

he had endured; he lost his hold, not of the boy, but of the mast, the wild waves swept over them, and they perished together.

### JOE SMITH AND THE MORMONS.

BY PROF. JAMES F. W. JOHNSTON.

IN the future history of mankind, if present appearances are to be trusted, the counties of Wayne and Ontario, N. Y., are likely to derive an interest and importance, in the eyes of a numerous body of people, from a circumstance wholly unconnected either with their social progress, or with their natural productions or capabilities. In these counties lie the scenes of the early passages in the life of Joe Smith, the founder of the sect of the Mormons.

Born in December, 1805, in Sharon, Windsor County, State of Vermont, he removed with his father, about 1815, to a small farm in Palmyra, Wayne County, New York, and assisted him on the farm till 1826. He received little education, read indifferently, wrote and spelt badly, knew little of arithmetic, and, in all other branches of learning he was, to the day of his death, exceedingly ignorant.

His own account of his religious progress is, that as early as fifteen years of age he began to have serious ideas regarding the future state, that he got into occasional ecstasies, and that in 1823, during one of these ecstasies, he was visited by an angel, who told him that his sins were forgiven—that the time was at hand when the gospel in its fullness was to be preached to all nations—that the American Indians were a remnant of Israel, who, when they first emigrated to America, were an enlightened people, possessing a knowledge of the true God, and enjoying his favor—that the prophets and inspired writers among them had kept a history or record of their proceedings—that these records were safely deposited—and that, if faithful, he was to be the favored instrument for bringing them to light.

On the following day, according to instructions from the angel, he went to a hill which he calls Cumorah, in Palmyra township, Wayne County, and there, in a stone chest, after a little digging, he saw the records; but it was not till four years after, in September 1827, that "the angel of the Lord delivered the records into his hands."

"These records were engraved on plates which had the appearance of gold, were seven by eight inches in size, and thinner than common tin, and were covered on both sides with Egyptian characters, small and beautifully engraved. They were bound together in a volume like the leaves of a book, and were fastened at one edge with three rings running through the whole. The volume was about six inches in thickness, bore many marks of antiquity, and part of it was sealed. With the records was found a curious instrument, called by the ancients Urim and Thummim, which consisted of two transparent stones, clear as crystal, and set in two rims of a bow—a pair of pebble

spectacles, in other words, or "helps to read" unknown tongues.

The report of his discovery having got abroad, his house was beset, he was mobbed, and his life was endangered by persons who wished to possess themselves of the plates. He therefore packed up his goods, concealed the plates in a barrel of beans, and proceeded across the country to the northern part of Pennsylvania, near the Susquehanna river, where his father-in-law resided. Here, "by the gift and power of God, through the means of the Urim and Thummim, he began to translate the record, and, being a poor writer, he employed a scribe to write the translation as it came from his mouth." In 1830 a large edition of the *Book of Mormon* was published. It professes to be an abridgment of the records made by the prophet Mormon, of the people of the Nephites, and left to his son Moroni to finish. It is regarded by the Latter-day Saints with the same veneration as the New Testament is among Christians.

The Church of the Latter-day Saints was organized on the 6th of April, 1830, at Manchester, in Ontario County, New York. Its numbers at first were few, but they rapidly increased, and in 1833 removed to the State of Missouri, and purchased a large tract of land in Jackson County. Here their neighbors tarred and feathered some, killed others, and compelled the whole to remove. They then established themselves in Clay County, in the same State, but on the opposite side of the river. From this place again, in 1835, they removed eastward to the State of Ohio, settled at Kirtland, in Geauga County, about twenty miles from Cleveland, and began to build a temple, upon which sixty-thousand dollars were expended. At Kirtland a bank was incorporated by Joe and his friends, property was bought with its notes, and settled upon the Saints, after which the bank failed—as many others did about the same time—and Ohio became too hot for the Mormons. Again, therefore, the Prophet, his apostles, and a great body of the Saints, left their home and temple, went westward a second time to the State of Missouri, purchased a large tract of land in Caldwell County, in Missouri, and built the city of the "Far West." Here difficulties soon beset them, and in August, 1838, became so serious that the military were called in; and the Mormons were finally driven, unjustly, harshly, and oppressively, by force of arms, from the State of Missouri, and sought protection in the State of Illinois, on the eastern bank of the Mississippi. They were well received in this State, and after wandering for some time—while their leader, Joe Smith, was in jail—they bought a beautiful tract of land in Hancock County, and, in the spring of 1840, began to build the city and temple of Nauvoo. The Legislature of Illinois at first passed an act giving great, and, probably, injudicious privileges to this city, which, in 1844, was already the largest in the State, and contained a population of about twenty thousand souls. The temple, too, was of great size and

magnificence—being 128 feet long and 77 feet high, and stood on an elevated situation, from which it was visible to a distance of 25 or 30 miles. In the interior was an immense baptismal font, in imitation of the brazen sea of Solomon—"a stone reservoir, resting upon the backs of twelve oxen, also cut out of stone, and as large as life."

