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Letter III

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LETTER III.

DEAR BROTHER,

AFTER a silence of another month, agreeably to my promise, I proceed upon the subject I proposed in the first number of the *Advocate*. Perhaps an apology for brevity may not be improper here, as many important incidents consequently transpiring in the organization and establishing of a society like the one whose history I am about to give to the world, are overlooked or lost, and soon buried with those who were the actors, will prevent my giving those minute and particular reflections which I have so often wished might have characterized the "acts of the apostles" and the ancient saints. But such facts as are within my knowledge, will be given without any reference to inconsistencies in the minds of others, or impossibilities in the feelings of such as do not give credence to the system of salvation and redemption, so clearly set forth and so plainly written over the face of the sacred scriptures.

Upon the propriety, then, of a narrative of this kind, I have briefly to remark. It is known to you that this church has suffered reproach and persecution from a majority of mankind who have heard but a rumour since its first organization; and further, you are also conversant with the fact, that no sooner had the messengers of the fulness of the gospel began to proclaim its heavenly precepts, and call upon men to embrace the same, than they were vilified and slandered by thousands who never saw their faces, and much less knew aught derogatory of their characters, moral or religious. Upon this unfair and unsaint-like manner of procedure they have been giving, in large *sheets*, their own opinions of the incorrectness of our system, and *attested* volumes of our lives and characters.

Since then our opposers have been thus kind to introduce our cause before the public, it is no more than just that a correct account should be given; and since they have invariably sought to cast a shade over the truth, and hinder its influence from gaining ascendancy, it is also proper that it should be vindicated by laying before the world a correct statement of events as they have transpired from time to time.

Whether I shall succeed so far in my purpose as to convince the public of the incorrectness of those scurrilous reports which have *inundated* our land, or even but a small portion of them, will be better ascertained when I close than when I commence; and I am content to submit it before the candid for perusal, and before the judge of all for inspection, as I most assuredly believe that before HIM I must stand and answer for the deeds transacted in this life.

Should I, however, be instrumental in causing a *few* to hear before they judge, and understand both sides of this matter before they condemn, I shall have the satisfaction of seeing them embrace it, as I am certain that one is the inevitable fruit of the other. But to proceed.

You will recollect that I informed you, in my letter published in the first number of the *Messenger and Advocate*, that this history would necessarily embrace the life and character of our esteemed friend and brother, J. Smith, jun., one of the presidents of this church; and for information on that part of the subject, I refer you to his communication of the same, published in this paper;* I shall, therefore, pass over that, till I come to the 17th year of his life.

It is necessary to premise this account by relating the situation of the public mind relative to religion at this time. One Mr. Lane, a presiding elder of the Methodist church, visited Palmyra and vicinity. Elder Lane was a talented man, possessing a good share of literary endowments and apparent humility. There was a great awakening or excitement raised on the subject of religion, and much enquiry for the word of life. Large additions were made to the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches. Mr. Lane's manner of communication was peculiarly calculated to awaken the intellect of the hearer, and arouse the sinner to look about him for safety; much good instruction was always drawn from his discourses on the scriptures, and in common with others, our brother's mind became awakened.

For a length of time the reformation seemed to move in an harmonious manner, but as the *excitement* ceased, or those who had expressed anxieties, had professed a belief in the pardoning influence and condescension of the Saviour, a general struggle was made by the leading characters of the different sects for proselytes. Then strife seemed to take the place of that apparent union and harmony which had previously characterized the motives and exhortations of the old professors, and a cry, "I am right, you are wrong," was introduced in their stead.

In this general strife for followers, his mother, one sister, and two of his natural brothers, were persuaded to unite with the Presbyterians. This gave opportunity for further reflection, and as will be seen in the sequel, laid a foundation, or was one means of laying a foundation for the attestation of the truths, or professions of truths, contained in that record called the word of God.

After strong solicitations to unite with one of those different societies, and seeing the apparent proselyting disposition manifested with equal warmth from each, his mind was led to more seriously contemplate the importance of a move of this kind.

* See Joseph Smith's letter, inserted after the conclusion of O. Cowdery's.

To profess godliness without its benign influence upon the heart, was a thing so foreign from his feelings, that his spirit was not at rest day or night. To unite with a society professing to be built upon the only sure foundation, and that profession be a vain one, was calculated in its very nature, the more it was contemplated, the more to arouse the mind to the serious consequences of moving hastily in a course fraught with eternal realities. To say he was right, and still be wrong, could not profit; and amid so many, some must be built upon the sand.

In this situation where could he go? If he went to one, he was told that they were right and all others were wrong—if to another, the same was heard from them. All professed to be the true church, and if not, they were certainly hypocritical; because, if I am presented with a system of religion, and enquire of my teacher whether it is correct, and he informs me that he is not certain, he acknowledges at once that he is teaching without authority, and acting without a commission.

If one professed a degree of authority or preference in consequence of age or right, and that superiority was without evidence, it was insufficient to convince a mind once aroused to that degree of determination which at that time operated upon him. And upon further reflecting, that the Saviour had said, that the gate was straight, and the way narrow that leads to life eternal, and that few entered there; and that the way was broad, and the gate wide which leadeth to destruction, and that many crowded its current, a proof from some source was wanting to settle the mind and give peace to the agitated bosom. It is not often that the *minds* of men are exercised with proper determination relative to obtaining a certainty of the things of God. They are too apt to rest short of that *assurance* which the Lord Jesus has so freely offered in his word to man, and which so beautifully characterizes his whole plan of salvation as revealed to us.

LETTER IV.

DEAR BROTHER,

IN my last I apologized for the very brief manner in which I should be obliged to give, in many instances, the history of this church. Since then yours of Christmas has been received. It was not my wish to be understood that I could not give the leading items of every important occurrence, at least so far as would effect my duty to my fellow-men, in such as contained important information upon the subject of doctrine, and as would render it intelligibly plain; but as there are in a great house many vessels, so in the history of a work of this magni-