

The Image of Mormonism in French Literature: Part I

The Image of Mormonism in French Literature: Part I

Wilfried Decoo

Anyone who studies the image of the Mormons in French literature must of necessity work with rather broad definitions of the word *literature*, for studying fiction and poetry alone does not adequately reflect the wide range nor the considerable interest that French authors from various fields have shown in the Latter-day Saints. In fact it was the non-fiction writers—historians, moralists, travelers, philosophers, and sociologists—who delineated the Mormon image that fiction eventually enlarged and distorted. This factual interest was, for the most part, a product of the positivistic movement that prevailed in France at the time of the introduction of Mormonism; most of the French authors of the 1850s–60s tried to approach Mormonism objectively, intending to analyze it “scientifically.”

This intended objectivity is in marked contrast with the spirit of most American authors who, deeply involved as they were in the religious controversies of the time, concentrated their efforts on either attacking or defending Mormonism. Even today, one can find in America vestiges of this particularly bitter 19th-Century controversy over the Latter-day Saints. Many American critics and readers still ask first not whether a particular work is accurate, but whether it is favorable or unfavorable in its image of Mormonism. Book lists, for example, are often divided into two sections, the pro- and the anti-Mormon works.

The position of most French authors was very different. Caring less about what they considered to be sectarian hatreds, they looked with simple curiosity on this far away religious movement on which their American colleagues were debating with such barbed comments and exulting panegyrics. The Mormon missionaries whose proselyting successes provoked such violent controversies in the Anglo, Germanic, and Scandinavian countries were met by the rather indulgent but unbelieving smiles of the Frenchmen. As early as 1863 the President of the French Mission, Louis Bertrand, abandoned his missionary efforts and closed the mission: “An experience of three years has taught me that nothing at all is to be expected among the French infidels: they are everyone spiritually dead.”¹ And the free thinking Frenchman comfortably confirmed Bertrand: “France and all the Latin countries have no representatives in Mormonism at all, three or four at the most. We have become too skeptical to believe in any religion,

and we are too much home bodies and too much at ease to emigrate so far without knowing what will come.”² Even the confirmed Catholics had no reason to get upset. For them, Mormonism was one of those “doctrines begotten by pride, by error, by deceit around the firm and admirable unity of Catholicism.”³ The Baron of Woelmont, observing the interest provoked in the eastern United States by the death of Brigham Young, could say with dignity: “We who do not have the same hatred, who are above these sectarian rivalries, because we are Catholics, can look upon the departure of this figure with more detachment.”⁴ The only exceptions to this superior attitude are the writings of a few Protestant ministers, generally from French-speaking Switzerland where Mormonism was making headway.⁵

Thus, an important characteristic of most of the French publications on Mormonism is the ease with which the author moves from the positive to the negative. Any absolute judgment on the value of the Mormon Church or any personal involvement either for or against the cause of the Saints is rare. In general the French author simply observes, commenting on what seems to him good and bad among the Mormons.⁶ In his critique of *Voyage au Pays des Mormons* (1860) by Jules Rémy, Louis Bertrand remarked that by “simply pruning a few pages one could make a genuine apology [for Mormonism] out of this book.”⁷ By their judicious use of extracts, ellipses, or rather free translations, some Mormons actually succeeded in amending the rather ambivalent testimonies of Rémy and others into positive witnesses for the Latter-day Saints.⁸

Even though the French wrote less about the Mormons than did the Americans, what they produced deserves attention because of the variety and quality of their writers: Prosper Mérimée, Alfred Maury, Hippolyte Taine, Elisée Reclus, Guillaume Apollinaire, Pierre Benoit, and Marc Chadourne, to name only the most famous. Although the interest accorded to the Mormons fluctuated, one can discern three periods of rather frequent and important French publications concerning the Mormons: 1850–1866; 1920–1930; and 1948 on, which correspond more or less to the Mormon proselyting periods in France: 1849–1864, 1924–1939 (if we exclude the unfruitful period of 1912–1914), and from 1946 on. What follows in this article is a study of the first period—1850–1866.

1st Period—The Time of Intellectual Fervor (1850–1866)

The renewed interest in science led the French authors of the second half of the 19th Century to attempts to understand the world in which they lived. The *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the *Journal des Débats*, the *Moniteur Universel* engaged a good many critical thinkers to popularize the discoveries of the time, to defend the various points of view, and thus to contribute to the elaboration of the great systematic vision of the world. As with so

many other religious and social movements of the time, Mormonism was caught up by the intellectual momentum. American publications on Mormonism were circulating the reports of Kane, Gunnison, Stansbury, the works of Bennett, Bowes, Gray, Mayhew, MacKay, revealing to the French devotees of political, social, and religious studies the existence of a spurned, persecuted and exalted people. In 1849 French Utopian Socialism was watching with interest the work of Cabet who was trying to establish his Icaria on the very place abandoned by the Mormons: Nauvoo, where the ruins of the Temple still stood. Returning from the New World, French travelers also brought their impressions of the Latter-day Saints. And in 1850, John Taylor and his companions arrived in Paris, followed shortly by their periodical *L'Etoile de Deseret*, a few pamphlets, and finally in 1852, *Le Livre de Mormon* itself. The French intellectuals needed no more to begin discoursing themselves on what was for them one of those "bizarre religions professed in the American union."⁹ In a general way one can divide these intellectuals into two groups—the bourgeois historians and the positivistic critics.

