

MORMONISM DISCUSSED.

Introductory Note:—It is mutually agreed to exclude all personalities from this discussion. Its only purpose is to present clearly the facts upon which the respective views are based. Both cannot be right; and the only honest attitude of any soul is that of sincere desire to know the truth, that he may follow it. In all that the writer has said on this subject the motive has been simply to advance the cause of Christ and to save men. He trusts that the same may always be true in the future. If anything in his part of this discussion shall seem otherwise to any one, it is hoped that he will remember these words and judge accordingly.

Most sincerely, for the cause of the truth and of the Lord Christ,

JOHN D. NUTTING,

Pastor Plymouth Congregational Church, Salt Lake City, since 1892.

The Opening Argument.

Mormonism appeals to the world as a new religion, compared with current beliefs. As such it must logically take the burden of proving itself true before the world. But for this discussion I cheerfully take the "burden of proof" of the opposite statement, as desired, and will attempt to show that Mormonism is not true. Starting at the beginning of the system, then, my first proposition is this: That Mormonism is untrue because its basic "revelation" is untrue.

This is simply a question of historic facts. Either the boy Joseph Smith did or did not receive a revelation in the woods in 1820, according to his history of the beginning of Mormonism. If he truly had such, it was either from God or from Satan; and he has preserved either a true or an erroneous account of it. Let us examine and see which of these is the truth.

The history is given in the "Pearl of Great Price," pages 83-110. It contains accounts of Joseph's being troubled about the different sects near his home, of his concluding that the Bible was of little account in such case, and of his going to the woods to seek illumination. Here two personages of great glory appear, one of whom points to the other and says: "This is my beloved Son, hear him" (see Luke 9:35) showing, if true, that both God the Father and God the Son had come down from heaven to enlighten him about the sects. The account goes on (pages 88, 89):

"I asked the personages which of all the sects was right, and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrine the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof."

Now, this professed "revelation" of either the Father or the Son deals with matters of historic record, and is easy to prove or disprove. It makes very definite statements about the entire Christian church of date 1820, and very strong charges against it and its members. If this "revelation" agrees with the known facts of church history it is in so far true; if it does not, it is not true, and with it must go the whole system upon which it is based. The two fundamental statements are these: 1. That all creeds of all the Christian churches in 1820 were an abomination in God's sight. 2. That the members of these churches were all corrupt, being hypocrites and teaching for doctrines the commandments of

men. (This misquoted from Matt. 15: 8, 9.)

1. As to the creeds of Christendom. These from the beginning are a matter of record in history. What does the record show? Essential unity and essential scripturality of creed in all branches of the evangelical church and in all ages, from the Apostles down! This is beyond historical question! There have been variations, of course; no two men or ages think just alike on finance, politics, or any other subject whatever. The element of individuality was intended by God to color all we do. But these variations have been upon minor points of Bible teaching, or in the explanation of greater doctrines—points divinely left without unquestionable statement in the Word, perhaps for this very purpose of stimulating thought, faith and appreciation. That this discussion had sometimes taken unwise direction and engendered undue feeling was only human, and was no ground whatever for any wholesale denunciation of creed and character, such as the "revelation" indulges in. A sensible, well-informed gentleman would be ashamed to do what God is thus represented as doing. More than this; there is not a fundamental point of doctrine in the Bible which was not in the creeds thus denounced, nor such point in the creeds which was not in the Bible and had not been taught by the Church of the Apostles and by Christ Himself! God's Word and the creeds of the Church of Christ of all denominations have always been practically harmonious on all such points. Truth does not change in theology any more than in mathematics; our comprehension and statement of it ought to grow, though dealing always with the same great essentials. So it has been with the Church; and nothing beyond this can be said. Hence to say that the creeds of Christendom were "all an abomination in God's sight," is to say a thing which is palpably untrue. They are the truth of God in all their essentials, and are honest reachings out after the truth in all other particulars.

