

tain place made known to him, and to him only ; that they contained revelations in regard to the last days, and that, if he remained faithful, he would be the chosen prophet to translate them to the world."

In the fall of the same year Smith had yet a more miraculous and astonishing vision than any preceding one. He now arrogated to himself, by authority of "the spirit of revelation," and in accordance with the previous "promises" made to him, a far higher sphere in the scale of human existence, assuming to possess the gift and power of "prophet, seer, and revelator." On this assumption he announced to his family friends and the bigoted persons who had adhered to his supernaturalism, that he was "commanded," upon a secretly fixed day and hour, to go alone to a certain spot revealed to him by the angel, and there take out of the earth a metallic book of great antiquity in its origin, and of immortal importance in its consequences to the world, which was a record, in mystic letters or characters, of the long-lost tribes of Israel before spoken of, who had primarily inhabited this continent, and which no human being besides himself could see and live ; and the power to translate which to the nations of the earth was also given to him only, as the chosen servant of God ! This was substantially, if not literally, the pretension of Smith, as related by himself, and repeatedly quoted by his credulous friends at the time.

Much pains were taken by the Smith family and the prophet's money-digging disciples to give wide circulation to the wonderful revelation, and in great gravity to predict its marvellous fulfilment. It is unknown, however, if the momentous announcement produced any sensation in the community, though it is fair to presume that the victims of Smith's former deceptive practices regarded it with some seriousness.

Accordingly, when the appointed hour came, the prophet, assuming his practised air of mystery, took in hand his money-digging spade and a large napkin, and went off in silence and alone in the solitude of the forest, and after an absence of some three hours, returned, apparently with his sacred charge concealed within the folds of the napkin. Reminding the family of the original "command" as revealed to him, strict injunction of non-intervention and non-inspection was given to them, under the same terrible penalty as before denounced for its violation. Conflicting stories were afterward told in regard to the manner of keeping the book in concealment and safety, which are not worth repeating, further than to mention that the first place of secretion was said to be under a heavy hearthstone in the Smith family mansion.

Smith told a frightful story of the display of celestial pyrotechnics on the exposure to his view of the sacred book—the angel who had led him to the discovery again appearing as his guide and protector,

and confronting ten thousand devils gathered there, with their menacing sulphureous flame and smoke, to deter him from his purpose! This story was repeated and magnified by the believers, and no doubt aided the experiment upon superstitious minds which eventuated so successfully.

Mr. Willard Chase, a carpenter and joiner, was called upon by Smith and requested to make a strong chest in which to keep the golden book under lock and key, in order to prevent the awful calamity that would follow against the person other than himself who should behold it with his natural eyes. He could not pay a shilling for the work, and therefore proposed to make Mr. Chase a sharer in the profits ultimately anticipated in some manner not definitely stated; but the proposition was rejected—the work was refused on the terms offered. It was understood, however, that the custodian of the precious treasure afterward in some way procured a chest for his purpose, which, with its sacred deposit, was kept in a dark garret of his father's house, where the translations were subsequently made, as will be explained. An anecdote touching this subject used to be related by William T. Hussey and Azel Vandruver. They were notorious wags, and were intimately acquainted with Smith. They called as his friends at his residence, and strongly importuned him for an inspection of the "golden book," offering to take upon themselves

the risk of the death-penalty denounced. Of course, the request could not be complied with; but they were permitted to go to the chest with its owner, and see *where* the thing was, and observe its shape and size, concealed under a piece of thick canvas. Smith, with his accustomed solemnity of demeanor, positively persisting in his refusal to uncover it, Hussey became impetuous, and (suited his action to his word) ejaculated, "Egad! I'll see the critter, live or die!" And stripping off the cover, a large tile-brick was exhibited. But Smith's fertile imagination was equal to the emergency. He claimed that his friends had been sold by a trick of his; and "treating" with the customary whiskey hospitalities, the affair ended in good-nature.