The Bourgeois Historians

In addition to real historians, this first group includes a disparate band of young free thinkers, noble Catholics, cultivated ladies, amateur intellectuals—in a word, bourgeois, often more fond of their own commentaries than of the facts. Since in most cases they only repeat their sources, the themes they pose deserve here only a brief sketch.

For France of the 1850s Mormonism was only one of the many sects that appeared in the United States; thus it was often mentioned as part of a larger discussion. The American population, said Auguste Laugel, is characterized by credulity, by anarchy of beliefs, and by a spontaneity of the spirit which reveals itself in the most capricious and disordered ways,¹⁰ and for C. Jannet, (a late follower of these moralizing historians) Mormonism was one of the "extreme symptoms of the religious and social disintegration" of the United States.¹¹ For these commentators, this was not strange, since America had "populated itself for two centuries with the overflow and—dare we say—the refuse, the scum of all nations."¹² The Irish emigrants especially were held responsible for the religious troubles in America since they were thought "ignorant, fanatic, and excessively pugnacious."¹³

For the French, then, who was this Joseph Smith? Questioning as they did American morality and intelligence, they excluded a priori any possibility of miracles as such, divine intervention, or prophetic calling. They did not even consider the possibility of there being a supernatural reality in Mormonism. Two explanations of the work of Joseph Smith shared the French pages: conscious imposture and unconscious delusion. The Spaulding

manuscript theory of the Book of Mormon (mentioned as a fact by almost all the authors) was in accord with the view of Joseph Smith as “an obscure rustic of a more than suspect morality and of a very limited education.”¹⁴ The second case is well represented by Hortense DuFay, who refused to “suppose him a hypocritical charlatan,” claiming that Joseph Smith had been the “dupe of a nightmare or of hallucinations resulting from an electrical effect quite natural to the powerfully magnetic makeup of the man.”¹⁵ This farfetched interpretation was supported by the alleged visionary character of the Smith family, in line with the French interest in seances, in the adventures of the Fox family, and in the works of the Swedenborgians, Allan Kardec, and Daniel Home. Finally, many authors adopted an eclectic theory, and explained Joseph Smith by both imposture and delusion: “The indomitable courage of Smith amid such great danger, his firm confidence in the final triumph of his doctrine, prove, as we have already said, that in the end he came to believe that he was himself an apostle.”¹⁶ This gradual spiritual elevation overcame the first abuses of power and received a kind of ratification in the martyrdom of Joseph Smith and his brother. Prosper Mérimée affirmed that “it is probably because of the bloody pages in its history that it [Mormonism] has not succumbed to the ridicule which condemns so many human follies.”¹⁷

The attitude of the commentator usually changed, however, when he came to the persecutions and the exodus from Nauvoo: “Whatever disapproval one may attach to the frauds of Joe Smith, one cannot help but pity his proselytes who suffered such atrocious persecutions, nor can one follow their long emigration without a profound concern.”¹⁸ The moving strokes with which some Americans like Colonel Kane painted the trials of the Mormons in their departure from Nauvoo and in making their way to the promised land, left few Frenchmen unmoved. For instance, after having mocked the “sad extravagance” of Joseph Smith, Mérimée wrote sublime pages on the heroism of the pioneers.¹⁹

But when they came to the Mormon growth and progress in Utah, the commentaries went in opposite directions. Although some French authors mentioned that the Mormons succeeded in “transforming deserts into blossoming colonies,”²⁰ and that they manifested “great perseverance and an incredible activity,”²¹ the majority of the bourgeois historians preferred to borrow the more bizarre ideas, the more sensational facts which were more apt to fascinate the reader and excite his imagination. In Utah, according to M. Etourneau, the Mormons were dominated by a power that was as despotic as it was violent. The vindictive and pitiless Mormon clergy kept the women, the blacks, and the Indians in a lamentable, servile condition.²² As barbarous inside their territory as they were rebellious against Federal authority outside, the Mormon leaders had installed “the most abominable

code of tyranny which modern times have seen founded.”²³ Hortense DuFay, who was generally favorable towards the morality and the magnetic gifts of Joseph Smith, imputed to Brigham Young, on the other hand, the instigation of despotism while accusing him of destroying the work of Christ and of plunging his people into “the mire of barbaric antiquity.”²⁴

