

# WHEN MORMONS QUIT THE STATE

Reforming Newspaper Wrecks City of Nauvoo and Makes Smith a Martyr.

BY REV. ORIEN W. FIFER.

After a long search I have at last found a copy of one of the most interesting newspapers ever published, the Nauvoo Expositor. The Expositor was issued but once, June 7, 1844, but that number ruined a promising city, caused the mob-murder of Joseph Smith, the prophet, divided the church of which he was the founder, exploded a great commercial enterprise, and excited thousands of people. Somewhat indirectly, but none the less effectively, the paper affected the political history of the nation. The stormy debates in congress, the fierce accusations by enemies, and stubborn resistance by friends of Mormonism in recent years, the grave influence of the Mormon vote upon political leaders and policies, and the complicated story of polygamy, with its dangerous social phases, can be traced to the one issue of this ill-fated newspaper.

In 1844, Nauvoo, Ill., now a placid little village, was the most important city politically and numerically, in the state. In that year Chicago had less than 19,000 inhabitants, while Nauvoo contained nearly 15,000. Nauvoo then teemed with industries. Steamboats were landing immigrants from Europe. A respectable college was flourishing. A temple costing hundreds of thousands of dollars in labor and material was approaching completion upon the high brow of the plateau which formed part of the site of the city. A real estate "boom" was on. Occupying one of the most beautiful sites for a city anywhere in the Mississippi valley, Nauvoo, in 1844, justified great expectations. Politically the city was to be feared. Astute politicians courted the solid Mormon vote. Abraham Lincoln termed Joseph Smith a friend and courted his political favor. Stephen A. Douglas, from the beginning of their residence in Illinois, was a prime friend of the Mormons and favored them in substantial and frequent fashion. Congressional and county candidates bargained for Mormon votes. The city also boasted in 1844 of a candidate for the presidency and a candidate for the vice presidency. Joseph Smith had been put forward for the presidency in January, 1844, and 137 elders, among them Brigham Young, had been sent out to electioneer for him through eastern states. Later Sidney Rigdon was named for vice president. Nauvoo complacently complimented itself upon these political ventures, and it is an open question how far the issues of 1844 would have been affected if the Expositor had not been issued, if Smith had not been murdered, and the Mormons had cast their votes for their candidates in the autumn. Until that fateful day in June, 1844, Nauvoo was a power in Illinois, and dreamed of unlimited growth and influence.

The one number of the Expositor changed all this. It was issued on Friday. By Monday evening, following the press had been destroyed, the building wrecked in part, and the owners and editor had fled for their lives. Within a little more than two years the Mormon community was hastening across the savage-wet prairies to an undiscovered home, the streets of the city had been stained with blood of citizens slain in civil strife, the gorgeous parades and ceremonies had ended, the imposing temple was deserted, and the city itself was for sale. The paper, aiming only to reform the Mormon religion, had made the prophet a martyr, aroused the state of Illinois to warfare against the so-called "Saints," and left the once prosperous city to dwindle to a village slumbering quietly amid strawberry beds and vineyards.

The copy of the paper before me contains four printed pages of six columns each. The edition numbered 1,000 copies. It was published by Mormons who had lived in Nauvoo, some of whom had been high in the confidence of Joseph Smith and the church. Their newspaper venture was

the method chosen to assail the character and to destroy the political power of Smith, and to disclose the secret teaching and probable practice of polygamy.

The Expositor contained the affidavits of William Law and his wife, Jane Law, and of Austin Cowles. William Law stated that Hyrum Smith, brother of the Prophet Joseph, read to him a certain document and then gave it to him to read for himself; that he took the document home and read it to his wife Jane; that it contained authorization for certain men to have more than one wife in this world and in the world to come; and that Hyrum Smith had declared the contents of the document to be a revelation from the Lord received by Joseph Smith. Jane Law declared in her affidavit that she had read the same document, and that it contained the doctrine of more wives than one at the same time, and that wives who would not allow their husbands to have more than one wife would be under condemnation before God. Austin Cowles stated that in the summer of 1843 Hyrum Smith did introduce into the high council a revelation given through the Prophet Joseph sanctioning the plurality of wives, and that by reason of such doctrine being taught and practiced he had left the office of first counselor in the church.

The paper also contained a preamble of several columns, in which the definite statement was made that Joseph Smith had attempted to secure a plurality of wives. This preamble was followed by 15 resolutions passed by seceders from the church in Nauvoo, in which again and again the protest was made against the teaching of plurality of wives by Joseph and Hyrum Smith.

The effect of the publication of these charges was immediate and disastrous. The Mormons went through the process of a trial concerning the Expositor. The trial was one of the most curious in the history of jurisprudence. It was held on Saturday, the day following the publication of the paper. The trial was adjourned over Sunday, continued and completed on Monday. The paper itself seems to have been tried. The city council acted as jury with the mayor, Joseph Smith in the chair. The owners, though absent, were tried without representation. Governor Ford, who writes largely from evidence furnished by the Mormons themselves, states that "one finds difficulty in determining whether the proceedings were the result of insanity or depravity. Nobody accused had notice of the trial. Nobody was permitted to defend the accused. No jury was called or sworn. No witnesses were put on oath. From the Mormon standpoint it was abundantly proved that the owners of the Expositor were sinners, thieves, swindlers, counterfeiters and robbers. It was the most curious and irregular trial ever held in any civilized country." The city council finally declared that the printing office from whence issued the Expositor was a public nuisance, also all the copies existing in the office, and the mayor was authorized to remove the same without delay in such manner as he might direct. The prophet ordered the city marshal to destroy the printing press, to "bl" the type and to burn all the Expositors found, together with libelous handbills which might be found. To aid the marshal in this duty the Nauvoo legion, local militia, was ordered to be in readiness in case opposition was offered.

