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## Letter III

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**Abstract:** Early history of Joseph Smith; the “great awakening” and “excitement” around religious topics during Joseph Smith’s youth

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# LATTER DAY SAINTS'

## MESSENGER AND ADVOCATE.

Vol. I. No. 3.] KIRTLAND, OHIO, DECEMBER, 1834. [Whole No. 3.

### COMMUNICATIONS.

*Liberty, Mo. Nov. 6, 1834.*

LETTER NO. 11.

DEAR BROTHER:

I am one, but the world has many, and the many so various and extensive that every mind and body may have its portion, and satisfaction, even of truth: wherefore I continue the sketches of the western wilds. And let me begin with that section of land which lies between the Missouri river, and the north-western counties of this State. This fine tract of territory embraces land enough for two or three counties, and contrary to the observation which I wrote you last August about it, there will be a further effort for annexation to this State, as soon as matters can move.

The appearance of this tract, as far as I know, is much the same, of the other contiguous country, as described in my last: Extensive prairies, fringed with timber upon the streams. The streams have generally a small assortment of fish, such as large cat, carp, buffalo-shad, hickery-shad, gars, and a few other small pan fish. About three or four miles west of the boundary line, there is a beautiful creek of living water, pebble bottom, running northwardly and empties into the Little Platt. It is called "Tod's Creek," and is sufficient for light mills. Passing some dry branches, in dry times, the Little Platt comes next, and a fine looking river it is, too, about eight or ten rods wide; with a grand fall for mills, of say six or seven feet, at the ford and ferry. Like other western waters, however, it sometimes rises very high, (fifty or sixty feet,) on short notice; and to use it for mill privileges and purposes, would require a stamina and capital equal to what brought the grand canal, by an aqueduct across the Genesee at Rochester, New-York.

On the great garrison road, near five miles westerly of the Platt, is a precious rivulet, called "Clear Creek," along which the Indians camp, in hunting seasons, by scores.— This route to the garrison, from the Platt west, is timber land, and has a fine appearance; in fact, from what I can learn, some of this section looks as rich and fertile as Jackson. At the distance of sixty or eighty rods from Clear Creek, as you come down upon the Missouri bottom, is a Jordan-like, deep sluggish stream, bridged, named "Bee Creek," from the great quantities of bees that have been found in its woods. The Missouri bottom from this creek to the garrison, about three miles, is covered with an unparalleled phalanx of rushes, four or five feet high, presenting one of the *stiffest* pastures I ever beheld. The cattle live and fatten upon these rushes, year in and year out, without any other fodder. One Mr. Martin, who has a permit from the garrison, has the benefit of all this spontaneous feed, together with a farm and ferry at the Platt, a farm and ferry at the Missouri, opposite the garrison, and a boarding house in the garrison, or canton-

ment, more properly, an account of which will be given hereafter. This permission with the facilities, without money or price, gives him a chance to amass a fortune with little trouble, little competition, and in a little time.

But to my subject. The last Congress, if I am not mistaken, extended the limits, jurisdiction and laws, of the territory of Michigan, to all "the district of country north of the State of Missouri, and west of the Mississippi," so that the "far west," or *western world* of territory, laid down on some of the maps, as the Missouri Territory, is now bounded, south by the Arkansas Territory; and Mexican States; west by the Rocky Mountains; north by the British line, as it shall be established according to the treaty of Ghent, cornering on the north-east, at the Lake of the Woods; and east by Michigan Territory, and the State of Missouri: comprising more land than did the old "Thirteen United States," and may emphatically be called *the heart of North America*. It is about nine hundred miles long and eight hundred miles broad, containing, at estimate, four hundred and sixty millions, and eight hundred thousand acres, spread over thirteen degrees of north latitude, and embracing all the beauty and variety of season and climate, that may be found from the south line of Virginia, to the gulf of St. Lawrence! It is a great place, and every thing about it is GREAT. The Missouri, than which a larger or more dreadful river, (with its muddy face always scowling,) is not on earth, rushes rapidly from near the 40th to about the 39th degree of north latitude, hurrying along with it, its numerous relatives, and tributaries, from the vast prairies, that lay spread out like an empire, and passes into the State of Missouri, as the President of rivers.

Notwithstanding, this great country may be ranked as a part of the realm of the United States, yet, the title to the land, is held by the Indians that hunt upon it; or, at least, the most of it, is theirs; and as the general government, has already commenced gathering and settling the various tribes upon the south-eastern limits of this grand region, I shall be justified on that point, and because we have the word of the Lord, that these Indians are a remnant of the seed of Joseph, I certainly shall write truth, on another point, when I call it THE LAND OF ISRAEL. Time will tell whether the United States will be so humane as to gather all the wandering tribes of the forest, and extinguish their title to such lands as they do not want. If the government should succeed in its philanthropic operation to ameliorate the condition of the Indians, and honorably purchase much of their land; if the Lord should permit timber to grow upon the prairies; like corn stalks upon the cultivated fields, so that towns and cities might speckle the west as they now do the east, still, when "Jacob takes root," according to the prediction of Isaiah, "and blossoms and buds and fills the face of the world with fruit," this country will then be *The Land of Israel*.