With the book was also found, or so pretended, a huge pair of spectacles in a perfect state of preservation, or the *Urim* and *Thummim*,* as afterward in-

. * The best attainable definition of the very ancient Urim and Thummim is quite vague and indistinct. An accepted biblical lexicographer gives the meaning as "light and perfection," or the "shining and the perfect." The following is quoted from Butterworth's Concordance: "There are various conjectures about the Urim and Thummim, whether they were the stones in the high-priest's breast-plate, or something distinct from them; which it is not worth our while to inquire into, since God has left it a secret. It is evident that the Urim and Thummim were appointed to inquire of God by, on momentous occasions, and continued in use (as some think) only till the building of Solomon's Temple, and all conclude that this was never restored after its destruction."

terpreted, whereby the mystic record was to be translated and the wonderful dealings of God revealed to man, by the superhuman power of Joe Smith. This spectacle pretension, however, is believed to have been purely an after-thought, for it was not heard of outside of the Smith family for a considerable period subsequent to the first story. So in regard to Smith's after-avowment, that he had received a revelation of the existence of the records in 1823, but was not permitted to touch or mention them until "the fulness of time" should come for the great event, this idea was also a secondary invention.

The marvellous metallic book and its accompaniment soon became a common topic of conversation, far and near; but the sacred treasure was not seen by mortal eyes, save those of the one anointed, until after the lapse of a year or longer time, when it was found expedient to have a new revelation, as Smith's bare word had utterly failed to gain a convert beyond his original circle of believers. By this amended revelation, the veritable existence of the book was certified to by eleven witnesses of Smith's selection. It was then heralded as the Golden Bible, or Book of Mormon,* and as the beginning of a new gospel dispensation. Wonderful stories and predictions fol-

* Philologically, "Mormon" is probably synonymous with *mormo*, which, according to Webster, signifies "bugbear—false terror." At least, this definition is sufficiently appropriate.

lowed in regard to the future "light" and destiny of the world, but these were for a time very crude and very conflicting, and therefore scarcely definable or worth repeating; and they had little attraction for public notice or curiosity. The reader will be content with the narration of these things as they ultimately took shape and system.

The spot from which the book is alleged to have been taken, is the yet partially visible pit where the money speculators had previously dug for another kind of treasure, which is upon the summit of what has ever since been known as "Mormon Hill," now owned by Mr. Anson Robinson, in the town of Manchester, New York.

This book of sacred records, after the dispersion of the first vague reports concerning it, was finally described by Smith and his echoes as consisting of metallic leaves or plates resembling gold, bound together in a volume by three rings running through one edge of them, the leaves opening like an ordinary paper book. The leaves were about the thickness of common tin. Each leaf or plate was filled on both sides with engravings of finely-drawn characters, which resembled Egyptian or other hieroglyphics. The Urim and Thummim, found with the records, were two transparent crystals set in the rims of a bow, in the form of spectacles of enormous size. This constituted the seer's instrument whereby the records were to be

translated and the mysteries of hidden things revealed, and it was to supersede the further use of the magic stone. The entire sacred acquisition was delivered into the hands of the prophet by the heavenly messenger attending him, amid the awful surroundings already stated, after the former had thrown up a few spadefuls of earth in pursuance of the Lord's command. Such was Smith's ingenious story at the time, the characterization of which is left for the reader.

Translations and interpretations were now entered upon by the prophet, and manuscript specimens of these, with some of the literally transcribed characters, were shown to people, including ministers and other gentlemen of learning and influence. These translations purported to relate to the history of scattered tribes of the earth, chiefly "Nephites" and "Lamanites," who, after the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel, had been directed by the Lord across the sea to this then wilderness-land, where they mostly perished by wars among themselves, and by pestilence and famine, and from whose remnants sprang our North American Indians. They were an attempted imitation of the Scripture style of composition, containing some plagiarisms from the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, drawing largely upon Isaiah and Jeremiah, and taking from Matthew nearly the whole of Christ's Sermon on the Mount, with

