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An Impressive Letter from the Pen of Joseph Smith

LAMAR C. BERRETT*

Because of rivalry and jealousy among the Missouri Saints, the Prophet Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, and Newel K. Whitney were appointed to sit in council with them in April 1832. (D & C 78: 9-10.) This was the second visit by Joseph Smith to the Missouri area.

After grievances were amicably settled, the three brethren returned to Kirtland by stage via St. Louis and Vincennes, Indiana. At a point between Vincennes, Indiana, and New Albany (near Greenville) they had a run-away when the horses became frightened. Joseph and Sidney jumped out of the coach unhurt; but when Bishop Whitney attempted to jump, his coat caught and threw him into the wheel. His leg and foot were broken in several places. Joseph and Newel stayed at Mr. Porter’s Public House at Greenville for four weeks, and Elder Rigdon returned to Kirtland. While attending Brother Whitney as he recuperated from his injuries, Joseph Smith was poisoned. He vomited so profusely that he dislocated his jaw. He replaced it himself and then made his way to the bedside of Newel K. Whitney where Newel administered to him and he was healed instantly. The Prophet Joseph Smith indicated that the effect of the poison was so powerful it caused much of the hair of his head to be loosened. He was grateful to be alive, however, and said, “thanks be to my Heavenly Father for his interference.”

Sometime in the four weeks while Newel K. Whitney was bedfast, Joseph Smith wrote an intimate letter to his wife, Emma.¹ His impressive account of his struggle for repentance and his assurance of his own forgiveness is touching; it is one of the most authentic glimpses of the Prophet’s repentance and effort for worthiness.

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²This letter was discovered by James R. Harris in 1960 in the possession of the Chicago Historical Society, who graciously supplied us with a copy of the letter. See DHC 1:271-2 for the instance of writing.
[Indiana]

June 6th Greenville Floyd  Co  [ ]

1832

Dear Wife

I would inform you that Brother Martin has arrived here and brought the pleasing news that our Family was well when he left them which Greately Cheered our hearts and [re]vived our Spirits we thank our hevenly Father for his goodness [ ] unto all of you us and [yes]. Martin arrived on Satterday the Same week he left Chagrin haveing a properous time we are all in good heath Brother Whitneys leg is gaining and he thinks he Shall be able to to perform his about Journy so as to get home as soon as the 20th. my Situation is a very unpleasent one although I will endeaver to be Contented the Lord assiting me I have visited a grove which is Just back of the town almost every day where I can be Secluded from the eyes of any mortal and there give vent to all the feeling[s] of my heart in meaditation and prayr I have Called to mind all the past and moments of my life and am left to morn [ ] Shed tears of sorrow for my folly in Sufering the adversary of my Soul to have so much had in times past ul power over me as he has^ but God is mercif
June 6th. Greenville, Ohio, 1832

Dear Sister,

I would inform you that Brother Martin has arrived there and brought the pleasing news that our families are well when he left them, which greatly pleased our hearts and warmed our spirits. We thank and honor Brother for his kindness. If you will come and visit us, Martin arrived on Saturday. The same week, we left Chicago. Although the profession of faith we are all in good health and Brother Martin is as strong and in that he shall be able to do my part in the family, as it got home soon. If my situation is a very unpleasant one, although, I will endeavor to be contented. God grant me if there existed a group of people, which in last battle of the town, almost every day when it can be excluded from the rest of the people, and that you went to all the feelings of my heart in meditation. In the past years, I have called to mind all these last moments of my life and, with my heart, I feel the expression of my soul to failures and my faults. Even now and God is mighty.
and has forgiven my sins and I rejoice that he sendeth forth the Comforter unto as many as believe and humbleth themselves before him lost
I was grieved to hear that Hiram had his little Child. I think we can in some degree sympathise with him but we all must be of the Lord reconciled to our lots and say the will be done her husband
[ ] Sister Whitney wrote a letter to [ ] which was very cheering [ ] and being unwell at that time and filled with much anxiety
it would have been very consoling to me to have received a few lines from you but as you did not take the trouble I will try to be contented with my lot knowing that God is my friend in him I shall find comfort I have given my [ ] life into his hands I am prepared to go at his call I desire to be with Christ I count not my life dear to me only to do his will I am not pleased to hear that William Mclelin has come back and disobeyed the voice of him who is altogether lovely for a woman I am astonished at Sister Emaline yet I cannot believe she is not a worthy sister I hope she will find [ ] will him true and kind to her but have no reason to [ ] expect it his conduct merits the disapprobation of every true follower of Christ
LETTER FROM JOSEPH SMITH

...has forgiven my sins and I join that he...
but this is a painful subject I hope you will excuse my warmth of feeling in mentioning this [ ] Subject and also my inability in conveyng my ideas in writing. I am happy to find that you are still in the faith of Christ and at Father Smiths. I hope you will Comfort Father and Mother in their trials and Hiram and Jerusha and the rest of the Family tell Sophronia I remember her and Kalvin in my prays to the rest. I Should like to see little Julia and once more take her on my knee and converse with you on [ ] all the Subjects which concerns us things I Cannot is not prudent for me to write. I omit all the important [ ] things which could I See you I could make you acquainted with tell Brother Will[ ] that I and Brother Whitney will arrange the[ ] business of that farm when we come give my respects to all the Brothers Br—Whitney Family [ ] tell them he is Cheerful and patient and a true Brother to me. I Subscribe myself your Husband the Lord bless you peace be with so Farewell untill I return

Joseph Smith Jr.
LETTER FROM JOSEPH SMITH

But this is a painful subject. I hope you will receive my respect for mentioning this subject and also my inability in conveying my ideas in writing. I am happy to find that you are still on the faith of Christ and of Father Smith. I hope you will comfort Father and Mother in their trials and bless and keep them.

And the rest of the family left to know I remember her and wish her well. I am in my prayers my respects to the rest. I should like to see little Julia and once more to touch her on my knees and converse with you on all the subjects which concern us. Things I cannot express. I cannot express all the important things which could I see you. I could make you acquainted with tell Brother Willing that I and Brother Whitaker will arrange the business of that farm when we come to the Lord. My respects to all the Brother B. Whitaker and Family. I tell them he is cheerful and patient and a true Brother to me. To you, my self, your husband, and the Lord bless you. Farewell until forever.

Joseph Smith Jr.