

MORMONISM.

About a hundred years since, philosophers congratulated themselves that they had finally "illuminated" civilized nations, and that thereafter the success of religious impostors, pretending to prophetic character by direct commission from heaven, would have to be confined to the barbarous nations. And the congratulation was not entirely unwarranted: one by one old superstitions, beginning with the belief in ghosts, shrank back into their native night. Year after year saw new light thrown upon science, history, and religion.

The people of the United States were supposed to be possessed of all the enlightenment of the time, and nevertheless some twenty years ago Joe Smith did set up for a prophet in the United States, and found such success as few of those acknowledged to have been worthy of being considered prophets have encountered. As has happened to prophets in all ages, Joseph found but little favor in his own country, and finally sealed with a martyr's blood the faith which he taught, truly or falsely. A close investigation would perhaps show that no founder of a religious belief has met with such success, if all the circumstances be considered. Smith had nothing to commence with save his talent. He had no education, no wealth, no external aid, no propitious circumstances, not even a reputation. He was looked upon as an idle, worthless fellow. He commenced to teach a new doctrine, not against a weak, poetical mythology, or a degrading idol worship, in dark ages among ignorant and credulous people, but against a multitude of zealous Christian sects, among a people strongly inclined to be incredulous.

And yet within twenty years Mormonism has grown to be considered one of the most important phases of existing religious belief, numbers more than a hundred thousand believers among civilized nations, and is spreading more rapidly, in proportion to its numbers, than any other faith.

To account for this success is difficult. The best reason that can be given is, that Smith's talent was equal to the task. The Mormon prophets would have us believe that the faith prospered because the Lord looked upon it with favor; but such reasoning would incline us to believe that the Lord has favored many different and inconsistent doctrines. The martyrdom of Smith, for such the execution deserves to be called, could not have had much influence. There was nothing in the Smith blood, or in any other human blood, which could lend wisdom or success to plans formed long before.

Mormonism was successful before Smith died. The true religious fervor had already taken possession of the majority of the believers and apostles of the new faith. How little ground for the faith it boots us not to inquire: the faith was sincere, and persecution could not compel its surrender. By what magic power, by what kind of political management, by what kind of church government Smith gained and preserved his absolute power, it will be the duty of the future historian to explain; for as yet we have no book worthy of the subject. Smith is said by all who knew him, to have been a man of wonderful talent. He was sociable, and ever familiar with all, even the rudest of his followers: plain, straightforward, and unostentatious in his manners, exceedingly bold in his plans, ready in his wit and conversation, a very able talker; not an orator, but an unsurpassable debater, speaking invariably to the point, and with convincing clearness; and sure to make himself master the favor of every person upon whom he exerted his powers.

Though many doubts might be entertained of Smith's talents, upon the testimony of those who knew him personally, there is little room for doubt, after considering the harmony and success of his system, when left to the care of others, long after his death. It is, besides, clear that no ordinary man could have commanded implicit obedience from such men as Brigham Young, Sydney Rigdon, Orson Hyde, and Parley Pratt.

When these men acknowledged their faith, the prospect of worldly gain was but dim, and it was so distant that a keen eye was required to see its success; and since then, the path of the Mormon leaders has not been over a bed of roses. The supposition that Smith and his apostles were conscious of being impostors, is not without its difficulties. Imposture is something which does not thrive under dangers and difficulties. It seldom happens that a man will seal a lie for its own sake with his blood; and yet Smith did it. He was in constant danger of losing his life from the time he arrived in Missouri until he was shot in Illinois; yet he never swerved. He might easily have modified his doctrines, and by bending a little before the storm, have adapted himself to the circumstances, so that the Mormons would have lived in peace, and himself become, by the natural influence of votes, a man of high-political im-

importance. He might have made far more use of his power, might have paraded himself before the public, might have bowed before the political parties; but his eye appeared too single to the government of his followers and the success of the unadulterated Mormon doctrine.

The position of the Mormon leaders at present is one which most impostors would shun. Brigham Young has shown no disposition to bow before the majesty of the United States; and we know what will be the result if the same stiff-necked policy should continue to prevail. Certain it is that in no case can the position of a leader of the Mormons be a sinecure. Neither is the position of an apostle a very desirable one. There are many missionaries in these days, but none are equal in devotion to the Mormons.

To call these men fanatics, fools, impostors, &c. is unwise, unconsoling, unjust, and impolitic. Mormonism can be conquered not by force and contemptuous treatment, but only by mildness and fair reason. Many doctrines quite as foolish as Mormonism prevail. The belief in the "Holy Coat of Treves," which found so many worshipers in the heart of Europe a couple of years since, was far more foolish. The similarity of the treatment of the Mormons and the early Christians is worthy of notice. The Christians, like the Mormons, were charged with dishonesty and all abominable vices, and the charges found general faith at a distance. It is quite probable that some of the professed Mormons are thieves or worse; but the falsehood of the charge as made against the sect bears the falsehood upon its front. Tacitus speaks of the Christians in terms very similar to those used by a majority of the Americans in speaking of the Mormons.

Into the future of Mormonism it is difficult to see, but it can safely be said that, come what may, so long as the present organization is preserved and the present leaders retain their power, Mormonism must thrive. Utah, a territory 460 miles long by 350 wide, is under their control. Brigham Young now holds his commission as Governor from the President of the United States, and the appointment was politic and proper. Difficulties may happen when the people apply for admission into the Union as a State. Whether polygamy will be abandoned by the Mormons and permitted by Congress—will be the great question; for that is the great tangible objection to Mormon morality.