But persecution followed them to Illinois, provoked in some degree, no doubt, by their own behavior, especially in making and carrying into effect city ordinances, which were contrary to the laws of the State. The people of the adjoining townships rose in arms, and were joined by numbers of the old enemies of the Mormons from Missouri. The militia were called out; and, to prevent further evils, Joe Smith and one of his brothers, with several other influential Saints, on an assurance of safety and protection from the Governor of the State, were induced to surrender themselves for trial in respect of the charges brought against them, and were conducted to prison. Here they were inconsiderately left by the Governor, on the following day, under a guard of seven or eight men. These were overpowered the same afternoon by an armed mob, who killed Joe Smith and his brother, and then made their escape. After this, the Mormons remained a short time longer in the Holy City; but the wound was too deep seated to admit of permanent quiet on either part, and they were at last driven out by force, and compelled to abandon or sacrifice their property. Such as escaped this last persecution, after traversing the boundless prairies, the deserts of the Far West, and the Rocky Mountains, appear at last to have found a resting-place near the Great Salt Lake in Oregon. They are increasing faster since this last catastrophe than ever; and are daily receiving large accessions of new members from Europe, especially from Great Britain. They form the nucleus of the new State of Utah, this year erected into a Territory of the United States, and likely, in the next session of Congress, to be elevated to the dignity of an independent State. So rapidly has persecution helped on this offspring of ignorance, and tended to give a permanent establishment, and a bright future, to a system, not simply of pure invention, but of blasphemous impiety, and folly the most insane.

The *Book of Mormon*, which is the written guide of this new sect, consists of a series of professedly historical books—a desultory and feeble imitation of the Jewish chronicles and prophetic books—in which, for the poetry and warnings of the ancient prophets, are substituted a succession of unconnected rhapsodies and repetitions, such as might form the perorations of ranting addresses by a field preacher, to a very ignorant audience.

The book, in the edition I possess, consists in all of 634 pages, of which the first 580 contain the history of a fictitious personage called Lehi and that of his descendants for the space of a thousand years.

This Lehi, a descendant of Joseph the son of Jacob, with his family left Jerusalem in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, six hundred years before Christ, and, passing the Red Sea, journeyed eastward for eight years till they reached the shore of a wide sea. There they built a ship, and, embarking, were carried at length to the promised land, where they settled and multiplied. Among the sons of Lehi one was called Laman and another Nephi. The former was wicked, and a disbeliever in the law of Moses and the prophets; the latter, obedient and faithful, and a believer in the coming of Christ. Under the leadership of these two opposing brothers, the rest of the family and their descendants arranged themselves, forming the Lamanites and the Nephites, between whom wars and perpetual hostilities arose. The Lamanites were idle hunters, living in tents, eating raw flesh, and having only a girdle round their loins. The skin of Laman and his followers became black; while that of Nephi and his people, who tilled the land, retained its original whiteness. As with the Jews, the Nephites were successful when they were obedient to the law; and, when they fell away to disobedience and wickedness, the Lamanites had the better, and put many to death. At the end of about four hundred years, a portion of the righteous Nephites under Mosiah, having left their land, traveled far across the wilderness, and discovered the city of Zarahemla, which was peopled by the descendants of a colony of Jews who had wandered from Jerusalem when King Zedekiah was carried away captive to Babylon, twelve years after the emigration of Lehi. But they were heathens, possessed no copy of the law, and had corrupted their language. They received the Nephites warmly, however, learned their language, and gladly accepted the law of Moses.

This occupies 158 pages. The history of the next two hundred years follows this new people, and that of occasional converts from the Lamanites—called still by the general name of Nephites in their struggles with the Lamanites, and the alternations of defeat and success which accompany disobedience or the contrary. This occupies several books, and brings us to the 486th page, and the period of the birth of Christ. This event is signified to the people of Zarahemla by a great light, which made the night as light as mid-day. And thirty-three years after there was darkness for three days, and thunderings and earthquakes, and the destruction of cities and people. This was a sign of the crucifixion. Soon after this, Christ himself appears to this people of Zarahemla in America, repeats to them in long addresses the substance of his numerous sayings and discourses, as recorded by the apostles; chooses twelve to go forth and preach and baptize; and then disappears. On occasion of a great baptizing by the apostles, however, he appears again; imparts the Holy Spirit to all, makes long discourses, and disappears. And, finally, to the

apostles themselves he appears a third time; and addresses them in ill-assorted extracts and paraphrases of his New Testament sayings.

