

# Letters to the Editors

*The pen and ink sketches in this section are by the early Utah artist James T. Harwood, from the book OUR INLAND SEA.*

Dear Sirs:

I was very pleased to read the David L. Wright material in the Summer issue. Jim Miller's "Introduction" and "Dave Elegy" form an outstanding preface to "The Conscience of the Village." To indicate the exceptional understanding between Jim and Dave, you may like to know that they frequently boarded together. They would work at whatever jobs they could find and would bring their earnings home and pile it on the table; each of them would then take from the pile as necessary.

From my acquaintance with Jim, I find that what he says about Dave is frequently true of himself. More than writing excellent poetry, Jim looks and acts in close accord with my vision of the truly great ones. He lives with Keats, Shelley, and all the Romantics.

Bill Skidmore  
Brigham City, Utah

Dear Sirs:

We were surprised at Mrs. Sprang's put-down [Summer, 1970] of the Wayne County resident's ability to appreciate the beauty of his country. Perhaps she hasn't been listening, or perhaps the "folks" don't feel they have the right to express their feelings about what is or is not beautiful in the presence of the resident artist. Maybe a person with such a low opinion of her neighbors is not able to feel and understand their language. For whatever reason, we're sure she is wrong.

Three years ago we made a film of the

last cattle drive from the desert to the Boulder Mountain. Our five member film crew spent six days with some of the slowest moving, slowest talking cowboys this side of the Pecos, men who for the most part live within ten miles of Mrs. Sprang and who she accuses of lacking any appreciation for their remarkable environs. They didn't effuse, "isn't this fantastic scenery," inanities in the style of their urban cousins, but they made sure in an unobtrusive way that we filmed this rock formation or that geological fault and wondered when we talked with them alone, if the red of the desert could be captured on film. When we had to leave before the drive was completely over, we felt their disappointment, "You'll miss Pleasant Creek" they said, and we knew we were missing an experience that had profound meaning for them. One of the Teasdale ladies chased our cameraman to the next town of Bicknell to persuade him to return and get a shot of the desert from the top of Boulder Mountain.

When we finished the film and showed it to the residents they were kind, but several expressed disappointment, "It's too bad you didn't get a picture of those cattle strung along the ridge at the tail end of the drive," or expressed in one form or another the idea that while it was a good film we didn't do the country justice — which we didn't, because it is impossible.

No, they don't lack appreciation of their country. They may not communicate it in a way that some folks would like them to, but we're sure it is there.

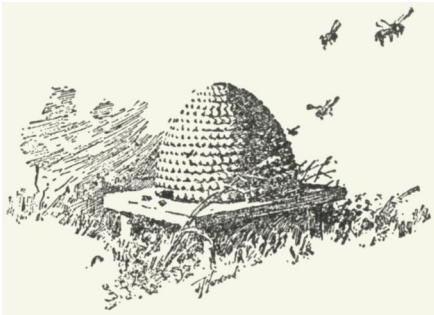
Garry and Cozette Shirts  
Del Mar, California

Dear Sirs:

I have just finished reading the first section of David L. Wright's "River Saints" and it rings beautifully and painfully true. For those of us who have lived in Bear Lake County, were raised as Mormons, and now live as expatriates outside the close confines of a small "Mormon" community, "River Saints" comes like a "bath of light," full of insight, understanding and compassion.

I applaud your decision to publish more of David L. Wright's work for he truly seems that creative honest Mormonborn writer.

K. B. Rasmussen  
Deerfield, Mass.



Dear Sirs:

Bravo! Mr. Bush's Review [Winter, 1969] is at once timely and most scholarly. The appendix to his article refers to the 15 Dec. 1969 letter of Elders Brown and Tanner wherein it is averred that the position of the Church toward Blacks "has no relevancy [sic] whatever to those who do not wish to join the Church." I would like to discuss this point briefly.

If we consider the effect of this policy upon the true believer, we may more readily see its relevance to the non-believer. Christ's criterion for judgement is to behold the fruits.

Feelings of racial superiority are not in harmony with the Gospel of the Brotherhood of Man and Fatherhood of God and my observations lead me to believe that such feelings are rather more encouraged than discouraged in members of the L.D.S. Church by the practice of priesthood denial to worthy Blacks solely because of their skin color.

The Constitution requires that we grant civil rights, but Christ's second mile con-

cept requires that we go beyond the immediately provable action to the more subtle attitude. Tell a black man he's free, but deny him access to certain jobs or residential areas — then read James 2:16 — what doth it profit? To refer to a man as "inferior" or "darkie" in this time and country is to display disrespect for his dignity and self-respect, and speaks eloquently of the real contempt felt by the speaker, protestations of piety notwithstanding.

