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Some Effects of the Gospel on Human Lives

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How does a religion affect the lives of those who practice it? This is the most searching question concerning any religion.

Perhaps the most noticeable and remarkable effect of "Mormonism" upon the lives of its followers is the rapid and large unfolding of the latent powers inherent in man. Faithful membership in the Church, including the systematic study of its laws, results in a steady growth in intelligence and the power to use that intelligence in the daily affairs of life. The members of the Church have been drawn from every country and condition of life. Rich and poor; learned and unlearned; skilled and unskilled, have come under the influence of the restored gospel. The weak have become strong; the strong have become mighty, and the Church has become able, in spite of the heterogeneous origin of its members, to build a homogeneous body capable of accomplishing great tasks. The European peasant has acquired a patriarchal understanding; the weaver, the coal miner, and the mechanic, have been used in positions of leadership in politics, finance, or religion; and the men of wealth or learning have found amplified opportunities for expressing their strength.

The body of bishops within the Church, approaching one thousand in number, is perhaps the best illustration of the power of the gospel to remould men into a larger stature. The bishops have been called from every ordinary human pursuit. Among them are farmers, mechanics, merchants, bankers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, capitalists, rich men and poor men; men who have scarcely seen the inside of a school, and college graduates possessing the best learning of the land. Yet, as a body, chosen, first of all, because of their devotion to the cause, they are, in their power to serve the people and to carry on the work in their charge, of remarkable uniformity. Something has occurred within each individual life to wipe out artificial distinctions of learning, wealth or pursuit, until the bishops meet and mingle on a common plane of understanding and efficient service.

To an astounding degree the same is true of all the mem-

bers of the Church. Every person has largely found himself. As duties come, they are performed well—in many cases far beyond ordinary expectations. Frequently, men of large devotion, though of the humblest extraction and most meagre preparation, have developed powers, of kingly quality, with which they have become able to satisfy their noble instincts. As such lives are studied, the conviction is established that, inherent in the system of faith established by Joseph Smith, is a kindling quality, by which men are made able to use more completely the powers with which they have been endowed.

Naturally, though such is the effect of the gospel upon the lives of its honest practitioners, there is no dead level among the "Mormon" people—no monotonous equality of gifts or attainments. At the best, each man is made better able to express his strength, be it great or small and the size of life's structure is always determined by the foundations that are laid.

Joseph Smith, the Prophet, exemplified in his life the large power to use one's gifts that comes from gospel contact. The Prophet grew up under hard and somewhat unlovely circumstances. His educational opportunities were exceedingly meagre. He was truly unlettered. During his boyhood and youth and young manhood, he was obliged to earn his living by manual labor. Joseph Smith, by all earthly standards, was not placed in the path to power.

Very soon, however, after the First Vision, a change came over the boy. His family, of good intelligence, and some of them of fairly good school training, accepted teachings and directions from the boy. Men and women of diverse conditions and powers, came under his influence and yielded to his superior power. As he proceeded to organize the Church, men of learning and much earthly experience gathered around him, but always was the youthful Prophet greater than any of his followers. Year by year he grew in power—as religious leader, builder of cities, or political and spiritual philosopher—until, towards the close of his short life he was recognized by friend and foe as a man of remarkable strength. Contrast the shrinking boy who, one hundred years ago, timidly looked about in the sacred grove to make sure he was alone before addressing himself to God, with the masterful man, imprisoned in a Missouri jail, who commanded his armed jailors to cease their filthy and blasphemous talk. The detailed life of the Prophet is well known, and drives the student to the conclusion that his mighty power was won from the education that the gospel gave him.

The development of individual power is probably the

greatest direct effect of the gospel upon the lives of its followers. From the possession of this larger power are drawn many of the other qualities that distinguish the "Mormon" people.

The gospel impels men to use their powers wisely. For example, the members of the Church are nearly all imbued with a desire to acquire the largest possible bodily, mental and spiritual health. Consequently, wise physiological living, high morality, simple honesty, and firm obedience to law, together with correct habits of life, in which work and play are commingled, characterize these Latter-day Saints. The gymnasium, the social center, and the Church, are often on the same block, sometimes in a connected building, and all under Church supervision.

