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*THE STORY OF  
The  
MORMONS*

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**By William A. Linn**  
**(1902)**

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# THE STORY OF THE MORMONS

*From The Date of their Origin to  
the Year 1901*

BY

WILLIAM ALEXANDER LINN

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## P R E F A C E

No chapter of American history has remained so long unwritten as that which tells the story of the Mormons. There are many books on the subject, -- histories written under the auspices of the Mormon church, which are hopelessly biased as well as incomplete;

more trustworthy works which cover only certain periods; and books in the nature of "exposures " by former members of the church, which the Mormons attack as untruthful, and which rest, in the minds of the general reader, under a suspicion of personal bias. Mormonism, therefore, to-day suggests to most persons only one doctrine -- polygamy -- and only one leader -- Brigham Young, who made his name familiar to the present generations. Joseph Smith, Jr., is known, where known at all, only in the most general way as the founder of the sect, while the real originator of the whole scheme for a new church and of its doctrines and government, Sidney Rigdon, is known to few persons even by name.

The object of the present work is to present a consecutive history of the Mormons, from the day of their origin to the present writing, and as a secular, not as a religious, narrative. The search has been for facts, not for moral deductions, except as these present themselves in the course of the story. Since the usual weapon which the heads of the Mormon church use to meet anything unfavorable regarding their organization or leaders is a general denial, this narrative has been made to rest largely on Mormon sources of information. It has been possible to follow this plan a long way because many of the original Mormons left sketches that have been preserved. Thus we have Mother Smith's picture of her family and of the early days of the church; the Prophet's own account of the revelation to him of the golden plates, of his followers' early experiences, and of his own doings, almost day by day, to the date of his death, written with an egotist's

appreciation of his own part in the play; other autobiographies, like Parley P. Pratt's and Lorenzo Snow's; and, finally, the periodicals which the church issued in Ohio, in Missouri, in Illinois, and in England, and the official reports of the discourses preached in Utah, -- all showing up, as in a mirror, the character of the persons who gave this Church of Latter-Day Saints its being and its growth.

In regard to no period of Mormon history is there such a lack of accurate information as concerning that which covers their moves to Ohio, thence to Missouri, thence to Illinois, and thence to Utah. Their own excuse for all these moves is covered by the one word "persecution" (meaning persecution on account of their religious belief), and so little has the non-Mormon world known about the subject that this explanation has scarcely been challenged. Much space is given to these early migrations, as in this way alone can a knowledge be acquired of the real character of the constituency built up by Smith in Ohio, and led by him from place to place until his death, and then to Utah by Brigham Young.

Any study of the aims and objects of the Mormon leaders must rest on the Mormon Bible ("Book of Mormon") and on the "Doctrine and Covenants," the latter consisting principally of the "revelations" which directed the organization of the church and its secular movements. In these alone are spread out the original purpose of the migration to Missouri and the instructions of Smith to his followers regarding their assumed rights to the territory they were to occupy; and without a knowledge of these "revelations" no fair judgment can be formed of the justness of the objections of the people of Missouri and Illinois to their new neighbors. If the fraudulent character of the alleged revelation to Smith of golden plates can be established, the foundation of the whole church scheme crumbles. If Rigdon's connection with Smith in the preparation of the Bible by the use of the

"Spaulding manuscript" can be proved, the fraud itself is established. Considerable of the evidence on this point herein brought together is presented at least in new shape, and an adequate sketch of Sidney Rigdon is given for the first time. The probable service of Joachim's "Everlasting Gospel," as suggesting the story of the revelation of the plates, has been hitherto overlooked.

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A few words with regard to some of the sources of information quoted: -- "Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith and his Progenitors for Many Generations" ("Mother Smith's History," as this book has been generally called) was first published in 1853 by the Mormon press in Liverpool, with a preface by Orson Pratt recommending it; and the *Millennial Star* (Vol. XV, p. 682) said of it: "Being written by Lucy Smith, the mother of the Prophet, and mostly under his inspiration, will be ample guarantee for the authenticity of the narrative. . . . Altogether the work is one of the most interesting that has appeared in this latter dispensation." Brigham Young, however, saw how many of its statements told against the church, and in a letter to the *Millennial Star* (Vol. XVII, p. 298), dated January 31, 1858, he declared that it contained "many mistakes," and said that "should it ever be deemed best to publish these sketches, it will not be done until after they are carefully corrected." The preface to the edition of 1880, published by the Reorganized Church at Plano, Illinois, says that Young ordered the suppression of the first edition, and that "under this order large numbers were destroyed, few being preserved, some of which fell into the hands of those now with the Reorganized Church. For this destruction we see no adequate reason." James J.

Strang, in a note to his pamphlet, "Prophetic Controversy," says that Mrs. Corey (to whom the pamphlet is addressed) "wrote the history of the Smiths called 'Mother Smith's History.'" Mrs. Smith was herself quite incapable of putting her recollections into literary shape.

