet say that he would yet tread down his enemies, and walk over their dead bodies; that, if he was not let alone, he would be a second Mohammed to this generation, and that he would make it one gore of blood from the Rocky Mountain to the Atlantic Ocean."

The sermon of Sidney Rigdon, the 4th of July previous, in which he had threatened "that, if they were disturbed, they would make it a war of extermination with their enemies, till the last drop of blood was spilled, carrying the seat of war to their own houses and their own families," seemed to confirm the sworn testimony above quoted of those who had been at that very time in the highest places of the church. And, when they fortified their towns, and defied the officers of the law, it added, of course, fuel to the flame of public excitement. The militia of the State were finally called out, and, yielding to their large numbers, the Mormons capitulated, agreeing to leave Missouri and go to Nauvoo, Ill. The Governor of Missouri, in his message, gives the reasons for their expulsion as follows:

"These people had violated the laws of the land, by open and armed resistance to them; they had instituted among themselves a government of their own, independent of, and in opposition to, the Government of this State; they had, at an inclement season of the year, driven the inhabitants of an entire county from their homes, ravaged their crops and destroyed their dwellings."

There is nothing as to their religion here, unless they may claim that, as in the case of polygamy, an assumed revelation justified them in their conduct.

In Nauvoo they remained till 1846. The disturbance, which finally caused them to leave that city, was not in consequence of their religious creed. Foster and Law, who had been Mormons, renounced the faith and established an anti-Mormon paper at Nauvoo, called the *Expositor*. In May, 1844, the prophet and a party of his followers, on the publication of its first number, attacked the office, tore it down, and destroyed the presses. The proprietors fled for their lives to Carthage, the county seat, and obtained warrants for Joseph and Hyrum Smith and sixteen others. The constable who sought to serve them was driven from Nauvoo. The Authorities thereupon called out the militia to enforce the law, and the Mormons armed themselves to resist it; but at last the two Smiths surrendered, and were taken to the county jail at Carthage, which was strongly guarded. A party of Missourians crossed the river, overpowered the guard, and murdered the prisoners. It was murder, and nothing else, for the prisoners had surrendered on the promise of the Government to protect them, and the guiltiest criminals have a right to a fair, public and impartial trial. But the origin of this tragedy can be traced directly to the illegal mobbing of a free press for daring to publicly denounce Mormonism and its practices. In 1845 the Nauvoo charter was repealed by the Illinois Legislature, and they made preparations to leave, hastened by another conflict with the people of the vicinity. In 1846 they reached Council Bluffs, and in 1847 Brigham Young and the advanced guard of the Mormons arrived at Salt Lake Valley.

I may briefly, under this head, trace the history of their collisions, in their present region, with the General Government.

In September, 1850, Congress organized Utah Territory, and President Fillmore appointed Brigham Young (who, at Smith's death, had become President of the Church) as Governor. The next year the Federal Judges were compelled by Brigham Young's threats of violence to flee from the Territory, and the laws of the United States were openly defied. Colonel Steptoe was commissioned as Governor, in the place of Young; but, after wintering with a battalion of soldiers at Salt Lake City, he resigned, not deeming it safe or prudent to accept. Brigham Young, the Sabbath after he left, preached a sermon in the Tabernacle, declaring:

"I am and will be Governor; and no power can hinder it, until the Lord Almighty says, 'Brigham, you need not be Governor any longer.'"

Most of the civil officers of the Territory who were commissioned at the same time with Steptoe, arrived a few months after his departure, and were harassed and threatened as their predecessors had been. In February, 1856, a mob of armed Mormons, instigated by sermons from the heads of the Church, broke into the United States Court-room, and at the point of the bowie-knife compelled Judge Drummond to adjourn his court *sine die*; and very soon all of the United States officers, except the Indian agent, were compelled to flee from the Territory.