The gospel awakens also an intense desire for intellectual advancement. It is a principle of "Mormonism" that the intelligence which a man develops here will go with him into another world of unending progress. "The glory of God is intelligence." The development of intelligence is therefore sought by every legitimate means, by conversation and travel, by the reading of books and periodicals, and by attendance at schools and colleges. This love of intelligence is rapidly making the "Mormon" people a body of high school and college graduates.

But the gospel requires that men serve one another. The plan of salvation is universal. Only as all of the human family are won to truth does the plan approach consummation. The conception of this large brotherhood of man has been so driven into the structure of the Church members that it colors all their acts. The missionary system well illustrates this thought. Men and women are called from their ordinary walks and sent into the world, at their own expense, to preach the gospel. It is a severe test, but if a person survive it, and most of them do, he will henceforth look upon his fellow man as a brother to be loved, helped and cherished.

Further, an understanding of the Plan of Salvation makes a man desirous of securing a fuller understanding of God and the spiritual world. The doctrine of the coherence of the past, present and future, presents a unified scheme of human progress. This life is but a continuation of a life before this, and a preparation for a future life in which individual action will be untrammelled. Under this doctrine, the duties of the day are performed with their spiritual values in mind; and a new courage to labor and to learn is born daily within the human heart.

Out of the doctrine pertaining to man's relationship to

man and God, comes a common sense view of things. Man, a pre-existent being, is on earth with his brethren, all children of God, to learn and to progress, and destined to continue to grow, if the human will is rightly used, throughout all time. God is a personage of transcending power and intelligence, the controller of the earth and man, of life and death. There is no mystery beyond that of truth yet to be gained. Man's main concern is to live well his earth life; and thus to prepare for the coming life. His God is a God of light, not of mistiness. The field of the unknown is great, but as new truth is won, it will come as added light. There is no place for spiritism or any other form of mysticism in the life of the Latter-day Saint. This explains, in part, the rapid growth of men and women within the Church. Mysteries are as underbrush, hindrances to progress; remove them, and the path of progress is clear.

Joseph Smith's impelling desire, when he went into the grove to pray, one hundred years ago, was to know the truth for himself. Every member of the Church has had his equivalent first vision. He knows the truth for himself. If he is deceived he cannot blame it on someone else. Consequently, the membership of the Church is made up of independent, fearless units, who are anything but the priest-ridden body described by enemies of the Church. This explains many of the so-called peculiarities of the "Mormon" practice of religion. The effect of this individual certainty upon human lives is naturally of tremendous importance. It gives great stability to the Church itself.

All this, and much more than the space allowed for this article to be written, results in making men happy. The Latter-day Saint who lives his religion finds his powers steadily unfolding. He is impelled to use his strength wisely for his own and his neighbor's good, and for the advancement of an eternal plan of progress in which he is a colaborer with God. He learns to love light and to eschew imitations of truth which depend upon mysticism and incompleteness for their success. He knows for himself that the system to which he yields allegiance is true.

Such a man finds daily progressive contentment, though life's struggle be strenuous. Even from earthly defeat he arises a conqueror.

This may be the severest test. Does a religion give peace of mind, and make even the eager unrest for progress a source of joy? Such a religion conforms to the plan designed by God for his children.

The "Mormon" people have won such contentment. Rest-

less they may be, in their daily tasks, as are other people, but, whether behind the plow, in the office, or in the market place, there is a song of joy in their hearts, for they know the truth for themselves; their powers are expanding, they have the will to serve themselves, their fellow men, and their God, and they see clearly, if distantly, the meaning of life and the destiny of man.

Such are some of the effects of the work initiated by the First Vision, upon the lives of those who believe the Vision to be true.



MEMORIAL MONUMENT AND COTTAGE, SHARON, VERMONT

The cottage was completed during the year following the dedication of the monument, on the hundredth anniversary of the prophet's birth, Dec. 23, 1905, and the surrounding grounds, now beautifully improved, attract thousands of visitors annually. The cottage contains a number of portraits of the Smith family, also pictures of their places of residence, from Essex, England, 1635, to Carthage, Illinois, 1844. The hearthstone of the old home has been preserved, and occupies in the new cottage the precise place it did in the old home, where the prophet was born.