

Written for this Paper.

## THE ENIGMA VENTILATED.

It is many years since the Elders of Israel first arrested our attention. We were amazed at their audacity, at their assurance and zeal. They were phenomenal in assumption, and unhesitating in assertion. They were always ready for debate, and controversy, even when unsought, seemed as much their element as an annunciation. No man so lowly but he found in them a listener, none so educated or well trained as to abash or overawe them, nor any so inquisitive but an answer was ready, either according to the folly or otherwise of the question presented.

These had come like John the Baptist, "bounding from the wilderness," Torch in hand they kindled a fire in the dry stubble fields of worn-out Theology, such as the waters of creed and catechism have never again extinguished. They were champions of the old and heralds of the new; and in either case they startled the sleepy respectability of both priests and people, by their persistent presentation of an aggressive movement.

These stranger messengers would not be put down. They were but few, but the enemy deemed them legion. They were said to be ignorant, but divines of every grade who went out ostentatiously or quietly on to the battlefield of polemics, always returned with armor shattered and souls discomfited by the weapons of war in the stripping's hand. Many a lordly opponent, many a proud Goliath, was smitten by the smooth stones in the sling, when hurled with the force of truth, and directed at a vulnerable point.

These un sophisticated, unlearned propagandists began to triumph. They stormed the citadels of error, tradition and superstition as if they were the trained warriors of many a stormy battlefield. And yet it was not so. They had come at the bugle call of duty, from the ploughshare, the carpenter's bench, from the forge, from the potter's wheel and from all the ordinary avocations of life. They were neither familiar with men nor institutions. They had been rocked on the prairies and cradled in the wilderness. At that time from half unknown and contemned America—from the adolescence of the New World—they had come to question the centuries' proprieties of the Old. Without prestige or introduction, without patronage or money, these innovators made contrast, they referred to professedly accepted standards, they opened the books and turned the leaves and were never at a loss for chapter and verse. Some said sophism, some liberalism, some Yankeeism. Others cried delusion, false prophets; they wanted miracles and "asked for a sign;" little dreaming that the sowing of seed, and planting of the little leaven, was, in growing and leavening, a miracle indeed.

As new converts were made, they became as zealous and enthusiastic as the originals. They went into the streets, they invaded the villages, and interested the cities. They interviewed ministers, and buttonholed quakers and thinkers. Every body began to talk, some favorably and others

disparagingly. When a professional was silenced in argument, he became an enemy. If incidental demonstration proved the inconsistency of men or systems, denunciation of the innocent aggressor became the rule. The unwelcome critic was an impostor, an enemy to established institutions—Lay to society; and the duty of society was to put down or extirpate the propagandists of so searching and unanswerable a faith.

Looking back over those times of warm encounter no wonder need be experienced at the attitude assumed by the religious world or its accredited guardians. They perchance had hardly been conscious of their status, of their errors, inconsistencies or sins. They had inherited these forms and ceremonies, they had acquired vested interests, had become the pivots of religious culture, and all the emoluments of sacred sentiment had centered in a favored and somewhat aggressive class. They had simulated authority and hedged themselves about with that "divinity which doth hedge about a king." To call in question, even indirectly, this condition or authority was sacrilegious—some thought blasphemous—and a bitterness of spirit was engendered which cannot be conceived of today, for it has been softened by education and modified by time, while in interested circles, religionists have wrapped themselves so perfectly in the garb of self-complacency and official security that the old time querist, if a "Mormon" Elder, is left to the ignominy of a silent and supercilious contempt, and where once controversy was easily had, now many an Elder cut in the world is, like the Irishman, "spoiling for a fight."

Meanwhile in the flight of years, sectarianism has been absorbing mentally, and formulating intellectually, many of the inspirational ideas promulgated of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the early Elders of the Church; and if hosts of the revered and sainted divines of years and ages gone were now resurrected and invited into the pulpits of their successors, their homilies would be found as much out of place and out of harmony with a new present as would the effort of an earnest outspoken missionary of the Church of Jesus Christ. Probably this general assimilation accounts, in part at least, for the later recognition of Christian characteristics among the "Mormon" people by the outside world, and it may affect the more apparent differences of years gone by when compared with the present.

In the beginning the Latter-day Saints were indeed a "peculiar people." There was a newness, an originality, in doctrines, methods of promulgation, in organization and anticipation, which seemed more striking than it does today. Familiarity with the system is among its adherents one thing, certain changes patent to all are another; but to the stranger, the outside observer, it may be now as unique, as individualized and as aggressive, as it once appeared to its most ardent converts.

It is from a non-recognition of the essential nature of a living thing or system, that men look backward as to the golden age. They ask for original, primitive, "old Mormonism," as they call it, with its freshness, vigor, ex-

citement and enthusiasm; with the opposition, persecution and change which these implied. But they overlook the fact that they were younger then, and the dreams and experiences of youth are never obliterated from the human heart. It is, in poetry alone or under strong depression, that men pray, "make me a child again, just for tonight." The latter clause always nullifies the possibilities of the former, and today as our eye rests upon a personal daguerreotype taken when upon the threshold of manhood, we feel no anxiety to return, spite of the burthens and responsibilities of maturer years. So in "Mormonism"—while the mental picture of years gone by may be fascinating, we prefer to live in its present, and to yet believe that its predestined mission is assured. Its approaching manhood is grander to our thought than its infancy or youth, though these may have had linked with them the warmest emotions and the unregretted sacrifices of the human soul.

The new generation coming upon the stage of action through the Church, have advantages over the fathers. Neither their mentality nor their action will be tinged with old traditions, and their illumination will be thus less clouded; while the tenacity of purpose which has been transmitted, coupled with a supersensitiveness to spiritual influences, will so mould their will and direct their energies that the present dormant condition will pass away before the more continuous and visible progress of the not far distant future. Dead things are non-elastic, they do not yield to pressure, they do not bend before the storm. Great men, wise men, "stoop to conquer," and even the suspension of a divine and righteous law carries with it no querulous comment upon that authority. The overruling mind, which writes the program of the eternities, works in and through them, while the generations of men are but as sands on the seashore or "the dust of the balance." Growth is always silent; "the kingdom cometh not with observation," and no man can see that increase with which he is most intimately associated. Children of the family circle reach manhood by infinitesimal addition. The closest observer cannot discover the difference between today and yesterday. But time tells; experience or absence knows that there is change, and that where health and vigor are, where there is power to absorb the elements of life, continuance is as certain as the rising of the sun.

And so from a parity of reason we conclude that Zion is growing, that truth is spreading, that example is contagious, that "the living Church" is carrying more influence than ever it has done in history. Thinkers tell it, religionists sense it, ministers feel it; the world is being moved by it to more exalting, to grander conclusions, though they may fail to give credit to the system; or even to recognize the finger of Deity, or the processes of revelation which give to "Mormonism" and its devoted believers all the potency which they undoubtedly possess. Philosophers, statesmen, workers and idealists have their eye upon this flaming beacon on the mountain top. They would imitate its methods, they