President Buchanan now determined to supersede Brigham Young as Governor, effectually. In 1857 he appointed Alfred Cumming, Governor, and Judge Eckles, of Indiana, Chief Justice, and sent them to

Utah, with a force of 2,500 soldiers to protect them and to compel obedience to the law. Brigham Young issued a proclamation denouncing the army as a mob, forbidding it to enter the Territory, and calling the people to arms to repel its advance. They fortified Echo Canyon, the gateway of approach to the Mormon capital (through which the Pacific Railroad now runs), and a party of mounted Mormons commenced the war by attacking and destroying several of the supply trains, and cutting off from the rear of the army and driving to Salt Lake 800 United States oxen. The troops, necessarily moving slowly, were overtaken by the snows in November, and wintered near Fort Bridger. In the spring of 1858 the President, through Governor Powell, of Kentucky and Major McCullough, of Texas, offered pardon to all Mormons who would submit themselves to the Federal authority, which was finally accepted. The troops encamped forty miles from the city and remained there till 1860, when they were withdrawn.

This sketch is not colored by any views of my own. I have simply drawn it from history, nothing extenuating nor setting down aught in malice. But the reader will fail to find in it that any of what they call their "persecutions" sprang from their peculiar religious faith.

III. THEIR POLYGAMY.

In their Mormon Bible, publicly proclaimed by them to the world as an inspired revelation, on which rock they had built their church, polygamy is denounced as the wickedest of crimes. David and Solomon are condemned in it for their many wives and concubines, "which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord." "Wherefore, my brethren, hear me and harken to the word of the Lord; for there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife, and concubines he shall have none; for I, the Lord, delighteth in the chastity of women." The manner in which this positive language is evaded by them is by quoting what occurs subsequently to this in their Book of Mormon, as follows:

"For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people. Otherwise they shall harken unto these things." I need not repeat the argument of the Josephites, (the anti-polygamy Mormons) that, if God did declare polygamy abominable, because it violated the chastity of women, he could not possibly make a revelation afterward commanding it. Suffice it to say, the Mormons claim that he did, July 12, 1843, thirteen years after the printing of their original revelation; and on that assumed revelation of 1843 they justify its practice, and their defiance of the law of the United States prohibiting it in all the Territories. But in 1845, two years after this pretended revelation, the leaders of the church, in an official document, formally declared as follows:

"Inasmuch as this Church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication and polygamy, we declare that we believe that one man should have but one wife, and one woman but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again."

The explanation they give of this official denial of a practice, two years after the assumed revelation by which they now justify it, is that it was made from prudent considerations. And without arguing whether this is any moral justification of the act, I propose to inquire whether a revelation of this kind, thus claimed by them, vindicates them in defying the law of the United States upon the subject.

There were three different newspaper reports made of the speech I delivered on the evening of October 5, in front of the Townsend House, in Salt Lake City: one by a Mormon reporter for the *Salt Lake Telegraph*, which was but an abstract, stating that I condemned polygamy and quoted from the Book of Mormon and from "the Doctrines and Covenants" (which is the creed and discipline of the Church); and the other two by reporters for the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Springfield Republican*. The Mormon editor replied in his paper of the next morning that the latter citation (which still embodies, in unchanged phraseology, the emphatic language used by their leaders in 1845, above quoted) was more forcible than the former one from the Mormon Bible, as that was qualified by the words, also quoted above, commencing "For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts," etc. I quote however from the two other reports of what I said, desiring to confine my argument now upon this point to the illustrations I presented to them, face to face, in their own public street.

The report in the *Chicago Tribune* quotes my remarks as follows:

"You tell me you have the authority of revelation for this defiance of law, and a new revelation, contrary to that recorded in the Book of Mormon, to which I have alluded. I reply that you have no right to overthrow and defy the laws by assumed revelations. If some one should have a revelation to-night, declaring that the strong should seize and possess the wives of the weak, you would surely have none of such a revelation. If there was another revelation that the talented and rich should take the wives of the ignorant and poor, you would certainly trample on it. If the Hindoos should come hither and insist on practicing what they regard as a religious rite—the burning of widows on the funeral piles of their husbands—you would scout such a revelation and such a religion."

