

Whose Sin Was It?

The Mormon bishop, John D. Lee [Mr. Lee never was a bishop.—ED. NEWS.] has paid the penalty for his great crime. Lee was no ordinary criminal; he was a religious enthusiast and not a man of brutal instincts. He committed wholesale murder. He mercilessly sacrificed the tender infant, the helpless invalid and the grey-haired matron, and yet he was noted for benevolence, for enterprise, for brain-power and for devotion to his religious belief, but he was a persecuted man, and this it was that led him into crime.

Religious persecution in the Nineteenth century and in Republican America is a curious fact, for our political creed has been said by its enemies to mean "unlimited license." However, unlimited license certainly did not mean license of any kind for the Mormons. Popular clamor drove him a fugitive flying by night from his home and temple in Ohio. Again, in Missouri we see their factories destroyed, their farms laid waste, their saints (they were saints to them) assassinated and their prophet imprisoned for years, charged with treason. As applied to Jos. Smith this was a ridiculous charge, but it is one that has always been very convenient when the imprisonment of religious leaders was the object in view. At last compelled to abandon the labor of years we see them flying from their homes while murder, rapine and pillage stalk over their well cultivated farms and through their thriving villages. Women and children, sick people and cripples, the aged and the idiotic were shot and burned in their homes by scores.

On the banks of the Mississippi, far from their persecutors, they stop their flight. Again peace and prosperity smile upon them, and Nauvoo, a city of 20,000 inhabitants, springs into life at their command. Temples of worship are erected, farms and orchards teem with wealth, and yet a volcano slumbers beneath them; they worship at a strange shrine; they reverence a new Bible; they have "latter-day Saints," and they follow the teachings of living prophets. Against them comes the combined weight of all other churches, divided as between themselves, but united in the effort to put down the new dogmas. A crusade against them is organized by religious fanatics, but being taken up by the criminal classes and ignorant enthusiasts, it is carried to a result not contemplated by its originators. The prophets are slain, their city destroyed, and after a brief battle the last Mormon is driven across the Father of Waters, and on the western bank of the great river, in full sight of their desolated homes, over three hundred women, children and feeble folk perished, and still they refused to doubt the truth of the revelations contained in the Book of Mormon, and still they trusted in the teachings of their living prophets. "Let us go beyond the reach of our enemies," they said, and into the land of savages they plunged that they might leave behind their more deadly and unrelenting foes. Storms howled over their unprotected heads, cold pinched, heat scorched, and hunger withered them. Seasons came and went before the emaciated survivors arrived on the barren desert beside the Dead Sea of America. From the Mississippi River to Utah it is said the Mormon trail can be followed by the rude piles of stone which mark the graves of the devoted followers of the American prophet.

They were now on Mexican territory, and they flattered themselves that here they could remain walled in by the everlasting mountains, and if they could only wrest from the desert sufficient nourishment to sustain life, they could live and die in peace. But the Mormons, though gone, were not forgotten. Brother Jonathan fought and conquered Mexico, and having seen the industry of the Mormons, he believed their territory, barren though it was, might some day be valuable, and so he took it and sent a military expedition to secure obedience to his laws. Brigham Young was then a penniless but spirited young leader, and he heard that the old enemies of his faith were sending an army to destroy his people. Then he called together his men, formed them into battalions, and they swore to fight for liberty as did their fathers in 1776, and, if we mistake not, their

songs indicated something of that spirit—

Remember the wrongs of Missouri,
Remember the fate of Nauvoo,
When the God-hating foe is before you,
Stand faithful, be firm and be true.

By the blood of our martyrs and sages,
By their toils, and woes, and pain,
We will fight for our homes and altars,
Till we mingle our blood with the slain.

In the narrow pass where the Weber rolls down its angry floods, the Mormon band blocked the path of United States troops, and here first they opposed our governmental authority. At last the Mormons were convinced that the army was not designed to destroy them, and was not even sent to fight them, so they withdrew to Salt Lake, packed up all they owned, and taking a southerly direction departed. A deserted city was not wanted, and the commanding general followed Brigham, and by making many kind promises and using much persuasion, induced him to return.

With varying fortunes the Mormon people battled with a sterile soil, ravenous grasshoppers, savage Indians and a hostile Congress, until one summer a band of emigrants entered their settlements. It is claimed that they had carriages that once belonged to the Mormons, when they lived in Missouri. It is claimed that the leaders of the emigrant party boasted of their prowess in driving Mormons from their State, and it is said that when they saw that irrigation was turning the desert into an oasis, they warned the Mormons that when they reached California they would raise an expedition and drive them from the country. How much of this is true we do not know. * * The Mormons had been bathed in blood, no man had ever gone through the semblance of a trial for murdering a Mormon. Vengeance had cried aloud, but her voice had not been heard. Jos. Smith's ghost whispered in their ears as did Hamlet's father's to the princely Dane, "Remember me." Their brothers, sons and daughters had many of them perished on the bleak prairies, and their chief men, their fathers and their father's friends, had been shot to death or stabbed in the back. Neither age nor sex had been spared by their relentless enemies. "Do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you," was forgotten. The sufferings and wrongs of two generations rose up before them; their enemies were in their power, and should they go by unharmed? Revenge was offered, should they refuse? They forgot the teachings of Christ, and remembered only the Mosaic rule of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. They remembered how Joshua smote the Philistines and left none to mourn, and then came the carnival of blood. We will draw a curtain over the ghastly scene. It was terrible, but whose was the sin? We trace it back and despite popular prejudice, in the face of the people of the whole world, we say it was not the Mormons', not John D. Lee's, not Brigham Young's, erring, passionate, sinful mortals though they be, but it rests on the heads of those who instituted religious persecution in Republican America. * *

John D. Lee has paid the penalty for his crime; it was just and right that he should and justice cries aloud for others who aided in that bloody massacre. But cast your eyes back on the prairies of Missouri, the banks of the Mississippi, and trace the graves above which no friendly hand has written, "Vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord." Glance back at the murder of Jos. Smith and his friends; see how they died with prayers on their lips; reflect on the hundreds who perished on the plains. Remember all this, and remember too that men now live and prosper who make it their boast that they helped to kill Jos. Smith and drive the Mormons from Illinois.

Remember this, and you will say with us that though we rejoice that one of the Mountain Meadow murderers has at last been convicted, by a Mormon jury, before another word is said about the Mountain Meadows, we should indict and try the fanatical bigots who taught the Mormons how to murder, and who made it possible for them to hold in veneration a host of martyrs.—*Omaha Western Magazine.*

— The Jewish *Times* publishes a list of clergymen who have fallen from grace within a year in the United States. The number of convictions for crimes is given as forty.