

JOSEPH SMITH, THE PATRIARCH.

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(Written for the Smith Family Association, to be read at their annual meeting, December 23, 1907.)

In Book of Mormon history the greatness of the Prophet Lehi is somewhat overshadowed by the greatness of his son, Nephi. In like manner the student of men and events connected with the latter-day restoration finds that Joseph the Patriarch was great, only the luster of his work is somewhat dimmed by comparison with that of his son, Joseph the Prophet. Yet he justly claims our attention. He did a considerable work in connection with the coming forth of the gospel. He was an inspired man, to whom God revealed certain things concerning the coming forth of the work, while his son Joseph was yet a little child. As regards his official position, he was the first patriarch of the church; as regards his personal character, his leading traits were honesty, simplicity, steadfastness, faith, and spirituality.

He possessed one characteristic in common with the early pioneers that surrounded him: the disposition to launch out into new enterprises. In the Old World a man inherited his trade or profession from his father and worked at it during life. In the New World the yoke was thrown off; Opportunity knocked at the door every morning, and men decided before breakfast what new venture to embark upon. So the subject of our sketch was by turns a farmer, a merchant, and a school-teacher, and in the declining years of his life he became a preacher, the first of at least four generations of preachers, and traveled extensively, converting and baptizing many people.

Evidently he entered upon his true calling late in life, as he

was a very spiritual man, calculated to succeed as a minister and to fail as a financier. In 1802 he rented his farm and engaged in mercantile business. He ventured about all he had in one enterprise, in the exporting business, and the venture resulted well for others but illy for him, as he was swindled out of all that he had invested. He failed and went out of business, but not with full pockets, as some have done before and since his time. He sold his farm and drew the savings of years from the bank and settled his debts in full. This trait of honesty is further illustrated by an incident which occurred just prior to his removal to Palmyra. He had been farming in the state of Vermont and crops had failed for three years in succession, resulting in hardship that amounted almost to famine. It was decided to move to the state of New York; but, before leaving, Mr. Smith called his creditors and his debtors together and made a satisfactory settlement with them all. Afterward, when some of the creditors made complaint, they were paid again in cash. The family kept clear of lawsuits and litigation of all kinds; never becoming involved in anything of the kind until years later, when Martin Harris' wife sued their son Joseph, charging him with extorting money from Mr. Harris, on which occasion Mr. Harris testified that the charge was false, and the case was dismissed.

The subject of our sketch may be termed the first convert of the Latter Day Saint Church; at least he was the first to hear and accept the testimony of his son regarding the angel's message. His simple and childlike faith is shown in his ready acceptance of the message, and his steadfastness of character is shown by the fact that he never wavered during all the hardships and perils of the years of persecution that followed. His ready acceptance might subject him to the charge of credulity, were it not that he had himself received divine instruction that prepared him for the events connected with his son's ministry. This shows us something of the spiritual

nature of the man who received them. The first of these revelations (see Lucy Smith's History, page 57,) was given during a night vision, the exact date of which is not a matter of record (probably about the year 1811). It appeared to him that he was traveling through an open, barren field, covered as far as he could see with dead, fallen timber. A deathlike silence prevailed, and no vestige of life was to be observed. He was alone in the gloomy place, with the exception of an attendant spirit that kept close to his side. This spirit told him, "This field is the world, which now lieth inanimate and dumb, in regard to the true religion, or plan of salvation; but travel on, and by the wayside you will find on a certain log a box, the contents of which, if you eat thereof, will make you wise, and give unto you wisdom and understanding." In the vision he traveled on and found the box. When he ate of its contents he was made perfectly happy, but immediately there arose out of the ground all manner of beasts, horned cattle, and roaring animals that surrounded him and compelled him to fly for his life, typifying, no doubt, the intense persecution that awaited him.

Just a little later he received another vision, which bears a resemblance to one that was granted to the Prophet Lehi. This is recorded in Lucy Smith's History, page 60. At first the same barren wilderness presents itself, but presently there is a change, and we quote a part of his description of the scene, as follows:

"Traveling a short distance further, I came to a narrow path. This path I entered, and, when I had traveled a little way in it, I beheld a beautiful stream of water, which ran from the east to the west. Of this stream I could see neither the source nor yet the termination; but as far as my eyes could extend I could see a rope running along the bank of it, about as high as a man could reach, and beyond me was a low, but very pleasant valley, in which stood a tree such as I had never

seen before. It was exceedingly handsome, insomuch that I looked upon it with wonder and admiration. Its beautiful branches spread themselves somewhat like an umbrella, and it bore a kind of fruit, in shape much like a chestnut-bur, and as white as snow, or, if possible whiter. I gazed upon the same with considerable interest, and as I was doing so the burs or shells commenced opening and shedding their particles, or the fruit which they contained, which was of dazzling whiteness. I drew near and began to eat of it, and I found it delicious beyond description. As I was eating, I said in my heart, 'I can not eat this alone, I must bring my wife and children, that they may partake with me.' Accordingly, I went and brought my family, which consisted of a wife and seven children, and we all commenced eating, and praising God for this blessing. We were exceedingly happy, insomuch that our joy could not easily be expressed. While thus engaged, I beheld a spacious building standing opposite the valley which we were in, and it appeared to reach to the very heavens. It was full of doors and windows, and they were filled with people, who were very finely dressed. When these people observed us in the low valley, under the tree, they pointed the finger of scorn at us, and treated us with all manner of disrespect and contempt. But their contumely we utterly disregarded."