The Church's present policy toward Blacks does not inspire its members to feel all men are their brothers — except in the abstract and at a distance. Now, insofar as this attitude is manifest in interactions between Blacks and L.D.S. Church members, it is a valid concern to both parties to the interactions. Hence, the statement that the "position has no relevancy [sic] whatever to those who do not wish to join the Church" is simply not true. (Note that even if the effect were to improve relations, the statement would still be untrue). Those who affect an air of injured innocence in the face of challenges to that policy (e.g., Stanford U. athletics) seem willfully to ignore the bad fruits thereof.

I would hazard the guess that the Church will make great missionary gains among fearful whites (in and out of the South) as long as it offers them religious sanctuary for their prejudices. But maybe it's better not to tamper with a man's prejudices — after all, Christ got into some trouble doing that.

Calvin D. Wood  
Livermore, Calif.

Dear Sirs:

The following was printed in the *Times and Seasons* on November 1, 1840:

**HYMNS! HYMNS!**

. . . It is requested that all those who have been endowed with a poetical genius, whose muse has not been altogether idle, will feel enough interest in a work of this kind, to immediately forward all choice, newly composed or revised hymns. In designating those who are endowed with Poetical genius, we do not intend to exclude others; we mean all who have good hymns that will cheer the heart of

*the righteous man, to send them as soon as practicable directed to Mrs. Emma Smith, Nauvoo, Illinois. POST PAID.*

Today, one hundred and thirty years later, I would echo this request for new Latter-day Saint hymns, both texts and music, to be written.

I am a doctoral candidate in church music at the University of Southern California, and my dissertation project deals with contemporary hymns in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I am seeking new hymn texts and new hymn tunes which can be performed by Latter-day Saint congregations and which could ultimately be considered for placement in the next hymnal of the Church.

It is my opinion that modern "Mormon" hymns should not only be appropriate for Latter-day Saint worship, but should also be fresh, creative, and representative of the Restored Church in 1970. They should be an honest expression of how we *today* feel about the Gospel. They may or may not conform to earlier rhythmic patterns, harmonic formulas, regular meters, uniform stanzas, etc., but should maintain the same standards of dignity, reverence, and beauty that are characteristic of all great hymns.

I believe we are blessed to live in a most exciting period of history — a time of excellence and fulfillment for the Church. May we, through the use of our talents, rise to the occasion, and add to the rich heritage given to us by earlier Saints.

Michael F. Moody  
1209 West 38th Place  
Los Angeles, Calif. 90037

[Recent events at Brigham Young University have been drawn to our attention by the following letter — Ed.]

Dear Sirs:

It's not often that the vice president and president of the BYU studentbody come out and oppose such ideas as war. That's just not supposed to be done on a campus like BYU where peaceful dissent is a communist plot and long hair is a shame to manhood. But they and ten others brave souls did it. Of course over 2,000 students signed a peti-

tion asking for the "re-call" (impeachment) of Brian Walton and Jon Ferguson as a result of their infamous attempt to restore reason to Zion. In their pamphlet, Walton and Ferguson made such outlandish statements as "we do not necessarily equate military service with service to our fellow men"



and "just as killing Christians did not kill Christianity, killing Communists will not kill Communism." They also had the audacity to quote Thoreau and President McKay.

While the quotation from Thoreau is dismissed with nary a shrug ("he wasn't even a Stake President, was he?"), the "BYU Twelve" have been accused of quoting President McKay out of context. Surely a President of the Church couldn't have really meant that "it is vain to attempt to reconcile war with true Christianity!" Well, for those who can't believe it, here are a few more quotations out of context:

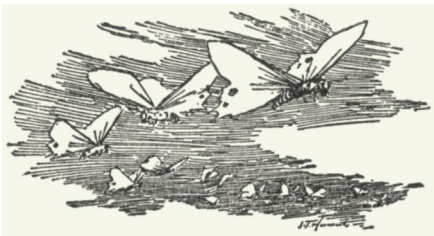
From Brigham Young: "Our traditions have been such that we are not apt to look upon war between two nations as murder; but suppose that one family should rise up against another and begin to slay them, would they not be taken up and tried for murder? But observe the martial array, how splendid! See the furious war horses, with their glittering trappings. Then the honor and glory and pride of the reigning king must be sustained, and the strength and power and wealth of the nation must be displayed in some way; and what better way than to make war upon neighboring nations, under some slight pretext? Does it justify the slaying of men and women and children that otherwise would have remained at home at peace, because a great army is doing the work? No: the guilty will be

damned for it. It is just as much murder to kill, unjustly, a million at a blow as it is to kill one . . .”

From *The First Presidency* (George Albert Smith, J. Reuben Clark, and David O. McKay): “. . . we have the honor respectfully to urge that you do your utmost to defeat any plan designed to bring about the compulsory military service of our citizenry . . .”

From George Q. Cannon: “I do not want to see our young men get filled with the spirit of war and be eager for the conflict. God forbid that such a spirit should prevail in our land, or that we should contribute in any way to the propagation of a spirit of that kind! But one may say, ‘Is it not our duty to defend our country and our flag? Is it not our duty to maintain the institutions which the Lord has given us?’ Certainly it is. And it is not the part of cowardice to take the plan that the Lord has pointed out. No man need be afraid that the Lord or any just man will look upon him as a coward.”

And if all that isn’t current enough, President Joseph Fielding Smith has said the following: “One of the best illustrations of this spirit of enduring wrong rather than retaliating is found in the story of the people of Ammon in the Book of Mormon.



Because they refused to take up arms to defend themselves, but would rather lay down their lives than shed blood in their own defense, they brought many of their enemies to repentance and to the Kingdom of God. This is the doctrine of Jesus Christ as taught in the Sermon on the Mount.”

But there may still be some who insist on a higher Authority. For them, in addition to the many passages in the Bible, I offer the following: the entire twenty-fourth chapter of the Book of Mormon and from

the Doctrine and Covenants, 42:18-19, 98:16, 98:23-27, 105:38-40, and 134:2, 4.

So perhaps Ferguson, Walton and Co. aren’t such flaming heretics after all? Of course not. In fact, from what the Mormon religion really tries to teach, these good brethren are merely following in the footsteps of their C.O. brothers, the people of Ammon. Do you suppose their example might bring “many of their enemies to repentance and to the Kingdom of God”? Let’s hope so. It looks like there are at least 2,000 potential converts busy signing petitions at BYU.

Roger Ekins  
University of Utah

Dear Sirs:

I just received the Winter 1969 issue of *Dialogue* and am quite interested in Richard L. Bushman’s article “Faithful History.” It is apparently a result of the continued frustration expressed at the end of his article “The First Vision Story Revived” in the Spring 1969 issue, where he explained his reasons for responding to Wesley Walter’s claims. Actually, this explanation was the only significant part of that article, since Walters destroyed all of Bushman’s arguments in favor of a 1820 revival. Indeed, if Bushman had had a satisfactory case, the last few paragraphs of his article would have been unnecessary and irrelevant.

Bushman’s article in the Winter 1969 *Dialogue* is an intellectual cop-out. Apparently he has learned that many of the claims of Mormon history will not stand up to the standards of high-level research employed by professional historians. So he is trying to find another approach to Mormon history consistent with both his testimony and his professional life. He is trying to have his cake and eat it too.

I was amazed when I read the Summer 1969 and Fall 1969 issues of *Dialogue* and found that there was practically no comment whatever concerning the “roundtable” on the Palmyra revival. Here was a matter of critical importance to the very foundations of the entire Mormon faith, and no comment at all! The BYU team and Bushman have clearly lost on the question of the 1820 revival.

It is time to face up to the realities of situation. In his articles in *Dialogue* Bushman is being dishonest with both himself and his readers. There are two honest courses he can take in the future: (1) give up on the historical rationalizations and be satisfied with spiritual experiences and the Mormon group life (Bushman stated that "spiritual experience is the most compelling data") or (2) proceed with truthful historical research and be willing to admit the obvious implications (i.e. the First Vision should be scrapped).

Dr. Bushman said in his Spring 1969 article: "Honesty requires that one remain true to ("spiritual experience" or "Faith of the faithful") even in the face of other evidence to the contrary." I would only ask that he be honest in his quest for this "honesty."

Bill Williams  
St. Louis, Missouri



Mr. Bushman replies:

Joseph Smith's story of his First Vision has held up better under historical scrutiny than Mr. Williams realizes. In fact, it is in a stronger position now than ever. Until recently virtually the only firsthand account of how the revivals affected Joseph had come from Orasmus Turner, an apprentice printer and editor in Palmyra from 1819 to 1822, who knew Joseph personally. Turner described Joseph as "catching a spark of Methodism in the camp meeting, away down in the woods, on the Vienna road." The Vienna road led from Palmyra to the neighboring township of Phelps whose village center was known as Vienna. Turner thus left us with a picture of Joseph being converted sometime before 1822 (when Turner left Palmyra) at a Methodist campground somewhere between Palmyra and Phelps.

Now, thanks to the work of various researchers, we have much more information about the religious situation in Palmyra and Phelps with which to fill in Turner's abbreviated account. In Palmyra the Methodists held a class meeting and occasional camp meetings. In June of 1818, for example, twenty people were baptized and forty united to the church. Again in 1820 the Palmyra paper referred to activities at the Methodist camp ground. But the Methodists did not own property yet. As was the usual practice elsewhere, they held camp meetings on borrowed land.

In Phelps, the more vigorous of the two villages in 1819 and 1820, the Methodists dedicated a meetinghouse in late 1818 or early 1819 which was large enough to accommodate a conference in July 1819 of perhaps 100 ministers from all over the Genesee area. We can safely assume there was a great deal of evangelizing at this conference, in Phelps and probably in nearby towns. It is highly unlikely that this gathering of men, whose life work it was to preach wherever they went, would have left Phelps without conducting public meetings. It may be due to this visit that in the following year Phelps experienced what a participant described as a "religious cyclone which swept over the whole region round about and the kingdom of darkness was terribly shaken." Membership in the circuit which included Phelps jumped from 374 to 654. The excitement may have touched Palmyra too, for in July 1821 the Methodists purchased property on the Vienna road and shortly afterwards began construction of a chapel, indication that their numbers were increasing.

Meanwhile Presbyterians in Phelps were also enjoying a harvest which benefited their church at Oaks Corners, another village in the township. The average admission from 1806 to 1819 had been five members a year. In 1820 thirty joined, twenty-two of them by April. Throughout the presbytery of which the Phelps congregation was a part, the number of conversions increased dramatically. The clerk of the presbytery noted in February 1820 that "during the past year more have been received into the communion of the Churches than perhaps in any former year." We do not know what happened in the Palmyra Presbyterian church

in this banner year, for no report was made at the February meeting and from 1820 to 1822 the church was without a pastor. Palmyra Presbyterians would have had to travel elsewhere or attend another denomination. If they went to Phelps in 1820, they would have encountered an unusual excitement.

Mr. Walters' main contention is that no revival occurred in Palmyra itself in 1819 or 1820. His argument against Joseph Smith's story rests on the assumption that village residents would not have traveled to an adjoining town to a revival meeting. But that is indeed unlikely. Members of the little Methodist class meeting would surely have wished to hear the ministers gathered for the annual conference, and Presbyterians without a pastor must have occasionally gone to Phelps to church. Furthermore, it was customary in this era for Americans to travel considerable distances to revivals. One of the famous conversion stories of the Great Awakening of 1740 tells of a man who heard one morning of George Whitefield's impending visit to a town ten miles away. The man dropped his work in the fields and rushed off at once to hear Whitefield. Along the way he met hundreds of others heading in the same direction. By the nineteenth century the practice of traveling to revivals had become institutionalized in the camp meeting, where people came and camped while they listened to preachers for two or three days. The fifteen mile journey from the Smith house to Phelps village (twelve miles as the crow flies) would not have seemed like an insurmountable distance to the Smith family. To a fourteen year old boy it would have been no more than a three or four hour hike. The range of Joseph's interest shows clearly in his account where he speaks of

the revival as occurring in "that region of country" and in "the whole district of country." There is no reason to believe that the Smith's activities were abnormally limited to the village of Palmyra alone.

I think it can be said in summary that all of the research in recent years has not drastically revised our picture of the events of Joseph's life in 1819 and 1820. We knew before that there were revivals in the general area and that Joseph probably was affected personally at a Methodist camp meeting somewhere along the road to Phelps. But now we understand much more precisely where the centers of activity were to which Joseph referred and what church life was like in Palmyra and Phelps. The next step for historians is to discover more about the strife of words and contention for converts which impressed Joseph Smith as much as the conversions themselves.

Dear Sirs:

In the Spring 1970 issue of *Dialogue*, you included a list called "Selected Works of Mormon Interest" at the end. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I was included. To set the record straight, my work is a dissertation, done at the University of Utah in 1969: Dennis L. Lythgoe, "The Changing Image of Mormonism in Periodical Literature, 1830-1969" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Utah, 1969). I am presently negotiating for its publication, and hope that soon it can rightfully be included in such a list. As a result of your listing I have already had a request from a book firm that places with libraries to see my "book."

Dennis L. Lythgoe  
Brockton, Mass.