The report in the *Springfield Republican* gives the same ideas and illustrations in language as identical as two reports by two different reporters would quote them:

"And yet, while you assume that this later revelation gives you the right to turn your back on your old faith, and to disobey the law, you would not yourselves tolerate others in assuming rights for themselves under revelations they might claim to have received, or under religions they might profess. The Hindoos claimed, as part of their religion, the right to burn widows with the dead bodies of their husbands. If they were to attempt it here, as their religion, you would prevent it by force. If a new revelation were to be proclaimed here that the strong men should have the right to take the wives of the weaker men, that the learned men should take the wives of the unlearned, that the rich men should take the wives of the poor, that those who were powerful and influential should have the right to command the labor and the service of the humbler, as their bond-slaves, you would spurn it, and would rely upon the law and the power of the United States to protect you."

John Taylor, one of the Twelve Apostles, in replying from Salt Lake City, November 2, 1869, in a letter to the *New York Tribune*, to this speech, says that in my "strictures on our institutions there is an apparent faith and sincerity manifested;" but he attacks those strictures and defends their institution in language which, to do him full justice, I quote literally:

"That our country is governed by law, we all admit; but when it is said that no 'assumed revelation justifies any one in trampling on the law,' I would respectfully ask, 'What, not if it interferes with my religious faith, which you state is a matter between God and myself alone?' The assumed revelation referred to is one of the most vital points of our religious faith; it emanates from God, and cannot be legislated away. It is part of the 'everlasting covenant' which God has given to man."

Mr. Colfax has a perfect right to state and feel that he does not believe the revelation on which my religious faith is based, nor in my faith at all; but has he the right to dictate my religious faith? I think not. He does not consider it religion. It is, nevertheless, mine. If a revelation from God is not a religion, what is it? His not believing it is from God makes no difference.

"All religions are tolerated with us, and all revelations or assumed revelations. We take the liberty of disbelieving some of them, but none are interfered with; and, in relation to turning our back on our old religion, we have never done it. Concerning our permitting the Hindoos to burn their widows, it is difficult to say what we should do."

As to his statements that "all religions are tolerated with us," I would say that the refusal to allow the sons of their first prophet, Joseph Smith, to preach the old anti-polygamous Mormon doctrine in their Tabernacle, ward houses, public buildings or the streets, and the threats and abuse to which they have been subjected ever since they attempted to preach in the few Gentile houses open to them, with the unpunished murderers of Gentiles, like Dr. Robinson, Brassfield and others, and the recent brutal attacks on Beadle, Watters and others, for daring to speak against polygamy, are specimens of "toleration" rather novel in the United States.

But I come directly to the apostle's argument. He passes over all the illustrations cited except one; and it is significant that about the same time he was writing it, when Godbe and others were being expelled from the church for doubting the infallibility of Brigham Young, Daniel H. Wells, the Mayor of Salt Lake, and now the next in authority in the church to their President, declared that one might as well dispute the infallibility of the Almighty, showing that whatever revelations Brigham Young may see fit to proclaim, now or hereafter, they are to be obeyed unquestioningly, no matter what law they repudiate, what authority they contravene, or what crime they may command. And, in the full and frank conversation of our party, in 1865, at the residence of Mr. Young, with himself and his apostles, Mr. Carrington, then editor of their church organ, declared that if he received a revelation through the church to kill his son he would obey it unhesitatingly! The details of this conversation are to be found in Mr. Bowles' book, "Across the Continent," published some years since.

The one illustration cited by me, to which Apostle Taylor does see fit to refer, is that of the Hindoos; and he confesses, in reply to it, that "it is difficult to say what we should do about our permitting the Hindoos to burn their widows." It is not, however, I am glad to remark, "difficult to say" what the nation would do, in spite of the claim that it is part of their religious faith; and history tells us what a civilized nation, akin to ours, actually did, when they had the power.

The suttee, as the burning of widows with their husbands is called, can be traced back as an alleged religious rite in India for 3,200 years—as far as fourteen centuries before the Christian era. The Brahmins claimed, as the Mormons do now in regard to their institution, that it was taught in their sacred books, and conferred the highest merit on both husband and wife. She was to remain with her husband in the regions of the blessed thirty-five millions of years. But, if she did not consent to it, she was to have no place there. It has been proven, however, recently, on an examination of these