Mormon doctrine itself wears thin in the hands of the *petite histoire* amateurs: “I obtained the books of the Mormons and tried to read them, but courage quickly failed me,” confessed Mérimée at the beginning of his article.²⁵ However, this did not stop him from defining the doctrine as a “confused mixture of the principles of Christianity, of Puritan reveries, with here and there a few strokes of Joseph Smith’s own down-to-earth politics.”²⁶ Seldom did the authors take the trouble to go into the doctrines in more detail. And if they did, it was with reservations: “We would have liked to avoid discussing the religious doctrines of the Mormons, for it is a difficult task. And we confess in all humility, that we understand very little of all that rigmarole; let us try, however, to explain their principal dogmas.”²⁷ There usually follows at this point a number of semi-authentic, semi-fanciful considerations of the Mormon deities, the Mormon sacraments, the different resurrections, their spiritual gifts, and, of course, polygamy.

Among all these contradictory notions, it is not surprising to see the intellectual amateur conclude for this 1850–1866 period:

There is nothing more bizarre and more indefinable than the constitution of the Mormon society. A mixture of Judaism and Muhammadanism, of strange barbarity and extreme civilization, of religious oligarchy and industrial democracy, it is a kind of theocratic Venice where the senate of the prophets crushes the faithful under an iron despotism. With the unity of effort and discipline which tyranny imposes, these sectarians have the energy, the initiative, the spirit of labor and of activity which elsewhere are the possessions of liberty.²⁸

Most of the authors confidently predict that this theocratic Venice will soon disappear under the push of civilization.²⁹

The Positivistic Critics

Like the bourgeois historians, some great “scientific” critics were also interested in Mormonism: Philarète Chasles, man of letters and titular professor at the *Collège de France*; Alfred Maury, also titular professor there and director general of the Imperial Archives; Jules Rémy, great traveler, botanist and ethnologist; Hippolyte Taine, the historian-critic-philosopher; Elisée Reclus, famous geographer and professor at the Free University of Brussels. At first, the writings of these men seemed to differ little from those of the amateur intellectuals, mainly because these writers often got their inspiration from the same sources, published in the same journals or

had their works printed by the same publishers. They also shared with the bourgeois historians common ideas about Joseph Smith, that is: he was brought up in a national and familial environment favorable to the blossoming of a new religion, his vocation was a mixture of imposture and illusion, and his martyrdom confirmed his final canonization. However the scientific critics had deeper interests in Mormonism, which differed considerably from those of the bourgeois writer.

At first these great men approached Mormonism with an absolute scientific detachment. They wanted to analyze it, to explain it, to classify it as if it were an astronomical or geological phenomenon. The botanist Rémy, according to his own testimony, studied the Mormons because, among religions, Mormonism "impressed me as being not only a variation, but also a curiosity of the species, a rarity if not an anomaly, like certain plants I had seen near the equator, like the *Rizophora*, for example. . . ."³⁰ Thus, instead of the imitative strokes of the petty commentaries or the moral reflections of the bourgeois historians, we find in the positivistic critics a careful examination of the reasons for the progress of Mormonism and the weakness of its system. For Philarète Chasles, the Mormon enterprise combined some of the characteristics of the first period of American history (the time of the credulous and fanatic Puritans) with the genius of the third period (the era of the conquering nation).³¹ Alfred Maury also saw Mormonism as the union of divergent tendencies, but he viewed it in the context of Protestant history which was the source of millennialistic and spiritualistic movements which sometimes stirred in the dreams of utopian socialism.³² Jules Rémy, in the more than 1,000 pages of his two volumes on Mormonism, digs deeply into the vital conditions of his "religious *Rizophora*." He went through great pains to study it at first hand, suffering through the inconvenience and discomfort of traveling across the American desert to Utah, and then spending a whole month in Salt Lake City. The readiness of the American soul for a religion which speaks to the spiritual and temporal needs of the underprivileged, of the ambitious, of the visionary; the pretension to universality; the moral and doctrinal eclecticism; the political and social flexibility of the Mormon community, its history and its doctrine—all this is treated with dignity and seriousness in this book, which is also replete with fascinating anecdotes and all kinds of observations about the geology, the flora and fauna of the region. Hippolyte Taine and Elisée Reclus, who did little more than review Rémy's work, indicated their interest in the observations of the ethnologist by their adherence to his conclusions.³³