R. H. Co. Hancock

## Messenger and Advocate.

KIRTLAND, OHIO, DECEMBER, 1834.

*From the West.*—The following is an extracted paragraph from the Message of the Governor of Missouri, to the Legislature of that State, now in session. We give it to our readers for the purpose of showing, that the cause of the afflicted, in the "Far West" does not escape notice. We did not receive this official document until a short time before our paper went to press, consequently, are hindered from making lengthy comments. Six things are certain, however, from the face of this paragraph:

First, The Governor has said that a portion of the citizens organized for the purpose of expelling other peaceable citizens from their homes:

Second, That in the following November they effected their purpose, "not however without the loss of several lives!!"

Third, That an attempt has been made to bring the mob to justice, but to no effect:

Fourth, That it is believed that none professing that system of faith held to by the people called "Mormons," can be protected from violence in Jackson County:

Fifth, That they are not permitted to take possession of their homes; and

Sixth, That it is for the Legislature "to determine what amendments the laws may require so as to guard against such acts of violence for the future!!!"

One thing, and only one, is wanting to put matters in a train for the restoration of this afflicted people to their own land—for the Legislature to "amend," or make provision in the law, to guard against the outrage of mobs, hereafter—when this is done, violence, in that land ceases forever!

With the majority of that Legislature we are unacquainted, but we know that there are individuals in that body, who are intelligent and patriotic; and we cannot believe that it will dissolve without investigating this shameful and disgraceful outrage, and making that provision, so highly needful, for the safety and quietness of that country.—*Editor.*

"In July, 1833, a large portion of the citizens of Jackson county organized themselves, and entered into resolutions to expel from that county, a religious sect called Mormons, who had become obnoxious to them. In November following they effected their object, not however without the loss of several lives. In the judicial enquiry into these outrages, the civil authorities who had cognizance of them, deemed it proper to have a military guard for the purpose of giving protection during the progress of the trials. This was ordered, and the Attorney General was requested to give his attention during the investigation, both of which were performed, but all to no purpose. As yet none have been punished for these outrages, and it is believed that under our present laws, conviction for any violence committed upon a Mormon, cannot be had in Jackson county. These unfortunate people are now forbidden to take possession of their homes; and the principal part of them, I am informed, are at this time living in an adjoining county, in a great measure, upon the charity of its citizens.—It is for you to determine what amendments the laws may require so as to guard against such acts of violence for the future."

*Conference notices*—A conference of the elders of the church of the Latter Day Saints, will be held at Freedom, Cattaraugus Co. N. Y. commencing, Friday, the 3rd day of April, 1835. Friday and Saturday will be occupied by the elders in transacting such business of the church as may be presented, and on Sunday the 5th, public preaching may be expected.

Another conference will be held on Friday, the 5th of June, next, at Elder Winslow Farr's, in Charleston, Orleans Co. Vt. Friday and Saturday will be occupied in church business, and the Sabbath following, instructions in the gospel will be given.—*Editor*

### DIED

In this town, on the 12th inst. CORNELIUS W. CAMFIELD, son of Mr. SAMUEL CAMFIELD, aged 9 years.

### LETTER III.

To W. W. Phelps, Esq.

DEAR BROTHER:—

After a silence of another month, agreeably to my promise, I proceed upon the subject I proposed in the first No. 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 rumor, 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 know 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 scurulous 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, & 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 No. of the Messenger and Advocate, that this history would necessarily embrace the life and character of our esteemed friend and brother, J. SMITH JR. 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 15th 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 tallented 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 a 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 Savior, 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 moves 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 lay-



ing a foundation for the attestation of the truths, or professions of truth, 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. 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 nor 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 they were right, and all others were wrong—If to another, the same was heard from those: 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 farther reflecting, that the Savior had said that the gate was straight and the way narrow that lead to life eternal,

and that few entered there; and that the way was broad, and the gate wide which lead 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 frequent 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.

### A SUMMARY

From the communications of the elders, and others.

Agreeably to a notice in our last we give in this number a summary of the intelligence received at this office for a length of time, not inserted heretofore.

Brethren E. Barns and O. Kilborn, of Troy, Bradford Co. Pa. write under date of Oct. 27, of the situation of the church in that place. There were 28 members formerly in that church, but they now number only 20, some previously having gone to the West.—They inform us that there are enemies to the cause of truth in that country, who seek to oppose its mighty influence; but this is difficult: though they may so far succeed as to hinder some from coming into the Messiah's kingdom, yet the time will roll on when falsehoods will be chased away, and the pure rays of righteousness enlighten the hearts of the meek. The saints have only to walk agreeably to their own profession, and the chain of the adversary will be severed. There has been one of late received by baptism into that branch of the church. If any of the travelling elders are passing that way they would do well to call. They close by saying: