

WESTERN SUN

EACH CENTURY HAS ITS PECULIAR MODE OF DOING BUSINESS, AND MEN GUIDED MORE BY CUSTOM THAN BY REASON, FOLLOW WITHOUT ENQUIRY, THE MANNERS WHICH ARE PREVALENT IN THEIR OWN TIME.—HUME.

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[IT has ever been, and still is, the wish of the Editor to exclude from his columns any thing which might have a tendency to introduce religious controversy—but, when from the general, indeed almost unanimous solicitation of his readers, he is convinced such is their wish, he can feel no hesitation in admitting the following.—*Ed. Sun.*]

AN ATTEMPT TO DEVELOPE SHAKERISM.

BY JAMES SMITH, ESQ.

About five years ago, three shakers, viz. Issacher Baits, John Mitchan & Benjamin Young, came to Kentucky, where I then resided, but was abroad in the state of Tennessee. On my return to my son, James Smith's in Ky. where I had my home, I found he had joined the shakers, I knew very little about them, but soon after they having collected a party on Turtle creek, in the state of Ohio, I asked the above mentioned Baits, if I might go and live with them some time, to see what sort of people they were—to which he agreed. I accordingly went; and from that time to the present, I have diligently endeavored to find them out, (which is truly difficult,) and I think I have succeeded in a good degree.

They artfully and insidiously conceal their real views and principles, from those whom they wish to proselyte to their scheme.—The main thing necessary to stop the progress of shakerism, is, for mankind to know what it is—I shall therefore endeavor plainly to relate what I have discovered, and as I intend principally to confine myself to matters of fact, I hold myself in readiness to prove the truth of what I shall assert, if required. I shall first give some account of the shakers faith, and secondly, of their practice.

1st. That our mother Eve, is what is meant by the forbidden fruit, the woman being prohibited from all animals, save Adam only, & the, contrary to the command, had carnal knowledge of the serpent—that this first sin followed the whole human race; and that mankind can never be restored to their primitive holiness and happiness, without a life of celibacy and abstinence, from copulation between the sexes. This they call taking up the full cross.

2d. That all who do not confess their sins to them, and receive the testimony of God from them, will certainly be damned, and go to hell.

3d. The shakers deny the personality of Christ, saying that the man Christ Jesus, had no more to do with our salvation, than any other man who had received the unction, only as he was a patron for a life of celibacy.

4th. That the man who was crucified was not Christ, but the unction or spirit of him only was Christ, and that this unction or spirit has come in a more powerful manner into a woman called Anna Lee, who is Christ's second coming without sin unto salvation. They esteem Anna Lee, much superior to Jesus.

5th. They deny the resurrection of the body of Jesus, and also of our bodies.

6th. They hold that elder David Durrow is inspired and infallible, that the priests & people under him must implicitly believe what he teaches, and obey his commands, which they call believing and obeying God.

7th. That all who have died, even those

who have been martyrs for christianity have gone to hell.

8th. That all who come to them and confess their sins, shall be delivered out of hell, except such as have in this life received their testimony and afterwards left them, and spread abroad what they had seen and heard while among them.

9th. That the scriptures of the old and new testament are true & foretold to them, yet they are not the word of God, nor a rule to them. That they are in a new dispensation, & have received a new revelation, being immediately inspired by the spirit of God, above what the Apostles ever were; and that none can understand the scriptures of the old & new testament aright, but such as receive their explanation from them.

10th. That the day of judgment is come, that they with thousands of Saints and Angels are now judging the world, and that they can see Angels and spirits which to others are invisible.

11th. That the general conflagration has now taken place, the fire is now kindled which will burn the world, viz. a life of celibacy, the human race not being propagated, there will not one be left on the face of the earth. Then the earth will be burnt up, but not by material fire. For the satisfaction of my readers, I shall here insert some information, which I received from persons who have been a considerable time with the shakers, and have left them, which may afford farther light respecting the shakers faith; and also give some idea of their practice, which is the second thing I proposed. As the persons appear to be ashamed of having been shakers, I shall not insert their names.