In almost all of these "scientific" writings on the Mormons, there appears from time to time a seemingly insignificant element lost in the large amount of data, i.e., the comparison of the rise of Mormonism with other religious movements or with the beginnings of cults in general. Mormonism was

often considered in connection with contemporary sects such as Irvingism or the Quakers, or it was studied in the light of such historical movements as the Leiden Anabaptists, certain Judaic sects, and, most important of all, the first Christians. These little comparisons, over which the unwarned reader passes, are not as innocent as they seem. As early as 1856, Emile Montégut launched a diatribe of rare violence against “those who want to see in Mormonism the material and evident proof that all religions have been, in principle, pure frauds, that all sects have been founded on a lie, and that the first god was a lucky imposter.”³⁴ And with this, Mormonism is suddenly and unknowingly launched as an object of controversy in the great intellectual struggle of 19th-Century Europe, the controversy which opposes absolute faith in the supernatural biblical facts to critical exegesis and to euhemerist and mythological explanations! This struggle which the philosophers and the free thinkers had been carrying out for almost two centuries in France reached a new climax in the second third of the 19th Century due to the invasion of the scientific method in Biblical exegesis. The works of the Germans—Eickhorn, Bower, Wicklein, Strauss, Volkmar—which came to France early, inspired such men as Littré and Renan, and provoked new scientific speculations about the natural origins of Christianity—speculations which the Guizots and Dupanlous strove to refute. Since Mormonism was a tangible example of a new religion, since it was born in circumstances comparable to those of Palestine at the time of Christ, and since everyone in France recognized its human origin, it did more than captivate certain critics: it stood as a proof of the theory of the natural Genesis of all religions.

It was not surprising, therefore, that Montégut loudly denounced the use of Mormonism as “the justification for the raillery and judgments of the encyclopedists against all religions.”³⁵ But the polemical situation of Montégut was ambiguous: In his argument against those who compared the beginnings of Mormonism to the beginnings of Christianity, this apologist was in a peculiar quandary regarding the acceptance of the supernatural elements in the calling of Joseph Smith: If he denied them and Mormonism continued its rapid development, then the origin of Christianity could also be explained away by natural phenomena. If he accepted them, he would contradict the veracity of his own church. There was only one way to get out of this dangerous dilemma: malign, violate, or tarnish Mormonism to such a degree that every comparison with the evangelical origins of Christianity would become impossible. And so the torrent of insults, accusations, and scurrilous and bloody anecdotes which Montégut poured out about the Mormons had only one goal—to prove that Mormonism was “the most odious of the sects. It has absolutely nothing Christian: We might call it a bastard child from the union of Mosaism and Muhammadanism

through the repulsive collaboration of a Jewish junkman, a Moslim dotard, and an old St. Simonian apostle who could find no railway to exploit.”³⁶ In spite of this vehemence, Montégut was not led by what an American critic would interpret as an anti-Mormon passion.³⁷ This Christian apologist was only answering an argument launched against the basis of his Christianity.

As to the future of Mormonism the scientific critic saw two possibilities. First, it seemed desirable that the Mormons would continue to develop themselves until they reached the stage of a world church and furnish the final proof of the theory of the natural Genesis of religions. This would be done by following the example of the great preceding religions: a dubious infancy growing into a glorious history, the theologians purifying and organizing the doctrinal muddle into a sophisticated system, the number of believers continuing to increase while the excesses of the first decades wither away. But these speculations were expressed with circumspection in the various writings so as not to exasperate Christian believers too much or to scandalize any conscientious churchman.³⁸ The second possibility for the critics was to predict the disintegration of Mormonism as soon as its isolation would be violated by the encroachment of civilization. And then the factual truth, of which our critics made themselves the proud heralds, would free the Mormons of their doctrinal and sacerdotal yoke. It is obvious that the second prediction was implicitly just as disastrous to other religions as the first. No matter how the positivistic critics turned it, Mormonism was to be a battering ram which would help break down the doors of historical Christianity.

In 1861 as the great intellectual animosity was wearing itself out, the voice of a true Mormon literary man made itself heard, that of Louis Bertrand.³⁹ E. Dentu, who had just published the work of Jules Rémy, thought it only fair (and probably financially rewarding also) to allow utterance to “a man of conviction, and to permit the naive testimony of a believer, even if only out of curiosity.”⁴⁰ One senses that Dentu was perhaps excusing his own boldness before the difficult bourgeoisie. But Bertrand was anything but naive: a great traveler, former associate of Cabet, editor of the daily *Le Populaire*, admitted to the great Masonic Lodges of Paris, he became a Latter-day Saint for well-founded doctrinal and social reasons. His 300-plus page book demonstrates a good intellect and stylistic mastery. Only when Bertrand criticizes the “absurdities” and “incoherencies” of the Parisian press does he become somewhat aroused. His testimony, strengthened by a stay of several years in that “most excellent, bucolic city” near the Great Salt Lake, contrasted singularly with the platitudes, the ignorance, and the vulgar mysticism which French authors in general attributed to the faraway Mormons. The *Memoires d'un Mormon* thus constituted, considering the era and the contemporary prejudices, a unique apology which attracted the surprised attention of the intellectual public.⁴¹

Having considered the two intellectual tendencies of the first period, we must also devote a few paragraphs to two subsequent ways in which French publications made their points about the Mormons: namely, the popular press, and the reports of French travelers in America. Although these less frequent and less important pieces take us partly into the last third of the 19th Century, they deserve consideration here because they refer to the writings of the 1850–1866 period.

