

Artemus Ward encountered when he visited Brigham Young. But he was spared so embarrassing an experience. Instead of being initiated into a sort of Mormon *Parc aux Cerfs* he was introduced to five stout, middle-aged gentlemen, who were living comfortably *en garcon*. The walls were ornamented with some coloured texts from holy writ. A number of ponderous trunks and traveling bags piled up in the corner served as a reminder that the missionaries are birds of passage only. The President, by name Thomas E. Bassett, is a youngish-looking man of not more than 30, perhaps, and appears to be the junior by several years of at least three of his colleagues. All of them spoke with an unmistakable American accent. Their manner was mild and subdued, and it was hard not to feel that this mission across the Atlantic is to them a matter of intense religious import.

"The British Isles," said the President in explaining the *modus operandi*, "are divided into thirteen missionary districts, or conferences as we call them, the head one being at Liverpool, and each conference comprises a president and a staff of traveling elders, from three to fifteen in number. Four traveling elders and a president are allotted to the Norwich district, which embraces Norfolk, Suffolk, and parts of Lincoln and Cambridgeshire."

"What sort of success do you meet with as regards making converts, Mr. Bassett?"

"Well, we reckon that a thousand Mormon converts leave Europe every year for Utah, and of that number 450 or 500 are recruited from the British Isles."

"Is there any native church?"

"Not worth mentioning. There are at present 102 Latter-day Saints in the Norwich district, but they are only waiting till they have saved sufficient means to emigrate. There are very few who refuse to go to Utah when once they have accumulated the wherewith. There used to be a thousand in the Norwich district alone."

"A thousand! How do you account for the decline?"

"Oh, they have emigrated. It is only the poorest who remain. Our numbers are recruited chiefly from the poor—the laboring class mainly. We are not very successful in the large towns."

"And have you no contributed funds—no means of subsistence provided by the Church in Utah?"

"None," said Mr. Bassett, in the opulent tone of a man to whom bank notes are things of no account. "We bear our expenses out of our own private means. We have been called upon by the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and we expect to fulfil a mission of about two years' duration, preaching what we consider to be the principles of the Gospel as taught by Christ."

The appearance of the missionaries was fairly comfortable and well-cared for, but it was a little surprising to learn that they were able, out of their own resources, to undertake a two years' European tour. "I take

it, then, that in your own country you are men of substance?"

"No. We have our flocks and herds in Utah, but we are not what you would call wealthy."

"I observe that nothing is said in your articles of faith about polygamy."

"No, and in preaching we do not advocate it. But we think it is permissible, because there is nothing in the Scriptures forbidding it. It was commanded of God anciently. The number of Mormon men having more than one wife is estimated at from 7 to 10 per cent of the total adult population of Utah. We do not even persuade men to take one wife. Our mission is simply to preach the first principles of the Gospel."

"Would you—er—mind telling me how many—er—wives you have each?" asked the pressman, putting so delicate a question with natural embarrassment. (The photograph of a charming Mormon lady lay upon the table.)

"Oh, we have only one each," they replied in chorus, "except one of us, and he has no wife at all."

"No, I am not married at all," said the elder indicated, laughing sadly at the unblissedness of his condition.

"The Mormon Church seems to have got itself into hot water with the United States Legislature in regard to polygamy. How can you go on practising it in view of your article 12, which proclaims subjection to the law?"

"But," said the President, "we do not believe that the Legislature in trying to uproot polygamy and confiscate our church property is acting in accordance with the law. The Constitution of the United States says that Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise of religion. Now polygamy is a part of our religion, and we hold that the law passed in prohibition of it is unconstitutional and therefore carries with it no obligation to be obeyed. The permission to practice polygamy has been revealed to us by our Heavenly Father, and we believe it will tend to the salvation of the human family and ameliorate its condition here on earth."

"But has it not yet to be proved that there is a surplus female population all the world round?" asked the visitor, reflecting that Mr. Hepworth Dixon found in some of the mining States that the proportion of men to women was twenty-five to one.

"There are States in the Union," said Mr. Bassett, "where the males predominate, but taking the whole population of the United States, females of marriageable age predominate over males of marriageable age."

"How about the Book of Mormon; do you preach from it?"

"No; we simply preach from the Bible. The Book of Mormon contains a sacred history of the ancient inhabitants of America and the fulness of the everlasting Gospel as taught by our Savior to the inhabitants of that land after His resurrection. It is to some extent doctrinal, but mainly a historical book."

"Well, harring your views on married life and the Book of Mormon, there is nothing extravagantly unorthodox in your theology."

"No, perhaps not; but there is a great deal of objection raised to the claim we make that the Gospel is again restored to the earth. We teach that the Church of Christ, as organized by Him, was taken from the earth about the close of the sixth century, and that according to the prediction of John the Revelator, in the 13th and 14th chapters of Revelation, it was restored to earth again through the instrumentality of a holy angel from heaven. We meet with some opposition on this point. Our views too on the subject of the Godhead are a source of objection. We believe in a God with bodily parts and passions. But we encounter no actual opposition such as we had to endure years ago. Then our meetings were broken up, and we were pelted with rotten eggs; but all that is stopped now. The clergy and ministry treat us with indifference. They do not oppose us; but neither on the other hand do they in any way recognize us."

"Just one last question, Mr. Bassett. What are the legal prospects of the Church in the United States?"

"Well, fairly encouraging after the report recently made by a committee of Congress. On application being made for the admission of Utah as one of the States of the Union, a committee was appointed to make investigations, and here are some extracts from the report."

The report would almost make it appear that the period of "paradisaic glory" has begun already in Utah. The people are chaste and sober, the proportion of illiteracy is very low, and industrial prosperity prevails. The latest figures of the Mormon Church give 12 apostles, 70 patriarchs, 3,719 high priests, 11,805 elders, 2,069 priests, 2,592 teachers, and 11,610 deacons, or a total of 31,877 officers for a population a little over 150,000. The immense proselytising effort put forth by so small a community seems to indicate that the Church of the Latter-day Saints is enjoying the full vigor of infancy. What sect in Europe exercises such discipline and control over its adherents as to make them missionaries by word of command and scatter them in scores across the sea at their own cost and charge? The chief blot on the system—plurality of wives—forbids anything more than a modified sympathy on the part of people who believe that the sanctity of the marriage bond, as between one man and one woman, is the very basis of a healthy social fabric. But for this weak point in President Bassett's theological harness, one might complacently regard the Dove Street Mormons as a cheap and effective emigration agency. A sentiment of antipathy is unavoidable; but so also is an under current of sympathy. Have they not taken this for a guiding principle:—"If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report, or praiseworthy, we seek after these things?"