What is termed his seventh and last vision was received in 1819, on the eve of the beginning of the restoration. It is recorded on page 74 of the history before mentioned. In this vision a man bearing a peddler's pack approached him, and their conversation is recorded as follows: "'Sir, will you trade with me to-day? I have now called upon you seven times, I have traded with you each time, and have always found you strictly honest in all your dealings. Your measures are always heaped, and your weights overbalanced; and I have now come to tell you that this is the last time I shall

ever call on you, and that there is but one thing which you lack, in order to secure your salvation.' As I earnestly desired to know what it was that I still lacked, I requested him to write the same upon paper. He said he would do so. I then sprang to get some paper, but, in my excitement, I awoke."

It was reserved for his son Joseph to receive in writing the plan of salvation.

Physically, Joseph Smith, the Patriarch, was very strong. He stood six feet and two inches in height and weighed two hundred pounds. As a young man he was noted as a wrestler.

Our paper deals with his character, but a brief outline of his life may be given. He was born in Topsfield, Essex County, Massachusetts, July 12, 1771. He married Lucy Mack, January 24, 1796. Ten children were born of them. Following the organization of the church, he moved to Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831, where he was ordained patriarch, and president of the High Priesthood, December 18, 1833. In 1838 he moved to Far West, Missouri. Following the extermination order of Governor Boggs, he escaped to Quincy, Illinois; and in 1839 he arrived in Commerce, afterward known as Nauvoo, Illinois. He died September 14, 1840.

Elder R. B. Thompson, who preached his funeral-sermon, said, "A prince and a *great* man has fallen in Israel; a man endeared to us by every feeling calculated to entwine around and adhere to the human heart by almost indissoluble bonds; a man *faithful* to his God and to the church in every situation, and under all circumstances through which he was called to pass."

Of him another wrote:

Zion's children loved him dearly;
 Zion was his daily care;
 That his loss is felt sincerely,
 Thousand weeping Saints declare;
 Thousands, who have shared his blessing,
 Thousands whom his service blessed,

By his faith and prayers suppressing
Evils which their lives opprest.

Faith and works most sweetly blended,
Proved his steadfast heart sincere;
And the power of God attended
His official labors here;
Long he stemmed the powers of darkness,
Like an anchor in the flood:
Like an oak amid the tempest,
Bold and fearlessly he stood.

REMARKS MADE BY PRESIDENT JOSEPH SMITH FOLLOWING THE
READING OF THE PRECEDING PAPER.

(Reported by Estella Wight.)

The duty imposed upon me to present the object of the association, has been done by the rules already adopted; all that I could do would be to enlarge upon them. These objects apply to all members whether through birth, as suggested by the secretary, or by the advantageous conditions of coming into the family by marriage. Of course your speaker recognizes the right of this condition, and the right to thus become a member of the association, and I am sure we feel like welcoming heartily every such acquisition to the ranks of the membership—the ranks of the clan.

It ought also to be the object of every member of the association to see to it that the faith, embraced by the acknowledged one whom we thus commemorate on the anniversary of his birth, be promulgated; to promote the spread of this faith by conduct as well as by precept. And it certainly must strike the members of the association very forcibly that the bad example of one member of the association can do more harm toward forming the family reputation, than can be overcome by the chaste, faithful, upright living of half the rest of them. So I suggest that this thought be taken into consideration by the various members of the association, and that they conserve the interests of the association thus far

in their personal conduct, and to commemorate the anniversaries, showing that our memories are still holding them in honor.

In reference to this anniversary, so far as it is practicable for us so to do, we should meet and make the family association an uplifting one—a continuous one, and seek to promote its interests. We also ought to bear in mind and follow the closing sentence of the formulated rules of association as declared by the adoption of these rules at this meeting that the object is to further increase the social—the legitimately social conditions, and to prevail upon members of the family to see that there should grow up no caste, or offensive line of distinction by which the cold shoulder of the association should be turned upon any member of the family, whether by birthright or by accession through marriage; to see that all are made welcome, and that all are to be made partakers of the meetings of a social character for the whole family, that we may be noted as we have read in the paper concerning our patriarch progenitor, that he was known for his honesty, integrity, and for his hospitality. I am inclined to think that there never was a more earnest and social body in the Smith family than Grandma Smith. I well remember when I was a boy it was our delight to go to grandma's, as it is the delight of most all boys to go to grandma's. I remember grandfather well. I suppose that one of the reasons why I remember him so well is that when he died I could not shed a tear, and did not. And when I was by Aunt Lucy asked if I was not sorry that he was dead, I said, No. And when they berated me for it I finally grew indignant and said: "You have all said he is better off than he was here; why should I be sorry that he has gone?" I know that it was the feeling then that he was a grand man. His example was worth following. In stature he had no superior in the family. Not one of his sons excelled him in physical appearance. Not one to my memory.

So far as it is within my power to lead out and to further the social character of the association I feel desirous of doing; to endeavor to do it so far as I am qualified. I think this should be one of the pleasant and continuous features of our work. I think further, it ought to be our effort to gather all the statistics; to be on the watch for everything that would conduce to a better understanding of the history of the family and their attitude, and that it should be lodged with the historian in order that it might be spread among the members of the association for their benefit. And while I can remember that I have been accused of striving to foster and build up the name of Smith, I do not see anything wrong in it, and never did. While I am not exactly a hero-worshiper, I believe in seeing—well, being proud of our progenitors, those of them that are worthy of being proud of, and to secure all the truth about them that we can, and then be honest enough if we find a rogue or a scamp not to imitate them, but strive to do better from their bad example. I was a little amused by one presentation of the secretary in regard to the way of our obtaining membership and the fact that none of us could get out of the family except by death. We are members for life and can not help ourselves. I do not know that there is anything bad about that, however. Thus I feel to add what force I can to the declared objects of the association.