The Popular Tradition

In 1856 Emile Montégut mentioned the famous novel *Female Life among the Mormons*, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. This same year two independent French translations of this novel were sold all over France, one by C. Everard in the “Illustrated Publications for 20 Centimes,” the other by B. H. Révoil, mentioned above as the commentator on American “bizarre religions.”⁴² From these translations, from statements such as Montégut’s, and from the extravagant stories originating in America and published in French papers, a popular tradition developed which even in 1974 has not completely disappeared. This tradition generally includes the same themes which Leonard Arrington and Jon Haupt have identified in 19th-Century American literature, namely the bloody vengeance of the Danites, the sacerdotal tyranny over the mass of the ignorant faithful, the terrible secret society of the endowment, and the patriarchal pasha in his haven of white slaves.⁴³ In 1859 a second rank novelist, Paul Duplessis, exploited these themes in a 1600-page, multi-volume novel, *Les Mormons*. Although the intellectuals who were interested in Mormonism never mentioned this work of popular fiction, it was reprinted several times within a few years. The plot follows a usual pattern, but uses French characters in the positive roles: two innocent girls, compelled by all kinds of horrible intrigues to travel to Utah, are liberated from the claws and atrocities of the Danites by a few noble heroes. Duplessis presented what was an original idea for the Mormon novel (although it is typical for French popular interests of the time): Hiram-Harris, a medium with a monstrous and hypnotic personality, is an invisible force who drives Mormonism and manipulates the straw-man, Brigham Young. The moral tone of the novel is best rendered by an utterance of one of its very noble and very Christian heroes: “Whenever a Mormon kills another Mormon, honest people must rejoice.”⁴⁴

But in the French popular tradition the theme of polygamy predominates. At a time when the vulgar theater flooded the stage with love triangles, with impossible matrimonial combinations, and with unbelievable erotic situations, Mormonism furnished for the frivolous and trivial imagination of a certain class of French people a frame for inexhaustible intrigues. One told jokes such as the following:

One day Victor Hugo received a delegation of Mormons. Because they wanted some of the descendants of the great man in their own country, they came to offer two pretty girls of their sect. Hugo replied: "Impossible. My contract forbids all foreign reproduction. Ask my publisher."⁴⁵

The French imagined that "Brigham Young is an old libertine who walks around naked arm in arm with his seventy wives,"⁴⁶ and that Mormons, addicted to sensual delight among favorite slaves are "Turks without."⁴⁷ Jules Huret confessed much later that the ideas of the "legendary Mormons" concerning love "were already haunting my adolescent dreams."⁴⁸ French comedy and vaudeville staged a few of those dreams in the penny theaters. For instance, the public roared with laughter as they watched an American Mormon, "cumulator of women," traveling through Europe on a "religious" recruitment mission.⁴⁹ Following the tradition, Jules Verne, in his novel *Le Tour du Monde en Quatre-Vingts Jours (Around the World in 80 Days)*, takes advantage of the opportunity to enliven the crossing of Utah with two comical Mormon elements—the introduction of an Elder William Hitch, who tries to convert Passepartout, and the barely successful flight of a Mormon who, even with one wife, had more than he could handle.⁵⁰

Although the French popular tradition embellished the same theme of polygamous society, it had little of the holy abhorrence which the puritan American ladies felt for the "Utah harem." Not one concern for decency, not one moral lesson disturbs the spicy gaiety of a good racy story about those polygamous Mormons. Moreover, the popular tradition which ties polygamy to Mormonism is so strong that in many cases the word Mormon has become a synonym for polygamist and Mormonism for polygamy.⁵¹

The Reports of the Travelers

Saturated with these comical stories about the Mormons, the French travelers in the new world approached Utah, not with apprehension or caution, but with the hope of witnessing some spicy and funny scenes. Even women were not exempt from this anticipation. Without any scruples whatsoever, Mrs. Audouard notes at the border of Utah: "We exclaimed with joy: 'Finally we are going to behold those seventeen member households which have only one man.'⁵² Upon arriving at a polygamous household: "I sighed in satisfaction, I saw real Mormons with my own eyes."⁵³ How far from the terrors of those Victorian American authoresses such as Maria Ward, Cornelia Paddock or Amelie Mattews! In light of these piquant hopes, it follows that the first French reaction to contact with real Mormons was one of disappointment: "[There is] nothing of the enormous and bizarre eccentricity which one expects to find in Mormon country," lamented M. Dugard.⁵⁴ After this the travelers had to reconcile themselves to reality and make excuses to the reader who was expecting exciting

revelations: "Please do not accuse me of pleading a paradoxical cause: I am sincere in my account of my travel impressions. For me, Salt Lake City is by far and away the most beautiful city in the West, and the one where the people look the least rough, the most honest, and obedient to authority."⁵⁵ The Marquis de Rochefort is less conciliatory to his compatriots, and accuses them of ignorance and rudeness in the preconceptions of Mormonism: "The nonsense which French flippancy has imagined about the actions and ideas of the adherents to this doctrine is indescribable."⁵⁶

