

**THE VITALITY OF
"MORMONISM":
AN ADDRESS**

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The vitality of "Mormonism": an address by James E. Talmage

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JAMES E. TALMAGE

**THE VITALITY OF
"MORMONISM":
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The Vitality of "Mormonism"

An Address

BY

JAMES E. TALMAGE

OF THE COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE, CHURCH OF JESUS
CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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PREFATORY NOTE

The following pages embody an address delivered by invitation at a meeting of the Denver Philosophical Society, at Denver, Colorado, December 14th, 1916, by Dr. James E. Talmage.

The address has already been printed through the daily press and in magazine pages; and it is presented herewith in convenient form, suitable for preservation.

The conciseness, clearness, and accuracy with which the subject is treated commend it to the attention of interested and studious readers.

THE PUBLISHERS.

Salt Lake City, Utah,
January, 1917.

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The Vitality of "Mormonism"

Why does "Mormonism" persist? Determined attempts were made both openly and by stealth to strangle the system at its birth, to destroy the mustard seed at the time of the planting; and, as the fact of its survival has become prominent the certainty of its impending demise has been announced time and again; the fall of the umbrageous tree, amidst whose branches the birds of search continue to find food and shelter, has been often predicted.

On the 6th of April, 1830, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized as a body corporate at Fayette in the State of New York; and the names of but six persons are of record as those of actual participants. True, by that time a few times six had identified themselves with the new and unprecedented movement; but, as the laws of the State specified six as the required number of incorporators, only that number took part in the legal procedure. And they, save one, were relatively unknown and in fact obscure.

The name of Joseph Smith had already been heard beyond his home district. He was at the time a subject of rapidly spreading notoriety if not of enviable fame. The Book of Mormon, purporting to be a record of the aboriginal peoples of the Western Continent, particularly an account of the dealings of God with those peoples, in short the Scriptures of what came afterward to be called the New World, had al-

ready been published. It was in reference to the title page of this work that the appellation "Mormon," first given in derision as a nickname, was fastened upon the members of the Church.

Such a beginning as that of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may seem to afford little ground of either hope or fear as to future developments; nevertheless, the newly established Church was made the subject of assault from its inception. What was there to cause hostile concern over the voluntary association of six men and a few of their friends in an organization of openly expressed purpose, and that purpose the peaceful promulgation of what they verily believed to be the uplifting religion of life, the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Whatever may be the answer to the query, the fact that the Church met determined opposition, increasingly severe from the beginning, is abundantly attested by history. While active persecutors and openly avowed assailants were comparatively few, the majority of those who gave any attention to the matter treated "Mormonism" with aggressive disdain; and contempt in the affairs of human endeavor has not infrequently proved itself a more effective weapon than physical assault. In this instance violence and outrage resulted.

I invite your attention to "The Vitality of 'Mormonism'" under a convenient classification, though, as will be seen, the divisions are inter-related and merge intimately together. Let us consider:

1. Facts attesting the vitality and virility of the Church.
2. Some causes thereof.
3. Some of the results.

1. Facts attesting the Vitality and Virility of the Church.

Today the "Mormon" Church is known by name at least throughout the civilized world as well as amongst most of the semi-cultured peoples in the remoter parts of the earth and on the islands of the sea. Since 1830 every year has witnessed an increase in membership and an extension of "Mormon" propaganda. The six have increased to over half a million adherents. In Utah and adjacent States, in Canada and Mexico, between seventy and eighty "Stakes of Zion" have been established, each Stake comprising several Wards, of which there are now over seven hundred and fifty; and the greater part of North America outside the established Stakes, as also many foreign countries, are covered by well organized Missions, each with its component Conferences and Branches.

The growth of the Church is apparent to even the poorly informed. But the Church has not only grown; it has developed. Between growth and development there is a difference of the most essential kind; and not a few of the grave mistakes of men, even in every day affairs,—in business, in politics, in statesmanship—are traceable to our confusing and confounding the two. Growth alone is the result of accretion, the accumulation of material, the amassing of stuff. Development involves an extension of function, a gradation of efficiency, a passing from immaturity to maturity, from infancy to manhood.

Growth produces big things, and not only things of this sort but men. Between bigness and greatness, however, there is a distinction of kind, not alone of degree. Growth is a measure of bulk, of quantity; it is defined as "so many" or "so much." Development is a gradation of quality; its terms are "so good" or

"so bad." America boasts of a constantly increasing host of big men; the great men of the land may be more easily counted. And as with men so with institutions.

Dead things may grow, as witness the tiny salt crystal in its mother-brine—at first a microscopic cube, then a huge hexahedron limited only by the size of the container or other external conditions. Development, however, is the characteristic of life to which mere growth is essentially secondary and subordinate. The acorn holds in potential reserve all the possibilities of the stately oak; within the tiny egg of the butterfly lies the future caterpillar and the hidden glory of the mature imago.

The vital character of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was evident from the first. In masterly parable, superb in conception and application, the kingdom of heaven has been likened unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal; and, behold, from it the mass became leavened. I make bold to affirm that the leaven of "Mormonism" is leavening the world and its theology.

The most objectionable feature of "Mormonism" today appears to be its name. The fundamental principles of the system, its revealed truths, are more readily accepted when unlabeled. Every studious reader of recent commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, and of theological treatises in general, is aware of a surprising progressiveness in modern views of things spiritual, amounting in many instances to an abandonment of what were once regarded as the fundamentals of orthodoxy.

In the new theology "Mormonism" has pioneered the way. I admit that so radical an assertion calls for evidence; and in its support I shall ask your unbiased consideration of a few illustrative instances. As the

examples to be cited, however, must have place in any exposition of the causes to which the vitality of the "Mormon" system of religion is to be ascribed, and as I assume that the actuality of the growth and vitality of "Mormonism" will not be contested, I pass in the interest of brevity to the second division.

2. *Some Causes to which the Vitality of "Mormonism" is due.*

"Mormonism" is definite and incisive in its claims. It speaks to the world in no uncertain tone. Its voice is virile; its activities are strong. It presents an unbroken front, and is unafraid. Its attitude is not hostile, nevertheless it is strongly aggressive. Its methods of work are those of reason and persuasion, coupled with a fearless affirmation of testimony as to the surpassing importance of its message, which message it labors to convey to every nation, kindred, tongue and people.

"Mormonism" lives because it is healthy, normal and undeformed. In general, a healthy organism is assured of life, barring destruction from external violence or deprivation of physical necessities; whereas one that is abnormal and sickly is doomed to decline. Opposition to the Church, the pitiless maltreatment to which its people have been subjected, comprising mobbings, drivings, spoliation, scourgings, assassination, and murder marked by every conceivable accompaniment of barbarity, have operated to strengthen the Church, body and soul. True, the heat of persecution has scorched and withered a few of the sickly plants such as had no depth of sincerity; but the general effect has been to promote a fuller growth, and to make richer and more fertile the Garden of the Lord.

"Mormonism" thrives and is extending its influ-