

**EARLY DAYS OF
MORMONISM, PALMYRA,
KIRTLAND, AND NAUVOO.
[NEW YORK-1888]**

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Early Days of Mormonism, Palmyra, Kirtland, and Nauvoo. [New York-1888] by J. H. Kennedy

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J. H. KENNEDY

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PALMYRA, KIRTLAND, AND NAUVOO

BY

J. H. KENNEDY

EDITOR OF THE MAGAZINE OF WESTERN HISTORY

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PREFACE.

AMONG the many books that have been written upon Mormonism, there is not one that purports to be a plain, concise, complete, and unbiased history of the early days of the Mormon Church, where no tinge of personal interest existed, and no theory was to be advanced or defended. The main body of writers upon polygamy and Salt Lake, have only referred incidentally to the days of Palmyra, Kirtland, and Nauvoo, that they might properly introduce and explain the main topics it was their purpose to discuss. In these pages the author has simply told the story of the inception and growth of that remarkable body of misleading and misled men, from the birth of Joseph Smith to his tragic death in Carthage jail,—a story so full of incident and interest that it becomes worthy of narration by itself, as detached from the final journey across the wilderness, and the founding of Brigham Young's empire in the valley of Salt Lake.

The gathering of material upon which this narrative is based has not been the hurried work of a few weeks or months, but has been carried through years of unusual opportunity. While all available authorities who speak in print have been carefully searched and freely used, their statements have been supplemented or corrected by many personal inter-

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views, by search of musty records in county court-houses, and the examination of files of newspapers published in the days of Joseph Smith. In deference to the modern conclusion that even theological history should not be controversial, no attempt has been made at argument; no statement of fact has been shaded to the color of a personal belief; no open question has been decided *perforce* against the Mormon creed; and no conclusion has been reached that the facts of the case did not seem to warrant. There has been but one aim in mind: to tell the story as directly and truthfully as it can be told; and to leave the issues that make Mormonism one of the problems of the age, to those who have studied it from the moral, religious, or political point of view.

The universal interest of the American people in all that pertains to Mormonism, and the fact that no such narration as this exists in print, seem to warrant its appearance at this date.

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EARLY DAYS OF MORMONISM.

I.

A RAPID GROWTH IN FRUITFUL SOIL.

THERE was no premeditated preparation for the advent of Mormonism, yet none the less was the way made straight before it, and all the conditions to insure its life abundantly supplied. Smith its creator, Rigdon its evangelist, and Young who saved it in its supreme hour of fate at Nauvoo, held no divine commission for the founding of a creed, yet each was well equipped by nature and circumstances in all the essentials for the part he was to play. Had the first failed at Palmyra, the second at Kirtland, or the third on the banks of the Mississippi, the complex and dangerous problem of the Salt Lake valley would not now demand solution at the hands of the nineteenth century.

The outlines of this great drama of human life and human folly were unconsciously prepared long before the lines were written or the parts assigned. The atmosphere in which Joseph Smith was reared was saturated with ignorant superstition. The ease with which his parents and himself were duped, proved to

his low cunning that others could be duped as well. The phases of social and religious life with which he was surrounded were such as to nourish within him the grossest germs of spiritual thought with which he had been endowed. His mother dreamed strange dreams, had visions, and sold to others the knowledge of the future which she believed she had received from celestial sources. For many years she had repeated the announcement that a seer was to be born of her family, and upon Joseph this doubtful honor was at last laid. He passed through childhood and into youth under the burden of this annunciation, and whether or not he wholly believed it in his heart, it must have colored his mental vision to some degree, and he was shrewd enough to see that it was not unheeded by many about him, and that it might be made to serve him in material things. It became one of the currents of impulse along which he at last drifted into the creation of a creed. I use the word drifted advisedly, as all the evidence obtainable shows that the Mormon scheme grew from one small fraud set upon another, and that no definite and determining intention held control in the heart of Smith, until he saw by experience the amount of nonsense that fanatical ignorance would enable mankind to accept and digest.

That this crude and cumbersome religion should find such ready root, can only be accounted for by an analysis of the soil in which it was set. The early years of the nineteenth century were filled with doctrinal jousts, in which denomination set itself against denomination, and creed made war upon creed. The religious crusades of new and aggressive churches were