On March 13th, 1810, I called on one who had been three years with the shakers. He said he had formerly been a member of the methodist society, and was then happy in the enjoyment of vital religion, but was not so while with the shakers; moreover, that the arbitrary authority and hard usage exercised over the working hands, was intolerable. He also added, that it was easy joining the shakers, but hard to get free from them.

The same evening I had an interview with three others, who were altogether: one of which had been 18 months, another near 3 years, the other 3 years with the shakers. They say the only use the shakers make of the Bible is to gain profitees. That as to themselves, they view it in the same light as an old Almanac.

that what is spoken or dictated by elder David, must be received by them as the word of God: and as he is esteemed infallible, implicit faith and obedience must be given to all his precepts—this they call believing and obeying God. Those men say that in general their education of children is chiefly a pretence, that their principle leaders only are well educated. They do not approve of those of a lower rank reading any books—they are taken from school as soon as they are fit for other business.

Elder David has overseers appointed over the different societies called families, thro' out the state of Ohio, Kentucky, and the Indiana territory. The overseers provide for the laborers common diet and apparel, and what they earn more than is sufficient for that purpose is given up to elder David, to be disposed of among his council, or as he sees fit, this they call giving up the money to God. They whip their laborers or underlings severely and also their children or young people, if they refuse to kneel or dance, or confess their sins, or otherwise

transgress. Besides they have various modes of inflicting punishment. My informers say they saw them punish a little boy for taking a piece of cake without leave, in the manner following:—They made a circle on the floor about a foot in diameter, & compelled the boy to stand within the circle with his face upw'ards, from 12 o'clock till dark. The shakers quarrel and fight among themselves, though they endeavor to conceal it from others.

Even when in their dance, which they esteem devotional, my informers say they have seen them strike each other with their elbows, and one man strike another with his fist so that the blood ran from his mouth and nose.

Elder David has taught the shakers that when assaulted by the men of the world they may borrow their own spirit and beat them.

They further state, that the shakers told them, if they bore the cross, and abstained from woman for some time, they would become so holy that it would be no sin for them to have carnal knowledge of their own holy women. But that it would be wrong for them to have children, as it would be a bad example to the world, and might prevent them from living in celibacy so as to become holy. The shakers charged these men, when about to leave them, that they should not tell what they had seen or heard when they were with them, stating that they would certainly go to hell for leaving the faith; but if they told as above, they would never get out, but must sink forever to the lowest hell.

They also say they believe many of the lower class feel sensibly their bondage, and are tired of shakerism, but are so infatuated they are afraid of going to hell if they disbelieve or disobey. They dare not converse privately with any one who is not a shaker, or even with each other. It is easy to put on the grievous yoke, but hard to get clear of it.

The substance of the foregoing account, I took in writing from those men, which being read to them, they all said it was fairly stated, the truth whereof they were willing to declare upon oath.

I shall here insert another circumstance respecting the man first mentioned, which may serve to show something of the spirit and practice of the shakers. When he left them he brot' all his family with him except one daughter, who was concealed from him. Sometime after, his son attended an assembly of the shakers, & seeing his sister, who was a minor, he took her by the hand to lead her away—the shakers attempted to take her from him by violence, some spectators came to aid in bringing away the girl, when a violent struggle ensued between the two parties. They called each other, tore each others shirts, &c.—the shakers being most numerous prevailed; and afterwards prosecuted the other party at the civil law for a riot, in which they failed, being the first aggressors.

Farther, to shew the practice of the shakers, I shall mention some circumstances relative to my son James Smith. After joining the shakers, he appeared to be divested of natural affection towards his wife Polly, and other connections; and appeared determined to sell his plantation in Kentucky and remove to the shakers on Turtle creek, which at length he did, contrary to his wife's consent. Before he removed which was in October 1810, he promised to Polly, if she would go with him he would not take her among the shakers, but would buy a place 2 miles from them. Upon this