Following this confrontation with reality, the testimonies of the French travelers are characterized by a remarkable unanimity on the Mormon situation in Utah: the towns are well built, the houses are big and clean, the Mormons are hospitable and friendly, virtuous, educated, hard working, etc. In this concert of praises only one discordant note was heard: the Count of Turenne, who in the course of an unsuccessful hunt got lost between Salt Lake City and Provo on a cold, dark November night, thought the Mormon women ugly, Brigham Young feeble, and he regretted that "the time of the Destroying Angels is also past."⁵⁷

Almost all the French travelers of this time (the great majority belonging to that nobility which, tired of the political events, wandered all over the world after the War of 1870) paid a visit to the President of the Church, Brigham Young, or later John Taylor or Wilford Woodruff, retaining very pleasant memories of the occasion.

The reaction of the travelers to the institution of polygamy is no doubt the most interesting one can read. The Marquis of Rochefort considered it "an element of work and fortune as well as an added force to procreation."⁵⁸ And as he viewed this remarkable cult of fecundity, the Marquis could not help but regret the fate of "so many unfortunate Catholic girls who languish in the convents."⁵⁹ Studying the organization and stability of polygamous life in Utah, the Count of Haussonville exclaimed that finally there was "the ideal basic family, which was so strongly advocated by the school of social reform and its illustrious founder, M. LePlay. What a pity one has to come from so far to find it!"⁶⁰ Almost all our travelers were in agreement in recognizing the advantages of polygamy: less jealousy, no adultery, no illegitimate children, and a commendable fruitfulness. The most remarkable testimony comes from the emancipated Mrs. Audouard. Striking up an immediate friendship with the first wife of Brigham Young, and being on good terms with the sixteen others, she claimed to have made an in depth study of the female hearts of Utah. Her conclusion is very favorable: in addition to the advantages already mentioned, "the Mormon woman is happy," in this system of "biblical patriarchal polygamy."⁶¹

In order to console the reading public for the lack of excitement in the visit to the Mormons, most of the travelers held their readers in suspense

by describing terrifying mountain passes, tumultuous rivers, gigantic mountains and ravines which they had to face to enter and leave Utah.⁶² Others gave themselves over to lyrical effusions on the shores of the mysterious Salt Lake, that beautiful “great pale sheet of motionless water stretched out from the feet of the purple mountains, but possessing the beauty of death.”⁶³ However, much to the detriment of the social and moral realities which the travelers defended in such laudatory terms, only these landscape images of the great mysterious lake and the impressive surrounding mountains found a place in the overall picture which France had of the world of the Mormons. Without having been in Utah, Hortense DuFay affirmed that in the middle of the delights of flowers and perfumes, the traveler through the Rocky Mountains “is overcome by a vaporous melancholy which pertains to those magical countries.”⁶⁴

At the end of our survey of the 19th-Century French literature about the Mormons, the farewell of another French traveler, Albert Tissandier, to the Latter-day Saints may serve as a last note:

After my peculiar sojourn in the province of Utah and in Arizona, I can assure that the Mormons are hospitable, good to strangers, amiable, and sufficiently educated: most of them are interested in all things of civilization. I will always remember with pleasure their cordial and moving reception; they received me as a brother: What more could I have asked?⁶⁵

But the French authors did ask more of the Mormons, as our succeeding article on the image of the Mormons in the 20th Century will show.

Mr. Decoo, a Belgian Ph.D. candidate, is presently instructor of French at Brigham Young University.

1. Letter from L. Bertrand to Brigham Young, 23 January 1863, cited by Gary Ray Chard, “A History of the French Mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1850–1960,” Thesis (Utah State) 1965, p. 41.

2. Louis Simonin, *A travers les Etats-Unis, de l’Atlantique au Pacifique* (Paris: Charpentier, 1875), p. 90.

3. Marmier, “Les Mormons,” in *Voyage d’une Femme autour du Monde*, II, Bibliothèque Illustrée, 32 (Ixelles Lez Bruxelles: Delevigne et Callewaert, 1853), p. 6.

4. Baron Arnold de Woelmont, *Souvenirs du Far-West* (Paris: E. Plon, 1883), p. 174.

5. E.g.: Louis Favez, *Lettre sur les Mormons de la Californie* (Vevey: E. Buvelot, 1851); Idem, *Joseph Smith et les Mormons, ou Examen de leurs prétentions relativement à leur Bible, et à leur Prophète et à leur Eglise* (Lausanne: De La Fontaine, 1845); Idem: *Le Mormonisme jugé d’après ses doctrines* (Lausanne: De La Fontaine, 1856); Emile Guers, *L’Irvingisme et le Mormonisme Jugés par la Parole de Dieu* (Genève: E. Beroud, 1853); Idem, *Le Mormonisme polygame* (Genève: E. Beroud, 1855); Frederic Desmons, *Essai historique et critique du Mormonisme* (Strasbourg: Berger-Levrault, 1856). This last work is a thesis, conceived to show the falseness of Mormonism, defended before the

Faculté de Théologie protestante de Strasbourg—a striking example of the Protestant need to intellectually dispose of Mormonism.

