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Letter IV

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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-

tude, many items which would be interesting to those who follow, are forgotten. In fact, I deem every manifestation of the Holy Spirit, dictating the hearts of the saints in the way of righteousness, to be of importance, and this is one reason why I plead an apology.

You will recollect that I mentioned the time of a religious excitement, in Palmyra and vicinity, to have been in the 17th year of our brother J. Smith, jun.'s, age. This brings the date down to the year 1823.

I do not deem it to be necessary to write further on the subject of this excitement. It is doubted by many whether any real or essential good ever resulted from such excitements, while others advocate their propriety with warmth.

The mind is easily called up to reflection upon a matter of such deep importance, and it is just that it should be; but there is a regret occupying the heart when we consider the deep anxiety of thousands, who are led away with a vain imagination, or a groundless hope, no better than the idle wind or the spider's web.

But if others were not benefited, our brother was urged forward and strengthened in the determination to know for himself of the certainty and reality of pure and holy religion; and it is only necessary for me to say, that while this excitement continued, he continued to call upon the Lord in secret for a full manifestation of divine approbation, and for, to him, the all important information, if a Supreme being did exist, to have an assurance that he was accepted of him. This, most assuredly, was correct—it was right. The Lord has said, long since, and his word remains steadfast, that to him who knocks it shall be opened, and whosoever will, may come and partake of the waters of life freely.

To grant a humble penitent sinner a refreshing draught from this most pure of all fountains, and most desirable of all refreshments to a thirsty soul, is a matter for the full performance of which the sacred record stands pledged. The Lord never said, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," to turn a deaf ear to those who were weary when they call upon him: He never said by the mouth of the prophet, "Ho, every one that thirsts, come ye to the waters," without passing it as a firm decree at the same time, that he that should after come, should be filled with a joy unspeakable. Neither did he manifest by the spirit to John upon the isle, "let him that is athirst come," and command him to send the same abroad, under any other consideration than that "whosoever would, might take the water of life freely" to the remotest ages of time, or while there was a sinner upon his footstool.

These sacred and important promises are looked upon in our day as being given, either to another people or in a figurative

form, and consequently require *spiritualizing*, notwithstanding they are as conspicuously plain, and are meant to be understood according to their *literal* reading, as those passages which teach us of the creation of the world, and of the decree of its Maker to bring its inhabitants to judgment. But to proceed with my narrative.

On the evening of the 21st of September, 1823, previous to retiring to rest, our brother's mind was unusually wrought up on the subject which had so long agitated his mind; his heart was drawn out in fervent prayer, and his whole soul was so lost to every thing of a temporal nature, that earth to him had lost its charms, and all he desired was to be prepared in heart to commune with some kind messenger who could communicate to him the desired information of his acceptance with God.

At length the family retired, and he, as usual, bent his way, though in silence, where others might have rested their weary frames, "locked fast in sleep's embrace;" but repose had fled, and accustomed slumber had spread her refreshing hand over others beside him; he continued still to pray; his heart, though once hard and obdurate, was softened; and that mind which had often flitted, like the "wild bird of passage," had settled upon a determined basis not to be decoyed or driven from its purpose.

In this situation hours passed unnumbered—how many or how few I know not, neither is he able to inform me, but supposes it must have been eleven or twelve and perhaps later, as the noise and bustle of the family in retiring had long since ceased.—While continuing in prayer for a manifestation in some way that his sins were forgiven, endeavouring to exercise faith in the scriptures, on a sudden a light like that of day, only of a purer and far more glorious appearance and brightness, burst into the room; indeed, to use his own description, the first sight was as though the house was filled with consuming and unquenchable fire. This sudden appearance of a light so bright as must naturally be expected, occasioned a shock or sensation, visible to the extremities of the body. It was, however, followed with a calmness and serenity of mind, and an overwhelming rapture of joy that surpassed understanding, and in a moment a personage stood before him.

Notwithstanding the room was previously filled with light above the brightness of the sun, as I have before described, yet there seemed to be an additional glory surrounding or accompanying this personage, which shone with an increased degree of brilliancy, of which he was in the midst; and though his countenance was as lightning, yet it was of a pleasing, innocent, and glorious appearance, so much so, that every fear was banished from the heart, and nothing but calmness pervaded the soul.