some alterations. The manuscripts were in the handwriting of one Oliver Cowdery, which had been written down by him, as he and Smith declared, from the translations, word for word, as made by the latter with the aid of the mammoth spectacles or Urim and Thummim, and verbally announced by him from behind a blanket-screen drawn across a dark corner of a room at his residence—for at this time the original revelation, limiting to the prophet the right of seeing the sacred plates, had not yet been changed, and the view with the instrument used was even too brilliant for his own spiritualized eyes in the light! This was the story of the first series of translations, which was always persisted in by the few persons connected with the business at this early period of its progress. The single significance of this theory will doubtless be manifest, when the facts are stated in explanation, that Smith could not write in a legible hand, and hence an amanuensis or scribe was necessary. Cowdery had been a schoolmaster, and was the only man in the band who could make a copy for the printer.

The manifest purpose of exhibiting these manuscripts in the manner adopted, was to test the popular credulity in regard to their assumed divine character; and also to determine, by the responses that should be elicited, as to the practicability of carrying out a concocted design of printing the "new Bible." Among

others, Mr. George Crane, of the adjoining town of Macedon, a Quaker of intelligence, property, and high respectability (now deceased), was called upon by Smith with several foolscap quires of these so-called translations, for his perusal and opinion, and also for his pecuniary aid to get the work through the press. The impious story, in all its extravagance and garniture, was related to him, to which he quietly listened to the end. And then came the answer of the honest old Quaker, which was such as would have been withering to the sensibility of an ordinary impostor—though Smith was unmoved by it, for his spirit of determination was never known to yield consentingly to any adverse human influence. Sternly rebuking Smith's pretensions, and denouncing them as in a high degree blasphemous and wicked, Mr. Crane kindly but earnestly admonished him, for his own good, to desist from his criminal pursuit, warning him that persistence therein would be certain to end in his death upon the gallows, or in some equally ignominious manner. How far this friendly warning was made prophetic, by the murderous catastrophe occurring fifteen years afterward, in Illinois, is a question respectfully submitted to the reader.

CHAPTER IV.

Budding of the Mormon Church—Proposed Printing of the Golden Bible—Martin Harris consults Professor Anthon and Others—Translations lost—Mysterious Stranger again.

UNDAUNTED by any rebuffs, Prophet Smith persisted in his grand design, and, by the power of his expanding genius, secured a few devoted followers in this incipency of his new revelation—proving that, in his case, “the prophet” was not wholly “without honor” even in his “own country.” Here may be recognized the first budding of the Mormon organization, or “Church of Latter-Day Saints.”

These pioneer Mormon disciples, so far as their names can now be recollected, were as follows, viz.: Oliver Cowdery, Samuel Lawrence, Martin Harris, Preserved Harris, Peter Ingersoll, Charles Ford, George Proper and his wife Dolly, of Palmyra; Ziba Peterson, and Calvin Stoddard and his wife Sophronia, of Macedon; Ezra Thayer, of Brighton; Luman Walters, of Pultneyville; Hiram Page, of

Fayette; David Whitmer, Jacob Whitmer, Christian Whitmer, John Whitmer, and Peter Whitmer, Jr., of Phelps; Simeon Nichols, of Farmington; William Stafford, Joshua Stafford, Gad Stafford, David Fish, Abram Fish, Robert Orr, King H. Quance, John Morgan, Orrin Rockwell and his wife Caroline, Widow Sally Risley, and all the remainder of the Smith family, of Manchester.

It is believed that this list embraces all the persons residing at or near the prime seat of the Mormon advent, who from first to last made a profession of belief either in the money-digging or golden bible finding pretensions of Joseph Smith, Jr.; and probably, indeed, not more than one-half of these can be said to have been genuine converts under the one head or the other. It is to be added in this connection, however, that a man of the name of Parley P. Pratt, of Lorain County, Ohio, who, on hearing of the new religion, after the Mormon book was printed (as he said in explanation of his movement), stopped off a canal-boat at Palmyra, and at Smith's residence embraced the Mormon faith, and joined the organization which had then been imperfectly inaugurated. He was a member of an association of anti-sectarians, mostly dissenters from different religious denominations, whose place of worship was at Mentor, Ohio. "Rev. Sidney Rigdon" was the regular minister of this congregation; though Pratt himself had done something

in the way of preaching there and elsewhere, and was aspiring to still higher position in the clerical vocation. The latter, with his spiritual guide Rigdon, afterward went with the first emigrants to Kirtland, and, continuing his association with the new sect, immediately became a prominent and efficient co-worker in its priesthood, and was subsequently an important spoke in the Mormon hierarchy at Salt Lake.*