The account of these visits of our Saviour to the American Nephites, and of his sayings, occupies about 48 pages. For about 400 years, the Christian doctrine and church thus planted among the Nephites had various fortune; increasing at first, and prospering, but, as corruptions came in, encountering adversity. The Lamanites were still their fierce enemies; and as wickedness and corrupt doctrine began to prevail among the Christians, the Lamanites gained more advantages. It would appear, from Joe Smith's descriptions, that he means the war to have begun at the Isthmus of Darien—where the Nephites were settled, and occupied the country to the north, while the Lamanites lived south of the isthmus. From the isthmus the Nephites were gradually driven toward the east, till finally, at the hill of Cumorah, near Palmyra, in Wayne County, western New York, the last battle was fought, in which, with the loss of 230,000 fighting men, the Nephites were exterminated! Among the very few survivors was Moroni the last of the scribes, who deposited in this hill the metal plates which the virtuous Joe Smith was selected to receive from the hands of the angel. This occupies to the 580th page.

But now, in the Book of Ether, which follows, Joe becomes more bold, and goes back to the tower of Babel for another tribe of fair people, whom he brings over and settles in America. At the confusion of the languages, Ether and his brethren journeyed to the great sea, and, after a sojourn of four years on the shore, built boats under the Divine direction, water-tight, and covered over like walnuts, with a bright stone in each end to give light! And when they had embarked in their tight boats, a strong wind arose, blowing toward the promised land, and for 344 days it blew them along the water, till they arrived safe at the shore. Here, like the sons of Lehi, they increased and prospered, and had kings and prophets and wars, and were split into parties, who fought with each other. Finally, Shiz rose in rebellion against Coriantumr, the last king, and they fought with alternate success, till two millions of mighty men, with their wives and children, had been slain! And, after this, all the people were gathered either on the one side or the other, and fought for many days, till only Coriantumr alone remained alive!

This foolish history is written with the professedly religious purpose of showing the punishment from the hand of God which wicked behavior certainly entails; and, with some trifling moralities of Moroni, completes the *Book of Mormon*.

Joseph Smith does not affect in this gospel of his to bring in any new doctrine, or to supersede the Bible, but to restore "many plain and precious things which have been taken away from the first book by the abominable church, the

Mother of Harlots." It is full of sillinesses, follies, and anachronisms; but I have not discovered, in my cursory review, any of the immoralities or positive licentiousness which he himself practiced, directly inculcated. He teaches faith in Christ, human depravity, the power of the Holy Ghost, the doctrine of the Trinity, of the atonement, and of salvation only through Christ. He recommends the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; and, whatever his own conduct and that of his people may be, certainly in his book prohibits polygamy and priesthood.

The wickedness of his book consists in its being a lie from beginning to end, and of himself in being throughout an impostor. Pretending to be a "seer"—which, he says, is greater than a prophet—he puts into the hands of his followers a work of pure invention as a religious guide inspired by God, and which, among his followers, is to take the place of the Bible. Though an ignorant man, he was possessed of much shrewdness. He courted persecution, though he hoped to profit, not to die by it. Unfortunately, his enemies, by their inconsiderate persecution, have made him him a martyr for his opinions, and have given a stability to his sect which nothing may now be able to shake. It was urged by Smith himself that the New World was as deserving of a direct revelation as the Old; and his disciples press upon their hearers that, as an *American revelation*, this system has peculiar claims upon their regard and acceptance. The feeling of nationality being thus connected with the new sect, weak-minded native-born Americans might be swayed by patriotic motives in connecting themselves with it. But it is mortifying to learn that most numerous accessions are being made to the body in their new home by converts proceeding from England.\* Under the name of the "Latter-day Saints," professing the doctrines of the gospel, the delusions of the system are hidden from the masses by the emissaries who have been dispatched into various countries to recruit their numbers among the ignorant and devoutly-inclined lovers of novelty. Who can tell what two centuries may do in the way of giving a historical position to this rising heresy?

#### AN ICE-HILL PARTY IN RUSSIA.

THE reader, I hope, will have no objection to quit his comfortable fire-side, put on his furs, and accompany me to a sledge, or ice-hill party.

An army of about ten or fifteen sledges start from a house where all the party assemble, the gentlemen driving themselves, and each family taking some provisions with them. After about an hour and three-quarters' drive, the whole

\* It has been recently stated that the Mormon emigration from Liverpool alone, up to the present year, has been 13,500, and that they have, on the whole, been superior to and better provided than the other classes of emigrants. Of course, many more of his sect must have emigrated from other ports, and many even from the port of Liverpool, whose faith and ultimate destination was not known.