It is no easy task to describe the appearance of a messenger from the skies, indeed, I doubt there being an individual clothed

with perishable clay, who is capable to do this work. To be sure the Lord appeared to his apostles after his resurrection, and we do not learn that they had the least difficulty in looking upon him; but from John's description upon Patmos, we learn that he is there represented as most glorious in appearance, and from other items in the sacred scriptures we have the fact recorded where *angels* appeared and conversed with men, and there was no difficulty on the part of the individuals to endure their presence; and others where their glory was so conspicuous that they could not endure. The last description or appearance is the one to which I refer, when I say that it is no easy task to describe their glory.

But it may be well to relate the particulars as far as given: the stature of this personage was a little above the common size of men in this age; his garment was perfectly white, and had the appearance of being without seam.

Though fear was banished from his heart, yet his surprise was no less when he heard him declare himself to be a messenger sent by commandment of the Lord, to deliver a special message, and to witness to him that his sins were forgiven, and that his prayers were heard; and that the scriptures might be fulfilled which say, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised has God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are, that no flesh should glory in his presence. Therefore, says the Lord, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder; the wisdom of their wise shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent shall be hid; for according to his covenant which he made with his ancient saints, his people the house of Israel must come to a knowledge of the gospel, and own that Messiah whom their fathers rejected, and with them the fulness of the Gentiles be gathered in, to rejoice in one fold under one shepherd.

"This cannot be brought about until first certain preparatory things are accomplished, for so has the Lord purposed in his own mind. He has, therefore, chosen you as an instrument in his hand to bring to light that which shall perform his act, his strange act, and bring to pass a marvellous work and a wonder. Wherever the sound shall go it shall cause the ears of men to tingle, and wherever it shall be proclaimed, the pure in heart shall rejoice, while those who draw near to God with their mouths, and honour him with their lips while their hearts are far from him, will seek its overthrow, and the destruction of those by whose hands it is carried. Therefore, marvel not if your name is made a derision, and had as a by-word among such, if you are the instrument in bringing it, by the gift of God, to the knowledge of the people."

He then proceeded and gave a general account of the promises made to the fathers, and also gave a history of the aborigines of this country, and said they were literal descendants of Abraham. He represented them as once being an enlightened and intelligent people, possessing a correct knowledge of the gospel, and the plan of restoration and redemption. He said this history was written and deposited not far from that place, and that it was our brother's privilege, if obedient to the commandments of the Lord, to obtain, and translate the same by the means of the Urim and Thummim, which were deposited for that purpose with the record.

"Yet," said he, "the scripture must be fulfilled before it is translated, which says that the words of a book, which were sealed, were presented to the learned; for thus has God determined to leave men without excuse, and show to the meek that his arm is not shortened that it cannot save."

A part of the book was sealed, and was not to be opened yet. The sealed part, said he, contains the same revelation which was given to John upon the isle of Patmos, and when the people of the Lord are prepared, and found worthy, then it will be unfolded unto them.

On the subject of bringing to light the unsealed part of this record, it may be proper to say, that our brother was expressly informed, that it must be done with an eye single to the glory of God; if this consideration did not wholly characterize all his proceedings in relation to it, the adversary of truth would overcome him, or at least prevent his making that proficiency in this glorious work which he otherwise would.

While describing the place where the record was deposited, he gave a minute relation of it, and the vision of his mind being opened at the same time, he was permitted to view it critically; and previously being acquainted with the place, he was able to follow the direction of the vision, afterward, according to the voice of the angel, and obtain the book.

I close for the present by subscribing myself as ever, your brother in Christ.

LETTER V.

DEAR BROTHER,

YOU will notice in my last, on rehearsing the words of the angel, where he communicated to our brother, that his sins were forgiven, and that he was called of the Lord to bring to light, by the gift of inspiration, this important intelligence, an item like the following:—"God has chosen the foolish things of the world, and things which are despised, God has chosen," &c.