How many of the preceding list of pioneer "Latter-Day Saints" at Palmyra and vicinity remained faithful, or took more than the first degree in the new institution, is now unknown to the writer. It is recollected that at least a portion, perhaps the majority of them, became backsliders after a very brief experience.

The proposition to publish the new revelation was as yet an adjourned question. Martin Harris enthusiastically favored it, and he was the man calculated on for the means of payment for the printing. He was one of the earliest, if not, in truth, the only real believer. He was a religious monomaniac, reading the Scriptures intently, and could probably repeat from memory nearly every text of the Bible from beginning to end, giving the chapter and verse in each case. His superstition and cupidity were both ap-

* The reader, as he pursues this history, will discover the bearing of the coincidence here referred to, upon the questions of the literary origin and prime invention of the "Golden Bible."



MARTIN HARRIS.



pealed to in this matter. Though he unreservedly gave in his adhesion to the book as of divine appointment, he was by no means so prompt in his willingness to bear the whole cost of printing it, for he was proverbially a covetous, money-loving man, but an honest and benevolent one. His habit had been to look out for the best chances in a bargain, and it was natural that he should desire further opportunity for examination and consideration, and also for trying his influence in proselyting—the latter object being with a view to judging of the question of reimbursement, should he advance the money required—and he was accordingly permitted to take the manuscript translations into his possession. Reading a portion of them to his wife, a Quakeress of positive qualities, she denounced the whole performance as silly and impious. His neighbors and friends, whom he importuned and bored on the subject, uniformly expressed the same sentiment and belief, and cautioned him against being imposed upon and defrauded.

But this opposition served only to strengthen Harris's profession of faith and increase his inclination to make the printing investment. Yet he evidenced some method in his madness, for, before doing so, he sought out the "wisdom of learned men," as he said, relative to the genuineness of the revelation and discovery. He accordingly procured from Smith some resemblances of antique characters or hieroglyphics

purporting to be exact copies from the plates; which, together with the translations in his possession, he carried to New York City, where he sought for them the interpretation and bibliological scrutiny of such scholars as Hon. Luther Bradish, Dr. Mitchell, Professor Anthon, and others. All the gentlemen applied to were understood to have scouted the whole pretence as too depraved for serious attention, while commiserating the applicant as the victim of fanaticism or insanity.

Harris, nevertheless, stood firm in his position, regarding these untoward results merely as "proving the lack of wisdom" on the part of the rejecters, and also as illustrating the truth of his favorite quotation, that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." This was always his self-convincing argument in reply to similar adversity in his fanatical pursuit.

The following is Professor Anthon's account of Harris's interview with him, as given and published a few years afterward. It was addressed in a letter to a friend in reply to inquiries, and dated

"NEW YORK, *February 17, 1834.*

"Some years ago, a plain, apparently simple-hearted farmer, called on me with a note from Dr. Mitchell, of our city, now dead, requesting me to decipher, if possible, the paper which the farmer would

hand me. Upon examining the paper in question, I soon came to the conclusion that it was all a trick—perhaps a hoax. When I asked the person who brought it how he obtained the writing, he gave me the following account: A ‘golden book,’ consisting of a number of plates fastened together by wires of the same material, had been dug up in the northern part of the State of New York, and along with it an enormous pair of ‘spectacles!’ These spectacles were so large, that, if any person attempted to look through them, his two eyes would look through one glass only—the spectacles in question being altogether too large for the human face. ‘Whoever,’ he said, ‘examined the plates through the glasses, was enabled not only to read them, but fully to understand their meaning.’