The autobiography of Joseph Smith, Jr., under the title "History of Joseph .Smith," began as a supplement to Volume XIV of the *Millennial Star*, and ran through successive volumes to Volume XXIV. The matter in the supplement and in the earlier numbers was revised and largely written by Rigdon. The preparation of the work began after he and Smith settled in Nauvoo, Illinois. In his last years Smith rid himself almost entirely of Rigdon's counsel, and the part of the autobiography then written takes the form of a diary which unmasks Smith's character as no one else could do. Most of the correspondence and official documents relating to the troubles in Missouri and Illinois are incorporated in this work.

Of the greatest value to the historian are the volumes of the Mormon publications issued at Kirtland, Ohio; Independence, Missouri; Nauvoo, Illinois; and Liverpool, England. The first of these, *Evening and Morning Star* (a monthly, twenty-four numbers), started at Independence and transferred to Kirtland, covers the period from June, 1832, to September, 1834; its successor, the *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*, was issued at Kirtland from 1834 to 1837. This was followed by the *Elders' Journal*, which was transferred from Kirtland to Far West, Missouri, and was discontinued when the Saints were compelled to leave that state. *Times and Seasons* was published at Nauvoo from 1839 to 1845. Files of these publications are very scarce, the volumes of the *Times and Seasons* having been suppressed, so far as possible, by Brigham Young's order. The publication of the *Millennial Star* was begun in Liverpool in May, 1840, and is still continued. The early volumes contain the official

epistles of the heads of the church to their followers, Smith's autobiography, correspondence describing the early migrations and the experiences in Utah, and much other valuable material,

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the authenticity of which cannot be disputed by the Mormons. In the *Journal of Discourses* (issued primarily for circulation in Europe) are found official reports of the principal discourses (or sermons) delivered in Salt Lake City during Young's regime. Without this official sponsor for the correctness of these reports, many of them would doubtless be disputed by the Mormons of to-day.

The earliest non-Mormon source of original information quoted is "Mormonism Unveiled," by E. D. Howe (Painesville, Ohio, 1834). Mr. Howe, after a newspaper experience in New York State, founded the *Cleveland (Ohio) Herald* in 1819, and later the *Painesville (Ohio) Telegraph*. Living near the scene of the Mormon activity in Ohio when they moved to that state, and desiring to ascertain the character of the men who were proclaiming a new Bible and a new church, he sent agents to secure such information among the Smiths' old acquaintances in New York and Pennsylvania, and made inquiries on kindred subjects, like the "Spaulding manuscript." His book was the first serious blow that Smith and his associates encountered, and their wrath against it and its author was fierce.

Pomeroy Tucker, the author of "Origin and Progress of the Mormons" (New York, 1867), was personally acquainted with the Smiths and with Harris and Cowdery before and after the appearance of the Mormon Bible. He read a good deal of the proof of



the original edition of that book as it was going through the press, and was present during many of the negotiations with Grandin about its publication. His testimony in regard to early matters connected with the church is important.

Two non-Mormons who had an early view of the church in Utah and who put their observations in book form were B. G. Ferris ("Utah and the Mormons," New York, 1854 and 1856) and Lieutenant J. W. Gunnison of the United States Topographical Engineers ("The Mormons," Philadelphia, 1856). Both of these works contain interesting pictures of life in Utah in those early days.

There are three comprehensive histories of Utah, -- H. H. Bancroft's "History of Utah" (1889), Tullidge's "History of Salt Lake City" (1886), and Orson F. Whitney's "History of Utah," in four volumes, three of which, dated respectively March, 1892, April, 1893, and January, 1898, have been issued. The Reorganized Church has also published a "History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" in three volumes. While Bancroft's work professes to be written from a secular standpoint, it is really a church production, the preparation of the text having been confided to Mormon hands. "We furnished Mr. Bancroft with his material," said a prominent Mormon church officer to me. Its plan is to give the Mormon view in the text, and to refer the reader for the other side to a mass of undigested notes, and its principal value to the student consists in its references to other authorities. Its general tone may be seen in its declaration that those who have joined the church to expose its secrets are "the most contemptible of all"; that those who have joined it honestly and, discovering what company they have got into, have given the information to the world, would far better have gone their way and said nothing about it; and, as to polygamy, that "those who waxed the hottest against" the practice "are not as a rule the purest of our people" (p. 361) and that the Edmunds

Law of 1882 " capped the climax of absurdity " (p. 683).

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Tullidge wrote his history after he had taken part in the "New Movement." In it he brought together a great deal of information, including the text of important papers, which is necessary to an understanding of the growth and struggles of the church. The work was censored by a committee appointed by the Mormon authorities.

Bishop Whitney's history presents the pro-Mormon view of the church throughout. It is therefore wholly untrustworthy as a guide to opinion on the subjects treated, but, like Tullidge's, it supplies a good deal of material which is useful to the student who is prepared to estimate its statements at their true value.

The acquisition by the New York Public Library of the Berrian collection of books, early newspapers, and pamphlets on Mormonism, with the additions constantly made to this collection, places within the reach of the student all the material that is necessary for the formation of the fairest judgment on the subject.

W. A. L.

HACKENSACK, N.J., 1901.

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