2. As to the character of Christian people in 1820. "All corrupt" hypocrites is the sweeping judgment of the revelation, upon the whole Christian world! Only Joseph seems to be exempt. This condemnation includes the writer's own grandparents, who were then living—as pious, truly Christian men and women as could easily be found, whose children were largely missionaries of the cross among the barbarous heathen, and whose grandchildren "rise up and call them blessed." It includes millions of other people's grandparents of similar character—all hypocrites! It includes all the most noted Saints of all earth's history—men like Edwards, Judson, Whitefield, the Wesleys, the English and other martyrs, Luther, Huss, Fennelon, Thomas-a-Kempis, Bernard of Clairvaux, Augustine and even the Apostles themselves; for all believed the same essential doctrines, from the same Bible, lived the same Godly lives, and were members of the same Church universal which this "revelation" maligns. More than this; Christ graciously identifies Himself with his faithful followers as to the treatment accorded them; (Matt. 10:41 and references) hence this "revelation" makes God to reject Himself with these followers, and to call himself "corrupt," etc.

Reader, does God blaspheme Himself? Does He traduce and vilify His own pious, loving children of grace, the best men and women of the earth? Does He slander His own Church on earth, which He died to create? Does He call His everlasting truth an "abomination in His sight?" To ask these questions, is to answer them in thunder-tones, "No."

What then logically follows? Since this "revelation," so-called, solemnly affirms that he did these things, what must the "revelation" itself be? Here are the possibilities of the case:

(a) It cannot possibly be true, for it is made of historic falsehoods.

(b) It cannot possibly have come from God, for God does not lie, or even make mistakes.

(c) It may come from Satan, for "he is a liar, and the father of it." (Christ, John 8:44.)

(d) It may have been an imagination of the boy Joseph, honestly held and acted upon. He was young and imaginative.

(e) It may have been a hoax invented by Joseph, either then or later, and either with or without definite purpose further at the time.

Personally, the writer is undecided as to which of the last three is true; possibly a combination of all. But one thing seems to him logically and absolutely settled forever; that this so-called "revelation" cannot possibly be true, because its essential part is made up of statements which we know absolutely to be untrue! The reader may say what becomes of the building when the foundation is removed.

My next articles will treat of some of the doctrinal teachings which compose this edifice based upon the "revelation" which we have been considering above. The first of these, Providence permitting, will be the doctrine of God.

The Reply.

In his opening argument for the proposition that Mormonism is not true Christianity, Rev. John D. Nutting arrives at the conclusion that the "basic revelation" of the religious system under discussion is untrue and that the superstructure, consequently falls with it. It will, therefore, be our first duty to examine the reasoning by which this conclusion is sought to be established.

The gentleman, it will be noticed, relies entirely on internal evidence as regards the authenticity of the revelation he reviews—a class of evidence which, as applied to the Bible, has already created a school of critics but little distant from the now almost defunct rationalists of Germany. But what is especially noticeable is that he places his own construction on the language of the revelation and then demolishes this construction. The revelation itself is untouched and intact. He says: "The two fundamental statements are these: 1. That all the creeds of all the Christian churches in 1820 were an abomination in God's sight. 2. That the members of these churches were all corrupt, being hypocrites and teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." This, he argues, no sensible, well-informed gentleman would say, and certainly not God. Ergo, the revelation representing Him as making these statements is not true.

It is necessary here to call attention to the fact that the revelation does not represent all the members of the various churches as corrupt or as hypocrites. It deals exclusively with "those professors," and the whole context shows that certain religious teachers, who teach the commandments of men, instead of the word of the Lord, are here held up to the light. To say that this revelation, or any other accepted by the Latter-day Saints, denounces good and honest men and women as "corrupt," or as hypocrites is to misrepresent the matter. Our Lord Himself denounced "all that ever came before me" as "thieves and robbers." But He had reference to just that class of people spoken of in these quotations from the Pearl of Great Price.

Let us now examine the passage a little closer. It says: