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JOSEPH SMITH AS A JACKSONIAN MAN OF LETTERS:
HIS LITERARY DEVELOPMENT AS EVIDENCED
IN HIS NEWSPAPER WRITINGS

A Thesis

Presented to the
Department of English
Brigham Young University

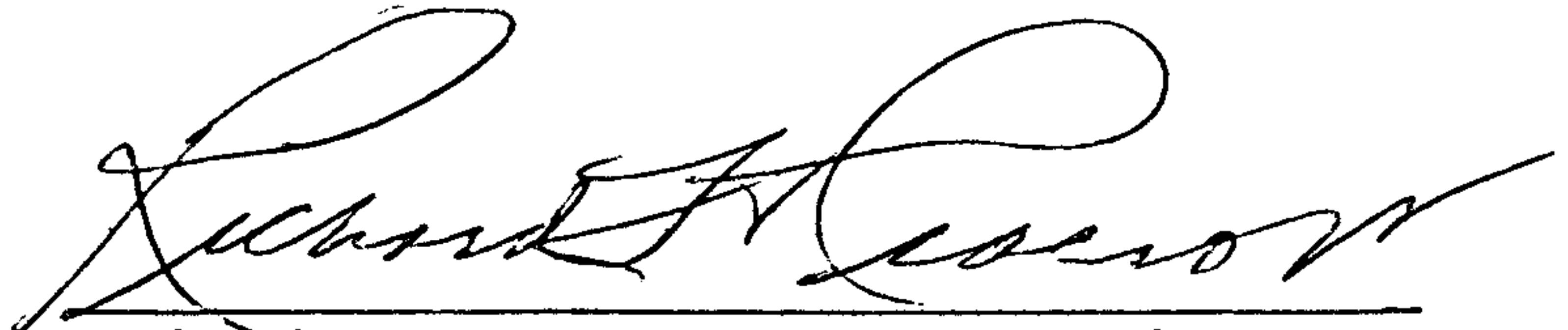
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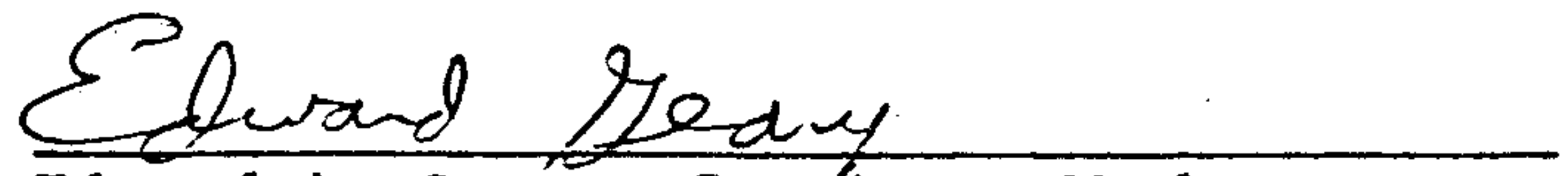
by

Walter A. Norton

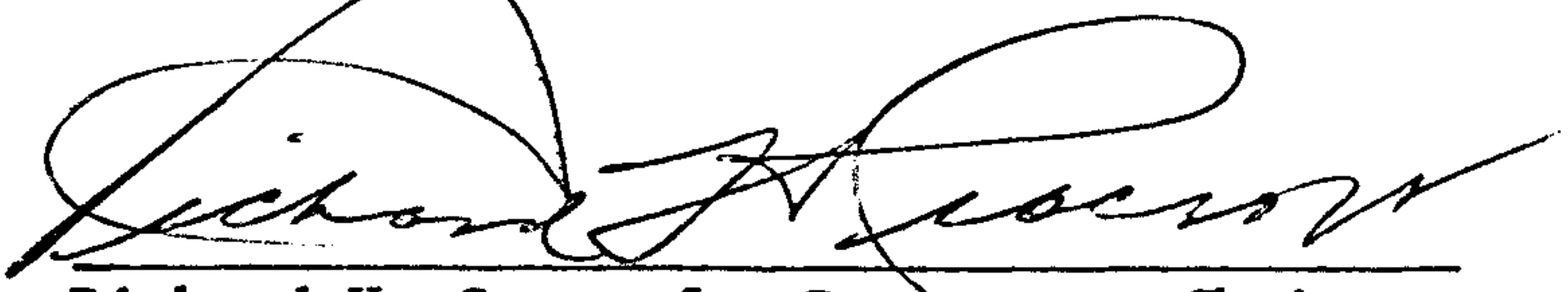
December 1976

This thesis, by Walter A. Norton, is accepted in its present form by the Department of English of Brigham Young University as satisfying the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.


Richard H. Cracroft, Committee Chairman


Edward A. Geary, Committee Member

6 August 1976
Date


Richard H. Cracroft, Department Chairman

PREFACE

Although I graduated from Idaho State University with a bachelor's degree in English, during all the seven-year interval since that time I have been employed as an instructor in religious education for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It was because of my combined interest in both English and religion that five years ago I began graduate work at Brigham Young University in American literature with intentions of writing a thesis on Joseph Smith as a Man of Letters. Numerous responsibilities aside from graduate work have delayed the completion of this project, but I now take great pleasure in presenting it here as the first of its kind (as far as I am aware) with hopes that additional studies in this area will follow.

As a member of the Latter-day Saint, commonly called Mormon, Church, I believe Joseph Smith to be a Prophet of God through whom God restored in 1830 the only true Church of Jesus Christ. But I also believe that such a restoration of true Christian principles could have taken place only in a place and time when the hearts, beliefs, and ideals of men would provide a suitable environment for these principles to grow and prosper. I believe that that place was the United States of America and that time the period which historians now call the Jacksonian Age. It is in this context, then, that I comprehend the resemblance between Jacksonian thought and the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

In reading this thesis, the reader may note variations in the spelling of the name of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In Joseph Smith's day the church name was written "Latter Day" and occasionally, in newspaper articles, "Latter-Day," whereas the present spelling is as in the full title above. Therefore, I have attempted to keep the spelling consistent with the period in reference.

I wish to express deep love and gratitude to my wife, Yvonne, whose determination that I complete this work has carried me through. I also thank her for the great sacrifice she has made to type this thesis.

I gratefully acknowledge the patience and numerous hours of time given in my behalf by my thesis chairman, Dr. Richard H. Cracroft. In five years he has never given up on me. And thanks to Dr. Edward Geary for his advice in the completion of this thesis.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: ARGUMENTS FOR JOSEPH SMITH AS AN AMERICAN MAN OF LETTERS

The purpose of this study is twofold. Primarily, it is a study of the newspaper writings of Joseph Smith, Jr., the Mormon Prophet, and of his development as an American writer as evidenced in his newspaper publications. It is also a study of the main concepts contained in Smith's newspaper writings, concepts which demonstrate that Smith may deservedly be called a "Jacksonian man of letters."

However, to label Smith as a Jacksonian man is in no way meant to indicate his political leanings or party preference. Rather, the term simply associates him with the spirit of the period in which he lived. The term is a general term used, as William Goetzmann uses it, "to describe a fictional composite, the average man of the period under consideration regardless of whether or not he was a follower of Andrew Jackson and his party."¹ Goetzmann in turn borrows the term from Richard Hofstadter, Marvin Meyers, and Alexis de Tocqueville, whose use of the term "seems to characterize to some extent men of all political persuasions in this period."²

¹William H. Goetzmann, "The Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man," American Quarterly, XV (Fall 1963), 402 fn.

²Ibid.

The term "Jacksonian Man," then, is a general term for anyone caught up in the current of American social thought of the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The term was derived, of course, from its namesake, President Andrew Jackson, whose ascendancy to the White House in 1829 symbolized for the American people in general the rise of the common man, the triumph of democracy.

A. SMITH A NEWSPAPER WRITER

During the summer of 1831, James Gordon Bennett, correspondent and associate editor for the Morning Courier and New York Enquirer (later to become the New York Herald), while touring upstate New York and gathering notes for future newspaper articles, made inquiries into the newly formed religious society called by some the "Mormonites." Subsequently, Bennett printed one of the earliest known newspaper accounts of this sect.³ As derogatory and inaccurate as the early story was when it appeared in print,⁴ it nevertheless disseminated the names of Joseph Smith and the Mormons into areas where they had not been heard before.

Bennett, a "strong supporter of Andrew Jackson,"⁵ little realized at that early point in what American historians now call the "Jacksonian Age" that this same Smith whom he had derided was

³Leonard J. Arrington, "James Gordon Bennett's 1831 Report on 'The Mormonites,'" BYU Studies, X (Spring 1970), 353-63.

⁴August 31 and September 1, 1831.

⁵Arrington, p. 353.

to become, like himself, not merely the subject of newspaper articles, but a prominent newspaper editor whose numerous writings would widely circulate from the eastern coast to the limits of the western frontier. Nor did Bennett realize then that Smith also was a staunch advocate of Jacksonian democracy.

During his lifetime Smith actually served editorially for two different newspapers and was indeed recognized over large areas of the country as a newspaper writer, as well as prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Literally dozens of American editors corresponded with him, published his writings in their newspapers, or editorialized about him. Thus, the name of Joseph Smith was closely linked to the newspaper world of the mid-nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, even though Smith established a considerable reputation as a newspaper writer, his newspaper career is generally given little attention in present-day scholarship. Although the religious doctrinal content of his newspaper writings may on occasion be mentioned, traditional studies of Smith have omitted any major focus in this area. Even more serious is the fact that Smith's writings in general have been almost totally ignored in the field of American literature, yet Smith was a prominently known American writer with volumes of valuable literature to his credit. Presumptuous as it may be to deviate from the traditional religious orientations to Smith's writings and propose to include him among studies of American literature, the arguments of this introduction should clearly indicate that such an approach is entirely logical, feasible, and appropriate.

The writings of any figure in American history of such notoriety and influence merit serious consideration, for such writings together form the tightly woven fabric of the American scene. Failure to give Smith due credit as a man of letters in America is failure to include vital threads of that fabric without which the total picture is incomplete. America in the nineteenth century was, after all, and still is, made up of many personalities as interesting and controversial as this Mormon Prophet, and any significant literature produced by them should not be neglected.

B. SMITH'S NUMEROUS WRITINGS

That Joseph Smith contributed such a large quantity of unique and valuable literature to the American scene is one good reason to include him in studies of American literature. These writings are unique in that Smith claims the principal source of his ideas to be revelation, yet mingled with the heavy scriptural orientation and interpretation is a considerable amount of Jacksonian thought. They are valuable in that they portray deep insights into the lives and history of a man and his followers who constitute an interesting segment of American history. Best known for his work, entitled the Book of Mormon, considered by Latter-day Saints as a divinely inspired scriptural translation, Smith also produced other scriptural and revelatory works, including The Doctrine and Covenants, The Book of Moses, the Book of Abraham (also a translation), and a partially completed revision of the King James Bible. In addition to these works, Smith contributed a multi-volume autobiographical history, several historical sketches, numerous

personal and public letters, several political pamphlets, petitions, memorials, and, of course, the profuse number of newspaper letters, editorials, and articles which have become the subject of this study.

C. SMITH'S LITERARY DEVELOPMENT

Another reason why Smith should be studied in literature is that his life presents such a remarkable story of literary development that it ought not to be ignored.

Considering the unlikely beginnings to Smith's career as a writer, his literary output was phenomenal. Lacking in education and totally inexperienced in any literary endeavor before 1827, Smith was one of the least likely Americans to have any literary piece ascribed to his credit. In fact, his wife, Emma, in claiming that Smith had received divine guidance in translating the Book of Mormon from ancient records, commented that he "could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter, let alone dictate as an original composition a book like the Book of Mormon."⁶

As the present study deals primarily with these aspects of Smith's life, further evidence of this unusual literary development will be given hereafter.

D. SMITH'S INFLUENCE ON AMERICA

A third argument for including the works of Joseph Smith in literary studies has to do with the significant impact which his

⁶Quoted in Hyrum L. Andrus, "Joseph Smith, Social Philosopher, Theorist and Prophet," Diss. Syracuse Univ. 1955, p. 117.

writings have had on American history. No one can deny the fact that the settlement of a large portion of the Rocky Mountain region of this nation is attributable to Mormons, who had their origin in the teachings and doctrines of Joseph Smith, their Prophet. Since those teachings are the sum total of Smith's writings, it can fairly be said that these writings have significantly influenced the growth of the United States of America.

At the very least, the Book of Mormon should be considered in literary studies, for while the aggregate of all Smith's literature has contributed to the Mormon influence on America, the Book of Mormon has constituted the greatest single influence, owing to the fact that this book is the "keystone of the Mormon religion."⁷

The fact is, however, that while one minor commentator may include the Book of Mormon along with such works as Thomas Paine's Common Sense, Lewis and Clark's History of the Expedition, Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America, and Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin as one of those "books that changed America,"⁸ most leading critics in the United States continue to ignore it. One non-Mormon author, Douglas Wilson, remarked, "No serious or sustained treatment of the Book of Mormon has appeared in any of our myriad literary histories, nor has any enterprising critic undertaken to explain an omission that, once it has been noticed and reflected

⁷Joseph Smith, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1970), IV, 461. Hereafter: History.

⁸Robert B. Downs, Books that Changed America (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1970).

upon, begins to look like a conspiracy."⁹ He adds that although Van Wyck Brooks made this book the subject of a literary essay on one occasion,¹⁰ "the most striking thing about Brooks' essay on the Book of Mormon is that it soon becomes clear, alas, that he has not even bothered to read it."¹¹

Mark Twain made a similar mistake. As is shown in a study by Richard H. Cracroft,¹² Twain sarcastically called it "chloroform in print,"¹³ which judgment he apparently pronounced without reading the book. Likewise, Bernard DeVoto scoffed at it in his writings of the West, and Henry Nash Smith ignored it completely.¹⁴ Says Wilson, "One is finally led to the conclusion, for lack of a better one, that the literary neglect of the Book of Mormon is largely the result of both ignorance and diffidence."¹⁵

The literary neglect of any of Joseph Smith's works is lamentable. Some may argue, out of a religious bias, that Smith

⁹Douglas Wilson, "Prospects for the Study of the Book of Mormon as a Work of American Literature," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, III (Spring 1968), 29.

¹⁰Van Wyck Brooks, Sketches in Criticism (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1932), pp. 253-56.

¹¹Wilson, pp. 29-30.

¹²Richard H. Cracroft, "The Gentle Blasphemer: Mark Twain, Holy Scripture, and the Book of Mormon," BYU Studies, II (Winter 1971), 119-140.

¹³Mark Twain, Roughing It (New York, 1959), p. 110.

¹⁴Wilson, p. 31.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 32.

does not merit consideration, but certainly his role in American history is no less pronounced than that of many other American writers whose religious overtones are just as striking but whose writings are included in American literature anthologies.

E. NEED FOR A MORMON LITERATURE

A final argument for including Smith's writings in studies of American literature is the assertion that an understanding of Smith's writings is the beginning point in identifying and studying and further stimulating a Mormon literature. Mormons lack a well formed literary tradition and, until recent years, have shown relatively little interest in understanding the Mormon literature which exists. Karl Keller, speaking from the Mormon viewpoint, feels that in order for a Mormon literary tradition to begin, Joseph Smith must first be considered as a writer. He states,

The real reason Mormons lack a literary tradition is that we have consistently denied to ourselves a literature. We have, for instance, always denied to Joseph Smith status as a writer. In our hagiography, we learn to love the Word of God but not the words of Joseph Smith. This is unlike the Jews, to whom the words of the prophets were not only the Word of God but also the words of the prophets, making them in their love of The Word's words "the people of the book;" and one of the results is a supreme literacy and from Spinoza to Saul Bellow a long and lively literary tradition. Such a denial is unlike the Catholics, to whom the Church Fathers were first of all writers, communicators, explicators, epistemologists of The Word, with a resulting literary tradition from Augustine to Flannery O'Connor. And our denial is unlike the Protestants to whom special revelation has ceased and who are therefore free to write about The Word on their own, in an attempt to discover through meditation on words, a place for themselves in the schemes of salvation; so from John

Bunyan to William Faulkner literature has served the Protestant for self-examination and for revelation.¹⁶

An apparent reluctance among Mormons to study Smith's writings objectively seems to arise from a fear of losing faith in him should they find weaknesses in his writing skills. As a result, what few opinions are given as to the literary quality of Smith's writings are generally subjective judgments based not so much on any literary evaluation of the writings themselves or on the religious doctrines contained therein, but on a belief or non-belief in Smith as a prophet of God. Consequently, non-believers who scoff at Smith generally find fault with his writing techniques as well, while believers generally praise the Prophet's written words.

Smith's proficiency as a writer, then, is yet a matter of conjecture which will be further pursued in this study. While one writer may state, "An imperfect education had left him Smith deficient in knowledge and the structure of the language, and hence his oratory and writings are characterized by most ridiculous grammatical blunders,"¹⁷ another writer may insist that,

As a writer, he added to literature some of the loftiest, most powerful and most beautiful poems of the age. The Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, the Doctrine and Covenants, and his autobiography contain sublime thoughts that invite the careful study of every seeker after truth.¹⁸

¹⁶Karl Keller, "On Words and the Word of God: The Delusion of a Mormon Literature," BYU Studies, IV (Autumn 1969), 13.

¹⁷"The Yankee Mahomet," The American Whig Review, June 1851, p. 556.

¹⁸Edward H. Anderson, "Closing Years of Joseph Smith, The Prophet," in A Brief History of Joseph Smith the Prophet By Himself (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1910), p. 60.

Joseph Smith, then, has been too long ignored as an American man of letters. Only a handful of writers who have finally seen the need to re-examine Mormon literature are beginning to consider Smith in relation to American literary traditions. Said one,

. . .the literary side of Mormon history has scarcely begun to be studied yet; that is, the literary aspects of the formal written history, wherever found. The job should be undertaken; we will not really understand the history as history itself until we have had a look at some of the mechanics of the writing. It should certainly be instructive to have a close look at Joseph's own autobiography, the existing manuscripts studied for textual variations as Thomas Jefferson's are. The "facts" quite aside, we will not understand Joseph Smith himself very well until his literary aspects have been thoroughly assessed.¹⁹ (Italics added.)

F. PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS

As in any scholarly research project, there are some inherent problems in the investigation of Smith's literary development. In the first place, because of the voluminous collection of writings to be considered, there must of necessity be a delimitation of subject matter for any study of Smith's writings. For this reason the present study focuses solely on the newspaper publications of Joseph Smith, but since the research has revealed that even this focus is too broad, further limitations have been made. Therefore, excluded from this study are any translations of ancient records, written revelations, and the history of the church, which

¹⁹Dale L. Morgan, "Literature in the History of the Church: The Importance of Involvement," BYU Studies, IX (Autumn 1969), 29.

Smith also published in the newspaper. Also excluded are any published items which seem of minor significance.

There are other reasons for choosing the newspaper publications as the major focus in this paper. One is that, until now, no study whatsoever exists wherein any compilation and analysis of Smith's newspaper writings has been made.

Another reason is that a study of Smith's newspaper writings in many cases reveals more of the man Joseph Smith and less of the Prophet Joseph Smith than do many of his religious works. Viewing him in this manner uncovers interesting insights that are not seen elsewhere and provides a strong basis for comparing Smith's ideas in secular matters to the general thought and philosophies of the period in which he lived.

In addition, Smith's letters and articles appeared either sporadically or regularly in various newspapers, Mormon and non-Mormon, almost throughout his writing career. Because of this fact, they become an important gauge by which Smith's development as both a writer and a thinker may be traced. They help reveal, for instance, that Smith's skills as a writer changed with the passage of time; that is, that Smith developed gradually as a writer. Further, they reveal a man who was considerably influenced by the controversies and philosophies of the Jacksonian Age.

Another problem in the study of Smith's writings has to do with attributing rightful authorship. Considerable question exists as to how much of this writing can justifiably be attributed to Smith. We know, for instance, that Smith nearly always dictated to a scribe. In his autobiography he writes:

Friday, July 5, 1839.--I was dictating history, I say dictating for I seldom use the pen myself. I always dictate all my communications, but employ a scribe to write them. (History, IV, I)

Still, as long as the words and thoughts are his, a man can claim authorship regardless of who pens the words on paper for him. However, concerning the "History of the Church," which bears Smith's name, recent studies have revealed that "Although Joseph Smith established the format of the History of the Church and at times dictated directly, the experiences to be recorded for the History, the manuscript is entirely the production of scribes."²⁰

A task of no small proportion lies ahead, then, for anyone who undertakes to unravel the mysteries involved in a literary study of this history. Nevertheless, it is still valuable history and it is still American literature, and to exclude this history from its proper place among the writings of other nineteenth century Americans would be a gross injustice to literary scholarship.

As for Smith's newspaper writings, presumably they, too, were dictated to scribes, yet Smith consistently claims authorship and responsibility for them. Furthermore, they were printed over his signature. So far no evidence has been uncovered to indicate that they were not his own writings, and thus they will continue to be attributed to Smith until they are proven otherwise. It is upon

²⁰Jeffery O. Johnson, Register to the Joseph Smith Collection in the Church Archives--The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: LDS Church Historical Dept., 1973), p. 6. See also Dean C. Jessee, "The Writings of Joseph Smith's History," BYU Studies, XI (Spring 1971), 439-73.

this basis that this study proceeds. Were they not of Smith's authorship, however, the argument that they be included among the literature of America would still stand.

A third problem to be considered in any study of Smith's literary productions has to do with those works termed "revelations" and "translations." The question arises as to the propriety of considering them as Smith's works. Some would argue that since they were merely revealed to or translated by Smith, they cannot, therefore, be his works at all; their literary merits must be considered in and of themselves, but not attributed to any American authorship.²¹ Others who cannot believe the role of divine intervention would merely accept the work as Smith's own doing and in that there is no problem.

In answer to the first case, several prominent writers and leaders of the Mormon faith have explained their belief, as to how the human element can coexist with revealed doctrines. James R. Harris, who has written for various Church publications, has said:

On rare occasions God may dictate a communication, or his conversation may be recorded as remembered by the prophet. But it seems that God usually communicates in concepts. To insure accurate reception, God communicates his will directly to the souls of man by flooding their understanding with concepts that cannot be misunderstood. If the divine message is to be

²¹Mark Twain argues this point against Mary Baker Eddy's Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures (1875) in his book Christian Science (1907). See discussion in Cracroft, pp. 127-30.

communicated to others, a prophet must then select the words that will enable his disciples to perceive the God-given concepts.²²

With the prophet required to transfer concepts in the mind to words on paper, there is no question that the written revelation would, therefore, contain certain elements of literary technique which would correspond with the prophet's individual style.

This is true of divinely translated manuscripts also, for the writer is required to study the original manuscript, think it through carefully, and, finally, record it in the words which he has at his command. This kind of process, then, not only heightens the importance of the prophet's own literary style, but it also allows for errors and grammatical weaknesses. Such explanations of the revelatory process, therefore, allow for the study of revealed matter not only as literature, but also as the individual writings of the prophet, in this case, Joseph Smith, Jr.

G. CONCLUSION

Underlying all the arguments for Joseph Smith as an American Man of Letters is the hope that the present study will contribute something toward the opening of new doors of research and more extensive studies of Smith's writings. The large number of his literary productions, his remarkable literary development, his

²²James R. Harris, "Changes in the Book of Moses and Their Implications upon a Concept of Revelation," BYU Studies, VIII (Summer 1968), 382. See also B. H. Roberts, as quoted in Harris, p. 380; Steven G. Walker, "The Voice of the Prophet," BYU Studies, X (Autumn 1969), 95-106.

significant influence on America, and the need for a Mormon literary tradition are all convincing arguments that Smith should be included in studies of American literature.

The subsequent chapters of this thesis develop the argument that Joseph Smith evolved as an American writer and that his writings can be studied as literature representative of the Jacksonian era in which Smith wrote.

As a prelude to the examination of Smith's literary development, we shall first review essential background information, first, of the Jacksonian Age to define what characterized that great age, and, second, of the youth and heritage of Smith himself to establish his origins as a Jacksonian writer.

We shall then examine three major periods of Smith's life, noting and analyzing in each period primarily the newspaper publications which Smith wrote, but also the experiences, influences, and opportunities which contributed significantly toward Smith's progress as a Man of Letters. These three periods include the 1831-1838 period in Kirtland, Ohio, and Missouri during which time Smith first became a newspaper editor; the 1839-1842 period which begins with Smith's Missouri imprisonment and ends with his return to editorship in Nauvoo; and the 1843-June 27, 1844 period which includes the closing years of Smith's life and his eventual rise to newspaper and political prominence. The evidence of these three periods will clearly demonstrate the development of Joseph Smith as a Jacksonian Man of Letters.

Chapter 2

BACKGROUNDS: THE JACKSONIAN AGE AND YOUNG JOSEPH SMITH--ORIGINS OF A JACKSONIAN WRITER

This study of Joseph Smith as a Jacksonian man of letters must necessarily begin at the time and place of his birth and with the social milieu into which he was born. The character of any man, that is, the sum total of his ambitions, philosophies, and creeds, is largely derivative of his natural heritage and of the social environment in which he lives. This being the case, we shall examine in this chapter some of the heritage and environment which formed an integral part of Smith's life, with the intent of establishing and demonstrating Smith's fundamental Jacksonianism. Furthermore, we shall endeavor to trace in Smith's life and writings those pertinent facts which might identify Smith as a notable American writer and, also, which might demonstrate his literary development.

Focusing on the first major period of Smith's life, the years 1805 to 1830, we will first consider the characteristics of the Jacksonian era, with its varied religious activities, political trends, and general philosophies, with some special attention given to the background of the American newspapers in Jacksonian America. We will then follow Joseph Smith through his youth in Vermont to his early manhood in New York and place

him in the context of the Jacksonian age as he begins his literary development and his newspaper writing career.

A. THE JACKSONIAN AGE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In the early nineteenth century America was an adolescent country--undeveloped but rapidly growing, young and desirous of becoming independent of other nations, confident in her self-governing powers, but needing further experience. Relatively few years had passed since her bold declaration of independence, but at least the first phase of coalescence as a nation was completed. Now an era of growth, the second phase, was about to begin.

Beginning shortly after 1820, new forces made themselves manifest in American society, and under the pressure of these new impulses a surge of social revolution swept over the country. Sweeping changes occurred socially, religiously, economically, as well as politically, and as a result, the era from 1820-1845 has been termed the Second American Revolution.¹ In short, the decades of the twenties through the forties became years of social unrest and intellectual ferment.

With this revolutionary era came a major change in the leadership of the American people. A great dynasty of presidents--Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and John Quincy Adams--had previously held the reins of government, and all had been men of aristocratic origins. However, the presidential

¹Hyrum L. Andrus, "The Second American Revolution: Era of Preparation," BYU Studies, II (Autumn 1959-Winter 1960), 71-100.

election of 1828 broke sharply with this tradition with the decisive victory of another kind of man, the popular war-hero, Andrew Jackson.

Jackson had previously won the confidence of the American people through his adroit military leadership and heroic wartime victories in the War of 1812, and thus achieved a popularity of no mean proportions, principally in the West and in the southern states. After serving several years as a United States senator (1823-1828) and gaining greater popularity with the people, Jackson ran for the presidency in 1828, winning easily, and thus became a symbol of an era in which the common man of America began to have new hope and to reach out for social equality. The social reformation that followed was, therefore, to a large extent, a turning away from aristocratic traditions and a striving for national unity based on social equality. Better known as the Age of Jackson,² this was a period in which the ideas of democracy were greatly broadened and widely implemented through extensive national reform movements.

According to Jacksonian democracy, the end of government is to promote the happiness and prosperity of the people by whom government is established. If the government fails to fulfill this function, it has no value. With these assumptions in mind, then, the Jacksonians of the early 1800's were deeply concerned

²Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1950).

with safeguarding the rights of the people, particularly the rights of the common man who all too often had stood only in a position of servitude to the monied classes. Explaining this class conflict, Arthur Schlesinger states:

The Jacksonians believed that there was a deep-rooted conflict in society between the "producing" and the "non-producing" classes--the farmers and laborers, on the one hand, and the business community on the other. The business community was considered to hold high cards in this conflict through its network of banks and corporations, its control of education and the press; above all, its power over the state: it was therefore able to strip the working classes of the fruits of their labor.³

One thrust of the Jacksonian revolution was thus an economic redistribution of property, thereby giving every American the opportunity to own land and, as a result, to have a voice in government. According to Schlesinger:

In several respects, then, the Jacksonians revised the Jeffersonian faith for America. They moderated that side of Jeffersonianism which talked of agricultural virtue, independent proprietors, "natural" property, abolition of industrialism, and expanded immensely that side which talked of economic equality, the laboring classes, human rights and the control of industrialism. This re-adjustment enabled the Jacksonians to attack economic problems which had baffled and defeated the Jeffersonians.⁴

Jacksonians not only revolted against great land owners, but against monopolies and corporations as well. They adopted Adam Smith's economic philosophy as presented in his The Wealth of Nations in which his attack against monopolies and his "advocacy of education and his general hope for the well-being of the farming and laboring classes further recommended him to the Jacksonians."⁵

³Ibid., p. 306. ⁴Ibid., p. 312. ⁵Ibid., p. 314.

Prior to the arrival of the Jacksonian Age, America was predominantly an agrarian society. Walter Fuller Taylor's literary study of America mentions that at this time "The great majority of its people lived on farms or in small villages. As late as 1860, only one sixth of the population lived in towns of eight thousand inhabitants or more."⁶ By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, however, a new industrialism had crept into society which forced a re-evaluation of the American economic philosophy. The impact of the industrial revolution necessitated a shifting from Jefferson's ideals of an agrarian society to Jackson's advocacy of a balanced economy which included industrialism. As a result, in the words of Dr. Andrus, "Jefferson would pass from the scene in 1826 hardly moved from his ideals of an agrarian society, while Jackson but two years later came to the presidency supported to an important degree by the laboring classes."⁷ Just how both agrarian and industrial principles were to coexist in this new society was not yet known, but however difficult, Jacksonians were determined to maintain economic equality.

The Jacksonian age was a period of rapid development and westward expansion. The spirit of democracy engendered by the new president was an optimistic spirit, a spirit which inspired confidence and self-reliance among the American people. As a result, America, with its firm faith in democracy and freedom, was a

⁶Walter Fuller Taylor, The Story of American Letters (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1956), p. 80.

⁷Andrus, "Joseph Smith," p. 34.

working nation with little time for leisure, yet people were doing what they wanted to do and making their dreams come true. Glyndon Van Deusen notes in his study of Jacksonianism that "By and large . . . this Jacksonian era had little time for the cultural side of life. It was mainly absorbed in the strenuous pursuit of material gain."⁸ This urge for quick material gain made expansionism a keynote of the period. Feeling a sense of individual enterprise and seeing the unlimited opportunities in the vast westward empire, Americans began moving towards the frontiers. By 1835, the frontier, which had been located just west of Kentucky at the end of the Revolutionary War, had moved as far westward as Independence, Missouri.

A major impetus in America's western expansion was the land policy adopted by the Jacksonians. Although men like "John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay wanted to sell land high, using the domain primarily as a fund to finance internal improvements, and hoping to hold back colonization,"⁹ most Jacksonians favored low prices and equal opportunity for all who desired to purchase land. In Schlesinger's words:

The Jacksonians thus regarded the keeping of the public domain as a democratic imperative. It was not for them a sectional question alone. The poorer people of the West demanded easy access and cheap lands for their own direct benefit. The poorer people of the East similarly required a liberal land policy, to provide for some a refuge, and to relieve the pressure on the great majority by draining

⁸Glyndon G. Van Deusen, The Jacksonian Era, 1828-1849 (New York: Harper & Bros., 1959), p. 2.

⁹Schlesinger, p. 347.

off rural population which might otherwise flock to town and swell the labor surplus. All agreed in advocating every preference for the actual settler in order to prevent the seizure of large areas of fertile land by speculators.¹⁰

Democracy, inexpensive land, equal opportunity--all of these were influential in increasing foreign immigration to America during the Jacksonian Age. Van Deusen writes that "Between 1828 and 1844 half a million immigrants arrived in the United States, and in the later eighteen-forties the number of arrivals swelled into a flood of over 200,000 each year."¹¹ Such an influx of immigrants was not without its influence on American politics. As Van Deusen remarks:

The fears and alarms of the native American population, north and south, soon found political expression. The immigrants early showed a tendency to join the Democratic party, some because of their belief that Jefferson and Jackson were the great symbols of freedom and the exponents of the rights of the common man, others because Democratic party organizations early grasped the potential that lay in the foreign-born vote and outdid themselves to curry favor with the newcomers. It was then only natural for the whigs to seek what capital they could by marshaling under the whig banner those alarmed by the foreign influx.¹²

The Whig opposition to immigrants extended itself to other minority groups as well, especially to organizations that attracted immigrant membership or appeared to the Whigs radical in nature. Such was the case with the religious group known as the Mormons, who endured Whig opposition throughout the Jacksonian era.

Because the Jacksonian Age was a time of rapid political, economic, and social change in America--a period characterized by immense optimism and individualism which resulted in the rise of the common man to position and power--it was only natural that

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 346-47. ¹¹Van Deusen, p. 15. ¹²Ibid., p. 16.

changes should also occur in religious thought. "We must not be surprised then," writes William Warren Sweet, one of the foremost scholars of America's religions,

to find in this period a great variety of new interests arising, new and strange sects, new movements in thought, reforms of one kind or another, many of them the result of individual vagaries.¹³

Religious ferment led to religious strife. Protestants disputed against Catholics; southern churches contended against northern sects. Schisms resulted and new sects appeared to vie for church membership.

Many of these religious movements were little more than experimental laboratories for social reforms. The Jacksonian Age, along with its emphasis upon egalitarianism, individualism, and the rights of the common man, was, paradoxically, also an age abounding with the ideas of social union and the quest for the perfect society. Nineteenth century America witnessed the rise of numerous Utopian communities--Owen's New Harmony community, Ripley's experimental Brook Farm, Joseph Smith's attempted New Zion--all of which, whether based on economic or religious principles, had nearly the same goal in mind, that of reform and social union. Even Ralph Waldo Emerson, individualist as he was, stated at this time that the world was "awakening to the ideas of union."¹⁴ The utopian schemes, Emerson insisted, were largely manifestations of the prevailing

¹³William Warren Sweet, The Story of Religion in America (New York: Harper & Bros., 1950), p. 259.

¹⁴Ralph Waldo Emerson, "New England Reformers." Essays: Second Series (The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Centenary Edition) (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903), III, 266.

desire to achieve in practice an integrated society.¹⁵ Perhaps

Van Deusen's summation of these activities says it best:

Exhilarated by the conviction that America was the pioneer in forging a new era for mankind, Americans in the Jacksonian period undertook a variety of experiments that were designed to broaden the area of freedom. They tested new religious faiths and philosophies that ranged from spiritualism and Mormonism to transcendentalism and Unitarianism. Some tried to establish religious or quasi-religious Utopias. Others undertook socialistic and communistic experiments that were supposed to bring in their train freedom from want and from social maladjustment. Devoted humanitarians ministered to the deaf, the blind, and the insane; penal reforms were instituted; secular education was widened and its quality improved; a temperance movement gathered headway. There were crusades for peace, for women's rights, and for the abolition of slavery. America was offering a challenge to the rest of the world, the challenge of a free society seeking a better way of life.¹⁶

In many religious circles, this Zionistic Utopianism also included strong ideas of millennialism, an anxious expectancy for the return of Christ and the commencement of his reign on earth, at which time the perfect Zion would be established.

While the first decades of the nineteenth century proved to be a period of continuing political and social maturation for the American republic, this was also a time when America was coming of age in the field of literature. Until 1820, European writers were still convinced that America had as yet no national literature which she could call her own. The year 1820, however, may serve to mark the definite "arrival" of a national literature in America, since in that and the following year Washington Irving published his widely read masterpiece The Sketch Book, William Cullen Bryant

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Van Deusen, p. 2

produced his first volume of Poems, and James Fenimore Cooper published his novel, The Spy. Finally, literature in America was beginning to keep pace with her physical development.

The literary period beginning in 1820 and coinciding closely with the extent of the Jacksonian Age was a part of the general romantic movement in America. Historically, the romantic period which began in Europe and later spread to America was one in which men's interest in the ideal exceeded their interest in the actual, and of all the romantic notions, perhaps the most profound and far-reaching was the vision of a broader freedom for the individual human being. This, of course, was the vision of the Jacksonian Age as well. In short, the Jacksonian interest in the welfare of the common man, approval of the simple life, and respect for the individual human soul were integral parts of the romantic pattern of ideas.

A characteristic peculiar to the romantic movement in America was the overriding influence of evangelical religion. The great wave of religious revivals of the Jacksonian Age was not too unlike the Great Awakening of the earlier puritan period and, in fact, still bore a strong puritan element in its insistent moral tone and in its concern with reform issues. The editors of one anthology of American literature remark that "probably no literature in any period was ever more scrupulously clean than that of the United States from 1820 to 1850."¹⁷ It was this moral earnestness

¹⁷Milton Ellis, Louise Pound, and George Weida Spohn, A College Book of American Literature (New York: American Book Co., 1939), I, 474.

that caused Poe to be rejected on the grounds that his own life was not pure, and Melville and Whitman to be ignored because of their frankness. The editors continue:

It was an era of social reforms in which the moral element was a dominating influence. The peace movement found Longfellow a quiet but sincere devotee. Margaret Fuller and Emerson championed the rights of women. Overshadowing all other issues was that of abolishing slavery, whose advocates, Whittier, Garrison, Lowell and Mrs. Stowe, reveal in their intense moments all the moral fervor and often intolerant righteousness of the puritan in all ages.¹⁸

The romantic literary movement and Jacksonian democracy were, therefore, merely separate manifestations of one and the same spirit. Both wrought profound changes in politics, economics, philosophy, religion and morals, with the goal of establishing freedom for the individual and elevating the common man.

Another significant characteristic of Jacksonian America prior to the 1840's was the interest and importance given to the American newspapers. Schools were scarce, especially in the Midwest--the Ohio to Missouri region--which was then the American frontier, and reading materials were likewise scarce. At the same time, however, the demand for reading materials was not so great as in the New England areas. Ralph L. Rusk, a literary historian at Columbia University, commenting on one Timothy Flint's observations on Missouri, writes,

Timothy Flint's observations on Missouri, would, in fact, apply, but with varying exactness, to the whole Middle West. "The people here are not yet a reading people. Few good books are brought into the country. . . .

¹⁸Ibid.

The people are too busy, too much occupied in making farms and speculations, to think of literature."¹⁹

But while not everyone could read, or had the opportunity to learn, or had the leisure to enjoy it, some books imported from the East were available, and western presses published in greater quantities their own periodicals, including newspapers, religious pamphlets, some literary magazines, and even a few medical journals. Of these publications, however, it was the western newspaper that provided the bulk of the reading material for the western public and far outdistanced in popularity any other type of literature. Explaining the strong influence of the frontier newspaper and its editor, Rusk writes,

Though travellers had already created a literature of the West, newspapers, the first of which were established in the frontier towns before the end of the eighteenth century, were the earliest means of literary expression of the Western people themselves. And in quantity, as well as their influence on the backwoods communities, they were the most important literary product throughout the pioneer period. Only leaders who were adept in the art of impassioned oratory could rival the editor of a weekly gazette in power to shape the popular will. The editor and printer, by his knowledge of language and of the mysteries of his craft, rose to the dignity of an oracle.²⁰

Those who subscribed to the frontier newspaper were exposed to many forms of popular literature, including poetry and essays of both British and American authors. Alongside the daily news it was not uncommon to find a poem or two or even an essay by one of the popular writers. The names of such British poets as Milton,

¹⁹Ralph Leslie Rusk, The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), I, 72 fn. quoting Timothy Flint, Recollections of the Last Ten Years, 1826, p. 185.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 131-32.

Cowper, Southey, Burns, Byron, Campbell, and Moore appeared often in the newspapers and their works became extremely popular in the Jacksonian era. Of these, the romantics achieved special attention.

As Rusk explains:

Far more remarkable than the vogue of these writers, however, was the phenomenal growth of the cult of the romanticists of action, Scott and Byron, who were regarded as the chief literary figures of the age . . . Thomson, Cowper, and Burns . . . had each won no small applause, even from readers in the backwoods of the West; and it is a noteworthy fact that Burns was well enough known to be imitated in verses published in a Cincinnati newspaper some years before his death. Southey, of a later generation, was remarkable both for his early fame and for the high regard in which he was held by critics of a certain religious bias.

But all praise of such writers was lost in the great din which greeted the triumph of Scott and Byron. The rapidity with which the former, from about 1810, and the latter, from a few years after, became known throughout the frontier country was unparalleled.²¹

Rusk also adds, "The other great romantic poets--Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats--were little noticed in the midst of the excitement attending the triumphal reception of Byron and Scott."²² On the other hand, the most important Victorian writers--Tennyson, Carlyle, and Dickens--were also very well known names in western periodicals.

Among America's own writers of the early nineteenth century, the frontier reader preferred such figures as Washington Irving, Cooper, Holmes, Whittier, and Longfellow. Hawthorne's name attracted some readers, Emerson was just becoming known, but Poe was yet unknown. By 1825 Bryant's name was somewhat familiar in the West, but

²¹Rusk, II, 11-12.

Ibid., p. 23.

never became popular, and by 1830, the names of Holmes and Whittier had begun to appear frequently. Also popular were many minor sentimental writers.²³

The popularity of the newspaper itself may have been due, in part, to the two controversial topics of discussion--politics and religion--that most frequently filled the columns and sparked a degree of interest among the readers. Moreover, the American newspapers and periodicals played a dominant role in the diffusion of political, religious, and social thought throughout the nation.

Political interest particularly was so high during the Jacksonian Age that most periodicals adopted a strong political bias and the majority of the American writers, from Irving and Bryant to Cooper and Poe, aligned themselves with party politics. Schlesinger reveals that although there were some exceptions, most of the prominent writers were not only politically active but, also, were Jacksonian Democrats. Schlesinger states:

Not all writers were politically active, not even all those possessed by visions of a new world. Some, like Emerson and Thoreau, preoccupied most profoundly with the questions raised up by the change, spent years quietly ignoring politics. But, even with such important exceptions, it is yet remarkable how many of the leading authors and artists publicly aligned themselves with the Jacksonian party. Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Cullen Bryant, Walt Whitman, James Fenimore Cooper, George Bancroft, Washington Irving (until the pressure became too great), James K. Paulding, Orestes A. Brownson, William Leggett, John L. O'Sullivan, John L. Stephens, Horatio Greenough, Hiram Powers, Edwin Forrest, Francis Wright, Robert Dale Owen, for example, were all Jacksonians.²⁴

²³Ibid., 35-36.

²⁴Schlesinger, pp. 369-70.

The Democrats were extremely proud of the large number of celebrated literary figures who rallied to their cause, while the opposing party, the Whigs (formerly the Federalists), lamented the loss. Perhaps one of the reasons the democratic party attracted these writers, according to Schlesinger, was that the

only future for a powerful native literature, dealing fearlessly in truth and reality, seemed to lie in a bold exploration of the possibilities of democracy. "The vital principle of an American national literature," declared the Democratic Review, "must be democracy."²⁵

The first requisite for a national literature is, of course, a medium for publication, but for a time the most respectable magazines, the North American, the American Quarterly, and the New England Magazine, were in Whig hands. Finally, John L. O'Sullivan began editing the Democratic Review with the approval and encouragement of Andrew Jackson, who "became the first subscriber."²⁶

O'Sullivan "was an excellent editor" and

quickly made the Democratic Review by far the liveliest journal of the day. His authors included Bryant, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whittier, Walt Whitman, Poe, Longfellow, Lowell, Paulding, William Gilmore Simms, Bancroft, Brownson, A. H. Everett, and many more.²⁷

During Van Buren's administration the Democratic Review left Washington and resumed in New York, where it remained under O'Sullivan's control until 1846. In 1843 it boasted of a circulation of 3500 subscribers.²⁸

The Boston Quarterly Review, the second democratic journal, edited by Orestes Brownson, merged with the Democratic Review in 1842.²⁹

²⁵"Introduction." Democratic Review, I (October 1837), as quoted in Schlesinger, p. 370.

²⁶Schlesinger, p. 372. ²⁷Ibid. ²⁸Ibid., p. 373.

²⁹Ibid., p. 374.

Besides the journals, there were numerous prominent newspapers that also became fully immersed in the political ideals of Jacksonian democracy. The New York Evening Post, edited for a time by William Cullen Bryant, the Albany Argus, and the Washington Globe were all part of the Jacksonian press. According to Glyndon Van Deusen, Jackson's friends selected Francis Preston Blair as editor of the prestigious Globe, "a paper which took for its motto 'The world is governed too much,' and in which Blair 'contributed a good deal to the stability of the party, while he exasperated Jackson's opponents.'"³⁰ Another widely circulating newspaper, the New York Herald, edited by James Gordon Bennett, also staunchly supported Jackson's party.

In the western reaches of the country and particularly around Nauvoo, Illinois, where Joseph Smith and his people had settled in the 1840's, the newspapers also aligned themselves with political parties. On the Democratic side were such papers as the Chicago Democrat, edited by Colonel John Wentworth, the Quincy Herald, and the Illinois State Register. The Whig party boasted the Quincy Whig, the Sangamo Journal, the Missouri Whig, and the Warsaw Signal, and others. Whether these newspapers were friendly to the Mormons was entirely dependent upon the majority vote of the Mormons in each year's election. For example, in the last years of Joseph Smith's life, 1842-44, the Mormons voted for

³⁰Van Deusen, p. 33.

Democratic candidates, and as a result the Whig newspapers turned against them.³¹

A considerable amount of the printed material contained in the various newspapers of the 1840's consisted of borrowed and reprinted articles or excerpts from outside newspaper sources. Such was the case with the Mormon newspapers as well. A perusal of the pages of all these newspapers reveals a wide variety of newspaper titles from which many excerpts have been borrowed for reprint. This borrowed news came from sources all across the settled portions of the United States and even from prominent English newspapers. It is no wonder, then, that the American newspaper retained its influence and popularity. As a news medium each newspaper contained the most interesting extracts of information from all parts of the country and provided the most rapid mode of nationally disseminating the names and particulars involved in political, social, and religious movements. According to the 1840 census, there were "twenty-nine daily papers in the West of which number Ohio had nine, Missouri and Michigan six each, Kentucky five, and Illinois three."³² These had grown from monthly and weekly papers of the earlier 1800's. Add to this list a much greater number of eastern newspapers and it becomes clear that sources for the news carried in any one newspaper in 1842 were numerous.

³¹Edward G. Thompson, "A Study of the Political Involvements in the Career of Joseph Smith," Thesis Brigham Young Univ. 1966, Appendix A.

³²Rusk, I, 155.

Since revivalism, millennialism, and other forms of religious enthusiasm played such a predominant role in the reform movements of the Jacksonian era, the American newspapers also published much of a religious nature. The very titles of many publications--such as the Campbellite Millennial Harbinger and the Mormon Times and Seasons--reflected the religious fervor and expectancy which filtered throughout the country.

This era, this "Second American Revolution," was a period distinctly characterized by strong religious tendencies. One such tendency was the movement referred to as Christian primitivism wherein religious zeal led to the rejection of contemporary religious institutions and a return to the pure, original Christian doctrine and faith. Included in Christian primitivism was a return to the Bible as the sole standard for Christian living. As a result of this movement towards biblical authoritarianism, scriptural documentation was common even in the newspaper writings. It was not uncommon for orators and writers to endorse their positions by the constitution and by the Bible as well.³³

Yet despite the religious emphasis prevalent in the Jacksonian era, there existed simultaneously a strong secularizing conflict and questioning of traditional beliefs. Jacksonian democracy adopted a particularly strong view of separation of church and state. As a result, according to Schlesinger, "The Jackson administration appeared to some writers as the culmination

³³Andrus, "Joseph Smith," p. 44.

of organized irreligion."³⁴ Moreover, in each election "the Jackson party had to face the charges of being antireligious."³⁵ However, the Democratic theory of separating church and state did not necessarily imply weaker religious convictions, for many of the leading Jacksonians were deeply religious. It simply implied opposition to the political aspirations of religion. Schlesinger points out, however, that for some Democrats, because they considered Christianity a radical belief, separation of church and state was necessary, but that their feeling would have been different had true Christianity, as they understood it, existed:

George Bancroft and Orestes A. Brownson, for whom religion was not the rigid Calvinism of the century before but the more radiant faith suggested in the first awakening of Transcendentalism, were particularly confident of the support which religion eventually would give to popular rights.³⁶

Jacksonianism, therefore, by disentangling politics and religion, assisted in the growing secularization of society, but this philosophy was not intended to undermine the principle of religious freedom and equality. Equal rights and liberty remained the basic ideals of Jacksonian democracy and these principles supported religious freedom as well.

This broad overview of Jacksonianism is not meant to be complete or conclusive, but it serves to reveal certain general characteristics of the age with which the remainder of this study

³⁴Schlesinger, p. 351.

³⁵Ibid., p. 353.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 359-60.

has a direct relationship. It was an age of social, religious, economic, and political revolution; it was a period of reform. It was an age of great political interest, religious fervor, and high idealism. The major concepts emphasized by the Jacksonians were individualism and the common man, equality, democracy, liberty and constitutional rights, expansionism, abolitionism, and Utopianism. In religion, the concepts of Zionism, millennialism, and Christian primitivism appeared. In literature, romanticism was the current trend. Through all of it, the American newspapers and periodicals were serving significantly in diffusing Jacksonian concepts throughout America.

Joseph Smith (1805-1844), the Mormon prophet, was clearly a man of this age, a Jacksonian man of letters. From the beginning of his prophetic career, he became, of necessity, a newspaper writer and continued to publish in the newspapers until his death in 1844. His Jacksonianism is best seen in these newspaper writings.

B. JOSEPH SMITH: HIS ORIGINS

Joseph Smith, Jr., the Mormon Prophet, was born December 23, 1805, "in the town of Sharon, Windsor County, state of Vermont" (History, I, 2). A New Englander by birth, Smith descended from a long line of pre-revolution New Englanders. As he writes in his autobiography:

My father, Joseph Smith, was born July 12th, 1771, in Topsfield, Essex County, Massachusetts; his father, Asael Smith, was born March 7th, 1744, in Topsfield, Massachusetts; his father, Samuel Smith, was born January 26th, 1666 in Topsfield, Massachusetts; his father, Robert Smith, came from England. (History, I, 2)

Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, born in 1775 in Getsum, New Hampshire, "was a child of the Revolution, for the battles of Lexington and Concord had been fought that spring."³⁷ Her father, Solomon Mack (1732-1820), and his father, Ebenezer Mack (1697-1777), were New Englanders as well.³⁸ It was in 1796, in Tunbridge, Vermont, that the Smith and Mack lines merged in the marriage of Joseph Smith, Sr., and Lucy Mack.³⁹

The latest and probably most accurate study of the progenitors of Joseph, Smith, Jr., done by Richard Lloyd Anderson, professor of religion at Brigham Young University, reveals that Smith was born into a line of deeply patriotic and spiritually rooted Americans. From them, claims Anderson, the boy Joseph grew up loving his country and all the freedoms it offered him. Likewise, a sense of religious conviction, not to any particular denomination, but to God, was nourished within him, due in part to the influence of both his parents and grandparents. Anderson writes:

Joseph Smith was like both grandfathers in patriotism, social concern, industry, personal initiative, physical courage, indomitable will, loyalty to parents, tenderness to family, reliance on the Bible, and religious convictions so deep that he was impelled to share them with others. Joseph Smith's traits are found among New Englanders of his time, but investigation shows that his family had Yankee roots of a specific type. The Prophet's grandparents quite avoided the narrow prejudices that Francis Parkman associated with the rural New England

³⁷Richard Lloyd Anderson, Joseph Smith's New England Heritage (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1971), p. 12

³⁸Ibid., pp. 4-12.

³⁹Ibid., p. 110.

of the eighteenth century, but they display admirably "its combative energy, and rugged, unconquerable strength."⁴⁰

That Smith inherited this patriotic spirit and lack of "narrow prejudices" from his grandparents is seen in a sermon which he delivered on July 9, 1843:

I am bold to declare before Heaven that I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a good man of any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves.

It is a love of liberty which inspires my soul--civil and religious liberty to the whole human race. Love of liberty was diffused into my soul by my grandfathers while they dandled me on their knees; and shall I want friends? No. (History, V, 498)

In 1816, at the age of ten, Smith moved with his family to Palmyra in the state of New York. At this time, the Smith family, because of a number of financial setbacks, had little money. Upon arriving in Palmyra, however, Father Smith opened a confectionery shop which, "combined with occasional earnings, by himself and eldest sons at harvesting, well-digging, and other common employments, enabled him to provide an honest living for the family."⁴¹ Young Joseph was included in the number who had to work, and much of his time was spent at odd jobs.

Because of the meager circumstances of the Smith family, the education of the children suffered greatly. Although the parents were educated (Joseph's father taught in the village

⁴⁰Anderson, pp. 155-56, quoting Francis Parkman, Montcalm and Wolfe (New York, 1962), p. 429.

⁴¹John Henry Evans, Joseph Smith, An American Prophet (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1933), p. 30.

school during the winter in Sharon, Vermont)⁴², and eager to have their children attend school, the circumstances did not always allow it. Lucy Mack Smith relates that in 1811, when the family had moved to Lebanon, New Hampshire,

As our children had, in a great measure, been debarred from the privilege of schools, we began to make every arrangement to attend to this important duty. We established our second son Hyrum in an academy at Hanover, and the rest, that were of sufficient age, we were sending to a common school that was quite convenient.⁴³

However, as young Joseph was not yet six years of age at this time, it is unlikely that he received any formal education in Lebanon, New Hampshire. Furthermore, if he went to school there, the quality of his education may well have been inadequate. Writers on American social and cultural history agree that during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, "Taking the nation as a whole, the common schools were in a deplorable condition."⁴⁴ This was the case especially along the frontiers, where the population was sparse, teachers scarce, and illiteracy widespread.

In Palmyra, however, the opportunities for a good education were better. Here a schoolhouse had been erected in 1793,⁴⁵ but young Smith was unable to take full advantage of the situation. In nearby Manchester village a public library was established in

⁴²George Q. Cannon, Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1972), p. 26.

⁴³Lucy Mack Smith, History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, ed. Preston Nibley (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1958), p. 51.

⁴⁴Frederick Jackson Turner, The United States, 1830-1850 (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1935), p. 17.

⁴⁵Milton V. Backman, Jr., Joseph Smith's First Vision (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1971), p. 34.

1817, and another in Palmyra in the winter of 1822-23.⁴⁶ Newspapers and books were also available in Palmyra.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, despite the availability of these books, none of the names of the Smith family are found on the subscriber list of the Manchester Library,⁴⁸ nor would we know whether the Smiths ever purchased any books in Palmyra's bookstore. We do know that though he learned to read, Joseph Smith was not much of a reader in his youth. According to his mother, "he seemed much less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children but far more given to meditation and deep study."⁴⁹ Smith apparently attended some school, however. John Henry Evans in his well known and widely read biography of Smith, writes:

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 48.

⁴⁷The recent research of Milton Backman reveals that "Joseph Smith, Jr., frequently visited the village to secure a copy of the local paper, The Palmyra Register." (Backman, pp. 43-44) Also, states Backman, "While the Smith family resided in Palmyra, many works were available in the T. C. Strong Bookstore. During the month of October, 1818, for example, approximately three hundred volumes were advertized in The Palmyra Register, which included fiction works such as Arabian Nights and Charlotte Temple; Alexander Pope's An Essay on Man; biographies of Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson; Alexander Humbolt's history of New Spain and many other historical works; and approximately thirty religious treatises." (Backman, p. 48)

⁴⁸Manchester Library Book Lists, Brigham Young University, J. Reuben Clark Collection. These lists include works by John Locke, William Cowper, Edward Young, Cervantes, and John Bunyan, Cooper's Lionel Lincoln, and Irving's The Life and Voyages of Christopher Columbus.

⁴⁹Lucy Mack Smith, p. 82.

That he attended school in Palmyra is certain, for there is still in existence three of his textbooks. One of these is entitled The First Lines of Arithmetic, "for the use of Young Scholars, adapted to the capacities of children." Published in Hartford, Connecticut, it bears the clear autograph of Joseph, with the date January 31, 1818. The Prophet would then have just passed his thirteenth birthday. Another of the books is called The English Reader. It contains "pieces" in both prose and verse--narrative, didactic, descriptive, conversational, and promiscuous. There are selections under the captions: "The Pious Sons," "Filial Sensibility," "Cruelty to Insects Condemned," "Tenderness to Mothers," "Respect and Affection Due from Pupils to Their Tutors," and "To a Young Woman with a Watch." The third book is a religious Reader. In this interesting volume, which runs to two hundred and sixty-four pages, are scores of "Gospel Sonnets" arranged in six parts, all in verse--the "Believer's Espousals," the "Believer's Jointure," the "Believer's Riddle," the "Believer's Lodging," the "Believer's Soliloquy," and the "Believer's Principles." These books were given by the Prophet to a fifteen-year-old boy--Richard Bush, who worked for him on his farm in Nauvoo.⁵⁰

The titles of the pieces and sonnets of these books indicate that if these are the books which Smith studied in school, his early academic orientation was in line with early romanticism and the accompanying puritanistic tones of morality. Also, he would have received only a rudimentary education because, as Hyrum Andrus explains, most of the good textbooks in spelling, geography, and history were not yet available. "Plainly speaking," says Andrus, "Joseph Smith had very little opportunity to acquire any more than the meager essentials of a common-school education."⁵¹ Orson Pratt, one of Smith's later close associates, said, in speaking of Joseph's early education,

⁵⁰ Evans, p. 35.

⁵¹ Andrus, "Joseph Smith," pp. 102-103.

His advantages for acquiring scientific knowledge were exceedingly small, being limited to a slight acquaintance with two or three of the common branches of learning. He could read without much difficulty, and write a very imperfect hand, and had a very limited understanding of the elementary rules of arithmetic. These were his highest, and only attainments; while the rest of those branches, so universally taught in the common schools throughout the United States, were entirely unknown to him.⁵²

But, finally, just how much education Smith actually received as a boy is a question not entirely answerable. Backman asserts:

The formal education of Joseph Smith was apparently neglected while he was living in the Genesee Palmyra area country. Joseph said that because he was obliged to assist in supporting his family, he was "deprived of the benefit of an education." The Prophet admitted, however, that he received instructions in reading, writing, and arithmetic "which constituted his entire literal acquirements.

Since Joseph was not able to attend the local elementary school as often as he desired, the young man undoubtedly was not enrolled in the grammar school nor the private school established in Palmyra village."⁵³

A cousin of Joseph Smith claimed that the boy "had scarcely education enough to read his Bible,"⁵⁴ and others who knew him have described him variously as "an illiterate youth,"⁵⁵ "an unlettered youth,"⁵⁶ "an illiterate, unlearned boy."⁵⁷

⁵²Orson Pratt, Remarkable Visions (Liverpool, England; R. James, 1848), p. 1.

⁵³Backman, p. 51, quoting Kirtland Letter Book, LDS Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City.

⁵⁴George A. Smith, Journal of Discourses (Liverpool, England; Amasa Lyman, 1860), VII, 111. Hereafter: JD.

⁵⁵Wilford Woodruff, JD, XVIII, 118.

⁵⁶John Taylor, JD, XVIII, 210.

⁵⁷Charles C. Rich, JD, XIX, 28.

With all the available facts accounted for, the only conclusions that can be drawn regarding Smith by the year 1820 are that he could read and write, but that he read very little and wrote nothing of which we have any record. He might have read some minor romance poetry; he was somewhat acquainted with the Bible, partly through his own reading, and partly through Sunday School and his mother's teachings at home, and he might have read a smattering of history, or heard it from his grandfathers, upon whose knees he sat as a boy. Mostly, however, he labored with his hands and probably had no desires to be a writer of anything. The world would be surprised when, ten years later, a book was published bearing his name.

Smith's development as a writer began with a remarkable sequence of events which he claimed occurred between 1820 and 1830. Whether or not the reader accepts the validity of Smith's claims, these events form the basis of Smith's first and subsequent writings. The account of this decade in his life, which Smith eventually put on paper, begins with the assertion that in the spring of 1820, as merely "an obscure boy of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor" (History, I 7), while praying in a wooded glen for direction as to which church he should join, he received a vision in which he saw God the Father, and Jesus Christ. This "First Vision," as it is now commonly called by the followers of Smith, was the beginning experience of

the young boy's career as an American prophet, but although it greatly changed his image in the community where he lived, his normal daily labor with his father apparently changed little.

Smith writes,

I continued to pursue my common vocation in life until the twenty-first of September, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-three, all the time suffering severe persecution at the hands of all classes of men, both religious and irreligious, because I continued to affirm that I had seen a vision. (History, I, 9)

Ordinarily, an individual having a unique experience such as young Joseph reported in 1820 would not only go about relating the story to others immediately, but, as well, would write it down to preserve it. Such was not the case with Smith, however. Mormon scholars report that the Prophet made no written account whatsoever until nearly twelve years later.⁵⁸ James B. Allen, one Mormon scholar who has done extensive research on this subject, concludes that, in fact, the First Vision account was not even generally known in the Church until the 1840's because no account had previously been published.⁵⁹

Just why Smith made no written account of the First Vision in 1820 may be a question we cannot answer exactly. Allen concludes that since

the young prophet said that he had been severely rebuffed, the first time he told the story in 1820; and since it represented one of his most profound spiritual experiences,

⁵⁸Backman, p. 124.

⁵⁹James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's 'First Vision' in Mormon Thought," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, I, (Autumn 1966), 31-32.

he could well have decided to circulate it only privately until he could feel certain that in relating it he would not receive again the general ridicule of friends.⁶⁰

Allen also adds that Hugh Nibley, another noted Mormon scholar, "takes the point of view that the story of the vision was not told in those early years because of its sacred nature."⁶¹

While these reasons are certainly valid, they omit another major factor and probable reason for Smith's failure to write out the First Vision account in that first decade. A look at his educational background, or rather, his lack of education, suggests that such a task as writing that account may well have been too difficult for the unlettered boy. He was not a writer and certainly needed further training or experience before he could become such. In line with this thinking, Dean Jessee, of the LDS Church Historian's Office, feels that,

Considering the youth of the Prophet, the frontier conditions in which he lived, his lack of academic training, the absence of any formal directive to motivate him to write, and the antagonistic reception he received upon first relating the experience, it is not strange that he failed to preserve an account of his First Vision during the decade between 1820 and 1830.⁶²

Further incidents in the life of Joseph Smith beginning in the year 1823 and culminating in 1830 seemed to provide the initial training which he needed. Joseph's mother tells that from the time

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 34.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Dean G. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," BYU Studies, IX (Spring 1969), 294.

of the First Vision "until the twenty-first of September, 1823, Joseph continued, as usual, to labor with his father."⁶³ Then on that date, according to the account, during the night and following morning Smith received several visitations from a resurrected being whose name was Moroni (History, I, 11-15). The instructions which Smith received on this occasion pertained to a set of ancient metallic plates which the angel informed him were hidden in a hill nearby and which would in time be delivered to him so that Smith might translate them into English. In the meantime, while waiting to receive the plates, Smith was to prepare himself and continue to meet annually with the angel for further instructions at the location of the buried plates. Not until 1827 did Smith receive the plates and also a strange instrument called the "urim and thummim" by which he was to make the translation which would be known as the Book of Mormon. Soon thereafter persecution arose against Smith which delayed his efforts to translate the plates. This intolerable condition forced him "to leave Manchester, New York, and go to the home of his wife's parents in Harmony, Pennsylvania, where he arrived in December 1827."⁶⁴

The translation was begun in Harmony later in June, 1829, but Smith soon moved to the home of David Whitmer in Fayette, New York, where the translation was completed. However, according to

⁶³Lucy Mack Smith, p. 74.

⁶⁴Dean C. Jessee, "The Original Book of Mormon manuscript," BYU Studies, X (Spring 1970), 260.

Smith's history and Dean Jessee's research, the actual writing time of the translation was no more than three months. Smith transcribed none of it himself, but used at least five different scribes to complete the work.⁶⁵ In 1830 he published the Book of Mormon, which he claimed to be a correct translation of those ancient records.

Joseph Smith's literary development begins with and is a direct result of his efforts to translate the Book of Mormon. Mostly, this initial experience trained Smith's mind to extrapolate concepts and ideas into coherent expression, for as the evidence indicates, the Prophet's intentions with the pen were hindered by his inability to spell and punctuate. He therefore left this task in the hands of a scribe. Even with this obstacle removed, the progress towards Smith's first literary expressions was not smooth. In the words of George Q. Cannon:

Joseph's first labor with the plates was in obedience to the general command given to him through Moroni. The particular means by which the translation was to be effected and given to the world had not been made known; and this young, untaught, impoverished man was at that hour unable, within his own resources of education and purse, to arrange for the consummation of the work. He devoted every available moment, however, to his sacred task, constantly praying to the Almighty for aid; and yet the progress was slow.⁶⁶

Joseph first established himself at Isaac Hale's home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, in order

to examine the sacred history and treasure which had been committed to his ward. And he very soon began a somewhat desultory labor of copying the different styles of strange

⁶⁵Ibid., 260-61.

⁶⁶Cannon, p. 50.

characters found upon the plates and translating some of them by the aid of the Urim and Thummim.⁶⁷

Working with the ancient records also provided Smith with opportunities and motivation to increase his education. His insights and understanding of the world in general increased markedly as a result of the translating process. Truman G. Madsen, of Brigham Young University, writes,

We do not often reflect that translation (no matter how it be "explained") was a learning process for him, often tintured with first time wonderment. One day, Emma Smith /his wife/ records, she was writing for him and he dictated the phrase, "the wall of Jerusalem." The Prophet paused and then said, in effect, "Emma, I didn't know there was a wall around Jerusalem."⁶⁸

This acquiring of knowledge and the enlightening of the soul was just as essential to Smith as it is to any other developing writer.

Smith's first actual literary productions appeared in 1828 and 1829 in the form of revelations written while he was translating the Book of Mormon.⁶⁹ Accepted by Latter-day Saints as God's instructions to the Prophet regarding the translation and the organization of the church over which Smith was to preside, these revelations required of the Prophet an exercise of the mind which he had certainly never experienced before. Whether accepted as merely Smith's writings or divine communications given through him, these revelations, as discussed in chapter one, are essentially

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

⁶⁸ Truman G. Madsen, "Joseph Smith and the Sources of Love," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, I (Spring 1966), 123, quoting from Saints Herald, XXXI (21 June 1884), 396-97.

⁶⁹ Doctrine and Covenants, Sections 3-18.

Smith's literary expression. Whatever study or preparation Smith had undertaken beforehand had made him capable of the work.

That Smith was still no grammarian is clearly evident from the facts concerning the Book of Mormon manuscripts which were taken to E. B. Grandin, proprietor of the Wayne Sentinel in Palmyra, for publication. John J. Stewart states simply,

Joseph Smith was no grammarian. Few authors are. In its original edition the Book of Mormon was woefully lacking in punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing and other mechanical and grammatical details. One of the printers in the Wayne Sentinel newspaper shop where the book was printed claimed that he and the other printers provided most of what little punctuation it had, as they set it into type.⁷⁰

Responding to Stewart's comments, however, Hyrum Andrus, while still recognizing Joseph's weakness, asserts that Smith's lack of ability as a grammarian was not the only reason for the unpolished manuscript:

Had Joseph Smith been properly schooled in the rules of grammar it seems proper to conclude he would have attended to these matters. But the fact should also be stated that the Prophet claimed that the Book of Mormon was a translation of an ancient document, and in ancient times punctuation marks were not used Professor Stewart fails to mention this side of the story and accredits the whole matter to the Prophet's lack of education, whereas the evidence indicates that Joseph Smith was not interested in tampering with the manuscript by inserting the needed grammatical details. It is better to have an accurate translation that is ungrammatical than an inaccurate one that is grammatically polished. Punctuation marks can make a difference in the meaning conveyed by a document. Having been a school teacher, Oliver Cowdery had a fair knowledge of the rules of grammar and could have taken care of these matters, had the Prophet so desired. But

⁷⁰John J. Stewart, Joseph Smith, The Mormon Prophet (Salt Lake City: Mercury Publishing Co., 1966), p. 34.

it was only when the printers raised the issue and put the pressure on him that Joseph Smith reluctantly permitted the manuscript to be punctuated.⁷¹

The fact still remains, however, that Smith was not able to punctuate had he wanted to. In fact, the mere translation was a remarkable feat, for, as his wife stated, "It would have been improbable that a learned man could do this, and for one so ignorant and unlearned as he was, it was simply impossible."⁷²

The year 1830, with the publication of the Book of Mormon, ends the first phase of Smith's development as an American man of letters. Claiming to have been called of God as an American prophet, but young and inexperienced in many things, Smith at this point seems to have been driven by an intense urge to increase his knowledge quickly, and by a swelling compulsion to learn to express his thoughts in writing even when it meant dictating them to a scribe. George Q. Cannon writes that, at twenty-four years of age,

Joseph was no longer an uncouth village lad, for the exalted course of his life during the years in which he had walked under God's guidance had elevated him intellectually until he was already the peer of any man. No doubt at this hour he was lacking, as he had been in his earlier youth, in the technical teachings of the schools; but he had a deeper knowledge and a finer judgment than any possessed by the most favored of all the students of the colleges.⁷³

⁷¹Hyrum L. Andrus, "The Historical Joseph," by John J. Stewart, rev. of Joseph Smith, The Mormon Prophet, in Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, (Winter 1966), 125.

⁷²Preston Nibley, ed., The Witnesses of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, Inc., 1946), pp. 28-29.

⁷³Cannon, p. 76.

By 1830 Andrew Jackson was in his second year of the United States presidency; Joseph Smith, then, was in the midst of the Jacksonian Age. Nearly all the Founding Fathers of American Independence had passed away⁷⁴ and a young man named Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) was just reaching maturity. In American literature the era of romanticism was in full swing: a forerunner to this period, Philip Freneau (1752-1832), was close to death; Washington Irving (1783-1859), James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), and William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878) were the popular writers of the day; and writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892), and Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), who were about the same age as Joseph Smith, were beginning their careers. Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), James Russell Lowell (1819-1891), and Walt Whitman (1819-1892) were still boys in this year of Emily Dickinson's (1830-1886) birth.

Though it was the age of Jackson, it was also the coming of age of Joseph Smith. And, as we shall see, the various thrusts of Jacksonian America, merging with Smith's own traits and philosophies, would combine to create in him not only an American Prophet, but also a noted Jacksonian writer.

⁷⁴George Washington (1732-1799), Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), James Madison (1751-1836).

Chapter 3

FROM KIRTLAND TO MISSOURI, 1831-1838: THE FRONTIER EDITOR

The labor of translating ancient records into English and of preparing these writings for publication provided Joseph Smith with his initial literary experience and, in addition, opened the doors to other writing opportunities. From 1831 to 1838, there were four additional projects which added to Smith's literary experience and which further prepared him for the role of a newspaper editor. These endeavors included compiling revelations of the church into book form, initiating a new translation of the Bible, commencing a history of the church, and attending the School of the Prophets. This chapter will deal briefly with the impact which each of these experiences, particularly the writing of a history, had on Joseph Smith's literary development; with the events which turned the Prophet's attention to the frontier newspapers; and with the first letters which Smith wrote for newspaper publication. Most importantly, we shall investigate the beginnings of Smith's career as a frontier newspaper editor and the writings which he produced during that age of Jacksonian thought. It was through the medium of the frontier newspapers that Smith began his acquaintance with the world around him and through which the world in turn became increasingly aware of him.

A. COMPILING THE REVELATIONS

Between the year 1827, at which time Joseph Smith began preparations for translating the Book of Mormon, and 1830, the year the book was published, Smith dictated to scribes a number of revelations concerning, primarily, the work of translation itself, and dealing in part with ecclesiastical matters leading to the formal organization of the church, which also took place in 1830. Immediately following the publication of the Book of Mormon, Smith began compiling these revelations in order to publish and present them to the church in book form. Said he, "I began to arrange and copy the revelations which we had received from time to time; in which I was assisted by John Whitmer, who now resided with me" (History, I, 104). Just as the translating and publishing of the Book of Mormon had served to improve Smith's education, as well as provide direct literary experience, so the compilation and publication of these revelations served to sharpen his intellect and provide further beneficial experience.¹ Time would show that the more Smith worked with the written word, assisted and taught by his scribes, the more competent he became in his own right.