6. A small number of French writings about the Mormons have been studied but with the peculiar American pro- and anti-Mormon sensibility: Dee J. Valentine, "Inventaire et Discussion de la Littérature française sur les Mormons, leur Histoire, leur Religion et leurs Moeurs," Master's Thesis, University of Utah, 1947. This thesis, lamentable in language and content concerns the favorable and unfavorable observations about Mormons in only nineteen French writings, and stigmatizes every negative remark as incorrect and prejudiced.

7. L. A. Bertrand, *Mémoires d'un Mormon*, Collection Hetzel (Paris: E. Dentu, n.d.), p. 209. See also note 39.

8. E.g.: John A. Widstoe, *Ce que les Autres disent des Mormons* (Ville d'Avray: Eglise de Jésus-Christ des Saints des Derniers Jours, n.d.), pp. 1–18; Vicomte d'Haussonville, *One Day in Utah: A Literary French Nobleman's Views on the Mormon Question*, trans. Leo Haefeli (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, 1883); Anon., *Le Mormonisme vu par la Presse parisienne* (Genève: P. Rulon Chtistensen, 1928).

9. B. H. Révoil, "Souvenirs des Etats-Unis," *Illustration*, XV (1850), 251.

10. Auguste Laugel, "Une Campagne des Américains contre les Mormons," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, XXVII (Septembre 1857), 194–95.

11. C. Jannet, *Les Etats-Unis contemporains, ou les Moeurs, les Institutions et les Idées depuis la Guerre de la Sécession*, 2nd ed. (Paris: E. Plon, 1876), P. 370.

12. Mme Olympe Audouard, *A travers l'Amérique: Le Far West* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1869), pp. 7–8.

13. Oscar Comettant, *Trois Ans aux Etats-Unis: Etude des Moeurs et Coutumes américaines*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Pagnerre, 1858), pp. 205–6.

14. M. Etourneau, *Les Mormons* (Paris: Bestel, 1856), p. 2.

15. Mme Hortense G. DuFay, *Le Prophète du XIXème siècle, ou Vie des Saints des Derniers Jours (Mormons), précédé d'un aperçu sur d'autres socialistes unitaires et sur le génie de la poésie anglaise* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1863), p. 37.

16. Amédée Pichot, *Les Mormons* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1856), p. 154. Pichot gives hardly anything more than an abridged translation of the work of Charles Mackay on the Mormons.

17. Prosper Mérimée, "Les Mormons," in *Mélanges Historiques et Littéraires*, 2nd ed. (1855; rpt. Paris: M. Lévy, 1867), p. 3. This article first appeared in *Le Moniteur Universel*, 25, 26, 31 March, and 1 April 1853. Mérimée's interest in Mormonism is quite relative. He wrote his article at the request of the editor, J. F. Turgan. His correspondence shows that he did his reporting mainly for the money and with little care. See P. Mérimée, *Correspondance*, série I, tome VI (Paris: Le Divan, 1947), p. 478; série II, tome I (Toulouse: E. Privat, 1953), pp. 18–19, 26.

18. Marmier, p. 23.

19. Mérimée, pp. 44–49.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

21. Hippolyte Ferry, *Description de la Nouvelle Californie géographique, politique et morale* (Paris: L. Maison, 1850), p. 87.

22. Etourneau, pp. VI–VII.

23. Laugel, p. 208.

24. DuFay, p. 31.

25. Mérimée, p. 4.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

27. M. Granson, *Des Mormons* (Le Havre: Lepelletier, 1863), p. 9.

28. Ernest Duvergier de Hauranne, *Huit Mois en Amérique: Lettres et Notes de Voyage 1864-65* (Paris: Librairie Internationale, 1866), pp. 247-48. We should note that Duvergier, although he had been in the United States, did not visit Utah; his information is all second-hand.

29. Cf. Etourneau, pp. vi-viii; Janet, pp. 373-74; J. J. Ampère, *Promenade en Amérique: Etats-Unis, Cuba, Mexique*, 2 vols. (Paris: M. Lévy, 1855), pp. 405-6; C. F. Audley, "Le Passé et l'Avenir des Mormons," *Correspondent*, XLIV (juillet 1858), 458-61.

30. Jules Rémy, *Voyage au Pays des Mormon: Relations, Géographie, Histoire naturelle, Histoire, Théologie, Moeurs et Coutumes*, 2 vols. (Paris: E. Dentu, 1860), I, x.

31. Philarète Chasles, *Anglo-American Literature and Manners* (New York: C. Scribner, 1852), pp. 269-70. Translated from the French *Etudes sur la Littérature et les Moeurs des Anglo-Américains au XIXème siècle* (Paris: Amyot, 1851).