The press was destroyed that evening, the prophet aiding strenuously in the destruction and engaging in something of a flat fight with a bystander. He later issued a proclamation reciting the charge that the city was infested with blacklegs, counterfeiters and debauchees, and that the proprietors of the Expositor belonged to that class.

The owners of the paper, who had fled to Carthage, filed charges against the prophet and city council for rioting. The legal incidents ensuing brought Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, under practical arrest to Carthage. A mob broke in on the jail and shot Joseph, exalting him to martyrdom in the eyes of his people.

Six months later the state legislature repealed the unique city charter of Nauvoo, the most favorable ever granted to an American city. In the summer of 1845 a degree of civil war was witnessed in and around the city. In October of that year the Mormons agreed to evacuate the region in the spring of the following year and remove to some point west of the Rocky mountains. The exodus began in the winter and proceeded during the summer. Excitement, fanned by wild rumors, created suspicion and hatred among the enemies of the Mormons, and on Sept. 16, 1846, a battle was fought at Nauvoo. The following day the remaining inhabitants of the city departed across the river into Iowa, urged by deeds of violence and compulsion disgraceful to American citizenship. The city stood empty, despoiled, and where 15,000 people had toiled and worshipped, only silence reigned among empty houses and deserted temple.

Mormon writers of the polygamous and the non-polygamous branches always have characterized the Expositor as a venomous, filthy, false and disreputable sheet. Some of these writers doubtless never have read the paper. The paper deserves consideration. The literary style is not superior, but the writing is straightforward and evidently the work of men possessing more than average courage. The paper needs to receive consideration as one of his elements is the better history of the middle west. Perhaps Illinois might have been saved from Mormon political domination without the Expositor, but the fact remains that the paper set in motion causes which relieved the state of any perils like those which menace more western commonwealths.

It is true also that one branch of the Mormon church preserves clean-

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## CUPID—IN THE STONE AGE AND TODAY.



ness of practice and teaching concerning polygamy by reason of the one issue of the Expositor. The members of the church characterize the Expositor in bitter terms, but it may have preserved them from polygamy. The sudden death of Joseph Smith made it possible for all Mormons to look upon him in a salutary light. Mormons who went to Utah accepted the charges made by the Expositor and boldly announced the doctrine of polygamy with endorsements from Joseph Smith much as the Expositor had published. The Mormons who remained behind in Illinois and elsewhere never have admitted the paternity of polygamy in the Smith family. The Expositor sheds some light upon the issue.

One who reads the expositor now is convinced that these men who made protest against Joseph Smith were conscious of a real peril in their church and to their domestic welfare. The tone of the paper is serious and earnest. There is a convincing corroboration of the charges made in the paper by the later admissions of the polygamous Mormons. After the revelation concerning polygamy was published in Salt Lake City in 1852 and attributed to Smith, William Clayton, who had been a clerk in Smith's office in Nauvoo, testified in an affidavit made in 1874 that the prophet broached the subject of plurality of wives during February, 1843, and that later Hyrum Smith offered to read the revelation to Mrs. Smith if the prophet could write it out. In a history of Mormonism, by E. C. Evans, of the Utah branch of the church, it is stated that the revelation concerning polygamy was read in part by Hyrum Smith in June, 1843, before the high council, all of whom except two or three received it as true doctrine. This corroborates the affidavits of William Law and Austin Cowles in the Expositor. The time—the summer of 1843—the proffer of Hyrum Smith to read the revelation, the fact of the reading before the high council, are coincident with the testimony of opposing parties which substantiate the truth

of the charges published in the Expositor. There is no foundation for the charge made so often by the Mormons that the Expositor was "reeking with libel and lath," or that "the leading citizens, men and women, were spoken of and slandered in the most indecent terms." The editor of the paper, Sylvester Emmons, removed to Beardstown, Ill., and lived there until his death. For 16 years he was mayor of the town and lived in eastern. William Law, who signed the first affidavit, had been named as one of the first presidency, had been mentioned by name in the special revelation commanding the building of the Nauvoo house (which has a story in itself very interesting), and had been registrar of the university. In April of that year, 1844, Hyrum Smith had spoken in high terms of William Law and his brother Wilson. These Law brothers ran a grist mill and a notice was printed in the Expositor that in view of hard times they would grind grain free on Thursdays for those who deserved charity. In the trial of the Expositor Joseph Smith complained that William Law had pursued him to recover \$4,000 which he owed him.

There is much evidence to show that these men who published the ill-fated Expositor were men of strength and worth, and that they rendered the civilization of the Mississippi valley an inestimable service for good in the publication of a "martyr newspaper."

—New York Christian Advocate.

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