“All this knowledge, however, was confined to a young man, who had the trunk containing the book and spectacles in his sole possession. This young man was placed behind a curtain, in a garret in a farm-house, and being thus concealed from view, he put on the spectacles occasionally, or, rather, looked through one of the glasses, deciphered the characters in the book, and having committed some of them to paper, handed copies from behind the curtain to those who stood outside. Not a word was said about their being deciphered by the ‘gift of God.’ Every thing in this way was effected by the large pair of specta-

cles. The farmer added, that he had been requested to contribute a sum of money toward the publication of the 'golden book,' the contents of which would, as he was told, produce an entire change in the world, and save it from ruin. So urgent had been these solicitations, that he intended selling his farm and giving the amount to those who wished to publish the plates. As a last precautionary step, he had resolved to come to New York and obtain the opinion of the 'learned' about the meaning of the paper which he had brought with him, and which had been given him as a part of the contents of the book.

"The paper in question was, in fact, a singular scroll. It consisted of all kinds of singular characters, disposed in columns, and had evidently been prepared by some person who had before him at the time a book containing various alphabets ; Greek and Hebrew letters, crosses and flourishes, Roman letters inverted or placed sideways, were arranged and placed in perpendicular columns, and the whole ended in a rude delineation of a circle, divided into various compartments, arched with various strange marks, and evidently copied after the Mexican calendar, given by Humboldt, but copied in such a way as not to betray the source whence it was derived. I am thus particular as to the contents of the paper, inasmuch as I have frequently conversed with my friends on the subject since the Mormon excitement began, and well

remember that the paper contained any thing else but 'Egyptian hieroglyphics.'

"Yours respectfully,

"CHARLES ANTHON."

Harris appears not to have presented the "translations" with the hieroglyphics to Professor Anthon, or if so, the immaterial fact had left too slight an impression for his recollection at the time of writing the above statement.

The pursuer after knowledge returned home, confirmed rather than shaken in his belief; for he had taken the sensible conclusions of the "learned men" he had seen by the rule of contraries, declaring in a boastful spirit that God had enabled him, an unlearned man as he was, to "confound worldly wisdom." He had apparently become seized with the Golden Bible mania beyond redemption. It was his constant theme wherever he appeared, rendering him, by his readings and commentaries, an object both of sympathy and dread to his friends and all whom he met.

As might have been anticipated, Harris's wife became exceedingly annoyed and disgusted with what she called her husband's "craziness." She foresaw, as she thought, that if he incurred the printing liability, as he had avowed to her his purpose of doing, the event would be the ruin of himself and family.

Thus exercised, she contrived, in her husband's sleep, to steal from him the particular source of her disturbance, and burned the manuscript to ashes. For years she kept this incendiarism a profound secret to herself, even until after the book was published. Smith and Harris held her accountable for the theft, but supposed she had handed the manuscript to some "evil-designing persons" to be used somehow in injuring their cause. A feud was thus produced between husband and wife, which was never reconciled.

Great consternation now pervaded the Mormon circles. The reappearance of the mysterious stranger at Smith's was again the subject of inquiry and conjecture by observers, from whom was withheld all explanation of his identity or purpose. It was not at first an easy task to convince the prophet of the entire innocency of his trusted friend Harris in the matter of this calamitous event, though mutual confidence and friendship were ultimately restored. The great trouble was, the lost translations could not be replaced, or at least such apparently was the difficulty. It might be supposed that, with his golden plates and spectacles before him, and with the benefit of the divine aid as he claimed, the prophet could easily have supplied a duplicate; and so he doubtless would have done had he really been the translator or original author of the composition. To explain his inability to reproduce the missing pages, he said he had received

a revelation of the Lord's displeasure for his imprudence in placing them in Harris's hands, and on this account forbidding his rewriting the same; and another reason for this interdiction was, that his enemies had obtained possession of the manuscripts, and altered them with a view of "confounding him" and embarrassing his great work of enlightenment and salvation! He and Harris were undoubtedly led to suppose that the lost manuscripts remained in existence, and might somehow be used for the object assigned.