32. Alfred Maury, "Sectes religieuses au XIXème siècle: Les Irvingiens et les Saints-du-dernier-jour," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, XXIII (1er septembre 1853), 964-68.

33. Elisée Reclus, "Le Mormonisme et les Etats-Unis," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, XXXII (15 avril 1861), 881-914; Hippolyte Taine, "Les Mormons," in *Nouveaux Essais de Critique et d'Histoire* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1865) pp. 271-99. This article first appeared in the 31 January 1861 issue of the *Journal des Débats*. A translation by Austin E. Fife was published with the pompous title "Taine's Essay on the Mormons, translated with introduction and notes by Austin E. Fife," *Pacific Historical Review*, XXXI, 1 (1962), 49-65. The introduction and notes are very short and elementary, failing noticeably in their major responsibility of separating Taine's original ideas from Rémy's.

34. Emile Montégut, "Le Mormonisme et sa Valeur morale: La Société et la Vie des Mormons," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, XXVI (15 février 1856), 692.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 690.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 719.

37. Chard, p. 27. Chard mentions nothing of the controversial position of Mormonism in the struggle between the positivistic critics and the Christian apologists.

38. After Bishop Dupanloup warned the Catholics against positivistic critics such as A. Maury, H. Taine, E. Renan, of whom J. Rémy claimed discipleship, most of their writings were characterized by prudence mingled with a sort of paternalism toward the "simple" religious minds.

39. The previously mentioned work of Louis Bertrand appeared as a series of articles in 1861 in *La Revue Contemporaine*. The book was probably published in 1862.

40. Preface to Bertrand, pp. 2-3.

41. Cf. DuFay, p. 31; Granson, p. 19; Audouard, p. 366; Oscar Comettant, *Les Civilisations inconnues* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1863), pp. 19-35; a review of Bertrand's work even appeared in Charles Dickens' literary review *All the Year Round*, as "Brother Bertrand, Mormon Missionary," no. 203 (14 March 1863), 68-72.

42. *La Femme chez les Mormons: Relation écrite par l'épouse d'un Mormon revenue récemment de l'Utah*, trans. C. Everard (Paris: Marescq, 1856); *Les Harems du Nouveau-Monde: Vie des Femmes chez les Mormons*, trans. B. H. Révoil (Paris: M. Lévy, 1856).

43. Cf. Leonard J. Arrington and Jon Haupt, "Intolerable Zion: The Image of Mormonism in Nineteenth Century American Literature," *The Western Humanities Review*, XXXII, 3 (1968), 243-60.

44. Paul Duplessis, *Les Mormons*, 5 vols. (Paris: A. Cadat, 1859), IV, 305.

45. Cited by Chard, p. 102.

46. *Retour de la Nouvelle-Calédonie: De Nouméa en Europe* (Paris: Ancienne Librairie Martinon, n.d.), p. 247. This 1881 book by the Marquis of Rochefort is

luxuriantly and richly illustrated and printed. The popular traditions are often identified in travelogues of this time when the writers confessed their former opinions in the light of what they discovered in Utah.

47. Le Comte d'Haussonville, *A travers les Etats-Unis: Notes et Impressions*, 2nd ed. (1883; Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1888), pp. 324 and 353.

48. Jules Huret, *En Amérique: De San Francisco au Canada* (Paris: E. Pasquelle, 1921), p. 107.

49. Edouard Malortique, *Les Aventures d'un Mormon: Dialogue en Trois Parties* (Paris: J. Lévy, 1886).

50. Jules Verne, *Le Tour du Monde en Quatre-Vingts Jours* (1873; rpt. Paris: Hetzel, n.d.), chap. XXVII, pp. 154–159.

51. Cf. P. Mérimée *Correspondance*, série II, tome I, p. 45; Audouard, pp. 297–8, 366–7.

52. Audouard, p. 292.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

54. M. Dugard, *La Société américaine: Moeurs et Caractère, Famille, Rôle de la Femme, Ecoles et Universités*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1896), p. 62.

55. Woelmont, p. 149.

56. *Retour de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, p. 246.

57. Le Comte Louis de Turenne, *Quatorze mois dans l'Amérique du Nord, 1875–76*, 2 vols. (Paris: A Quantin, 1870), I, 67–93.

58. *Retour de la Nouvelle-Calédonie*, p. 263.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 268.

60. Haussonville, p. 331.

61. Audouard, pp. 340, 350.

62. E.g.: Honoré Beaugrand, *Six mois dans les Montagnes-Rocheuses: Colorado-Utah-Nouveau Mexique* (Montréal: Granger Frères, 1890), pp. 208–215.

63. Dugard, pp. 57–8.

64. DuFay, p. 109.

65. Albert Tissandier, *Six mois aux Etats-Unis: Voyage d'un Touriste dans l'Amérique du Nord, suivi d'une Excursion à Panama* (Paris: G. Masson, 1886), p. 108.