B. SMITH'S NEW BIBLE TRANSLATION

In addition to compiling revelations, Smith also began, in 1830, a revision, or "translation," of the King James Bible, an awesome task that engaged great portions of his time for years

¹See Earl E. Olson, "The Chronology of the Ohio Revelations," BYU Studies, XI (Summer 1971), 329-49.

afterward and served to educate this young man in things and ways that no other experience could have.² Smith wrote that in December, 1830, the Lord had given him "some more extended information upon the Scriptures, a translation of which had already commenced" (History, I, 132). At this time Smith was living in Harmony, Pennsylvania, but shortly afterward, in January, 1831, he moved to Kirtland, Ohio, where he soon resumed work on this translation. He comments in his history, "During the month of April, I continued to translate the scriptures as time would allow" (History, I, 170).

Later in the year Smith moved again, but he continued his study of the scriptures. He wrote, "The early part of September was spent in making preparations to remove to the town of Hiram Ohio and renew our work on the translation of the Bible" (History, I, 211). Such references to the labor of translation are found frequently in the history from this time until mid-1833 and occasionally beyond that time.³ According to the Latter-day Saint historian B. H. Roberts, Smith intended to publish the revised scriptures in Far West, Missouri, but the persecution which arose there prevented the undertaking (History, I, 324 fn.). The revision never was published, but the work of the revision nevertheless served well in educating the Prophet. As we shall see in the present study, Smith's newspaper articles are often permeated with scriptural references, scriptural logic and argument, and even with scriptural

²Robert J. Matthews, "The 'New Translation' of the Bible, 1830-1833: Doctrinal Development During the Kirtland Era," BYU Studies, XI (Summer 1971, 420. See entire article for a more complete discussion.

³Ibid.

language. It is evident, then, that this experience of translating the Bible was beneficial to Smith's newspaper writings. The literary endeavor of translating provided an educational and writing experience, as well as source material for his religious teachings.

C. WRITING A HISTORY

A third beneficial experience for young Joseph was the development and preparation of a documentary history of the church. On April 6, 1830, at Fayette, New York, at the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Smith presented to his followers, as the revealed word of the Lord, these words:

Behold, there shall be a record kept among you; and in it thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder of the church through the will of God the Father, and the grace of your Lord Jesus Christ. (History, I, 78)

The idea of keeping a record of his religious activities and of the business conducted in the newly formed church was a challenging new concept to Smith, but the 1830 revelation made record keeping an imperative which he took seriously from this time forth.⁴ However, he knew better than anyone else that a poor education and a lack of writing ability and experience made him ineligible, at least for the time being, for the task of writing a history; therefore, he again relied upon scribes whom he appointed to assist him. In this manner he began a history and continued his efforts

⁴Jessee, "Writing of History," p. 439. See entire article for a more complete discussion.

to keep a history throughout the remainder of his life, thus increasingly exposing himself to the written word and, in time, gradually acquiring some skill of his own in transferring his own thoughts into written form.

The determination and zeal shown by Smith in accepting the formidable charge of writing a history of his religious activities was not unlike the sense of commitment evident in the theological histories of the early American Puritan writers. Smith himself, having descended from strict New England Puritan ancestry and having been reared in New England, was strongly influenced by Puritan values, including a strong sense of duty and uprightness before God. Nor was the idea of writing an account of religious activities totally new to him. In his own family his grandfather, Solomon Mack, had, in earlier years, recorded a brief but vivid account of his conversion to Christian principles,⁵ and this interesting autobiography, then in the possession of the Smith family, no doubt further influenced the religious sensitivities of the boy Joseph. In describing those early New England writers whose influence was still felt by Joseph Smith and his contemporary Jacksonian Americans, Kenneth B. Murdock, a prominent Harvard University historian, states:

The work of the best writers in colonial New England shows that they wanted to write well as one way of serving God, and reflects both their zeal and their concern for fundamental stylistic values.⁶

⁵A Narrative of the Life of Solomon Mack. See Anderson, pp. 33-58.

⁶Kenneth B. Murdock, Literature and Theology in Colonial New England (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1949), p. 31.

The Puritan writers chose to write in plainness and simplicity, to avoid the ornate and ostentatious. At the same time, however, their writings were not dull. According to Murdock,

Inevitably, then, when he [the Puritan] preached or wrote on divine themes, he tended to limit his diction, his images, and his literary devices to those which he could find in Holy Writ. In subject matter, too, obviously what was closest to the Bible was best. Biblical style was perfect because it was "penned by the Holy Ghost."⁷

The Puritan style, then, was simple and to the point in order that the common man might better understand, but such a style depended largely upon scriptural passages and imagery for its artistic value. Making the religious message of truth understood without conveying a false impression was the most important consideration to the Puritan writer. In short, "He wished to express lofty thoughts simply but without mediocrity."⁸ Also, the Puritan deemed the writing of history most important for he saw history as a "record of God's providences."⁹

The parallels between these Puritan attitudes and Smith's personal views about literature become apparent in a study of Smith's writing career. "Plainness" and "simplicity" are key words in describing Smith's literary style, a style not simply incidental to a lack of writing skill, but rather a style predetermined and intentional in accordance with a literary philosophy uttered by Smith himself. On one occasion, in a letter to his "Brethren in Zion," dated "Kirtland, April 21, 1833," Smith wrote:

⁷Ibid., p. 42.

⁸Ibid., p. 51.

⁹Ibid., p. 75.

As every letter that comes from Zion must go the rounds of the brethren for inspection, it is necessary that there should be no disguise in them, but that every subject written upon by the brethren should be plain to the understanding of all, that no jealousy may be raised, and when we rebuke, do it in all meekness. (History, I 340-41)

Smith's philosophy of a plain and simple style remained with him all his life. On May 1, 1840, he wrote to Orson Hyde, who had inquired about publishing a pamphlet on the history of the church, and stated, "It will be well to study plainness and simplicity in whatever you publish, 'for my soul delighteth in plainness'" (History, III, 129). And as late as 1843, Smith repeated in a sermon, "I never design to communicate any ideas but what are simple; for to this end I am sent" (History, V. 529).

The simplicity of style which the Puritan writer used both for the benefit of God and for the lay reader did not disappear as a literary virtue in the later Jacksonian era when writers placed a similar emphasis upon reaching out to the "common man." Furthermore, with an increasing flow of Americans toward western settlements and the subsequent shortage of frontier educational facilities, writers in the West who wanted to reach the masses often had to rely on a simple, homey, and even rustic literary style to achieve their goal. On the other hand, religionists, such as Joseph Smith, often used the simple style to convey truth to the common people. Thus, the plain, simple writing technique which characterizes so much of Smith's literature was common in that era, even though some journalists, particularly in the East, enjoyed making their writings quite florid, verbose, and ornate. Nevertheless, Smith intentionally

chose to write plainly during the period in which he began writing a history of the church.

The early efforts to write a history of the church were difficult and frustrating for Joseph Smith. He was aware of his inexperience and shortcomings in writing, but desired to improve his skills. On November 27, 1832, Smith dictated:

Oh, Lord, deliver us in due time from the little, narrow prison, almost as it were, total darkness of paper, pen and ink:--, and a crooked, broken, scattered and imperfect language. (History, I, 299)

One year later Smith revealed an acute awareness that his writing ability was far below the standard set by the popular authors of the day when he wrote:

I have thought that perhaps a few lines from me, though there may be a lack of fluency according to the literati of the age, might be received with a degree of satisfaction on your part. (History, I, 441, Smith's italics)

It would only be conjecture to state how knowledgeable Smith was of the "literati of the age," but presumably he had seen various pieces by some noted writers in local newspapers and was thereby impressed by their quality.

Smith's initial efforts to write a history were plagued with numerous setbacks due, in part, to unreliable scribes, and, in part, apparently, to the difficulty of the task itself for such a relatively unskilled writer.¹⁰ We know, for instance, that prior to 1839 Smith made at least three attempts to write a satisfactory account of his first vision experience, but he failed each time.¹¹ On one occasion

¹⁰For an account of scribes, see Jessee, "Writing of History."

¹¹See Backman; also, Jessee, "Early Accounts," pp. 275-94.

in 1832 Smith even took up the pen himself and, as a result, this account is the "only history containing the actual handwriting of Joseph Smith."¹² Replete with errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, and stilted in its form, this brief account markedly reveals the early literary deficiency of its author. One unedited portion of the manuscript reads as follows:

I was born in the town of Charon in the ^{State} [^] of Vermont North America on the twenty third day of December AD 1805 of goodly Parents who spared no pains to instructing me in ^{the} [^] christian religion at the age of about ten years my Father Joseph Smith Siegnior moved to Palmyra Ontario County in the State of New York and being in indigent circumstances were obliged to labour hard for the Support of a large Family having nine children and as it required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the Support of the Family therefore we were deprived of the bennifit of an education Suffice it to Say I was nearly instructed in reading writing and the ground [^] rules of Arithmatic which constituted my whole literary acquirements.¹³

Despite the poor quality of this historical piece, it apparently provided some encouragement to Smith. At least it was a beginning, for on November 27, 1832, Joseph Smith began keeping a letter book as well as a daily journal.¹⁴ From this time forth Smith continued dictating, all the while struggling to express himself adequately. His next attempt at writing an actual history however, was not until 1838, after years of further preparation.

¹²Jessee, "Writing of History," p. 462 fn.

¹³Quoted in Backman, pp. 155-56.

¹⁴Jessee, "Early Accounts," p. 278.

D. THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHETS

The opportunity for Joseph Smith to continue his development and improvement as a writer was greatly enhanced as a result of his attendance at the "School of the Prophets" in the winter of 1834-35. The School of the Prophets, so called because those who attended were in the leadership of the church, was a winter-long series of classes held for the education and training of these men. Such a school had been organized and conducted under the direction of Smith himself during the previous winter, but principally for the study of theology and doctrine pertaining to the ecclesiastical order of the church. In this second winter in which the School was held, however, many other subjects of interest were added to the curriculum, including subjects sorely needed by Smith, such as English grammar. A report of the Kirtland School issued by William E. M'Lellin on February 27, 1835, stated that the studies included "penmanship, arithmetic, English grammar, and geography," in which classes "Burdick's Arithmetic, Kirkham's Grammar, and Olvey's Geography have been used, and Noah Webster's Dictionary as standard" (History, II, 200). By the close of the School of the Prophets in March, 1835, Smith had assuredly increased his knowledge of the English language, a factor that he hoped would prove beneficial in his efforts to communicate truth to the world.

The School of the Prophets began again the following winter (1835-36), but with emphasis on a new course of study--Hebrew. During the summer of 1835 the Saints at Kirtland had purchased

several Egyptian mummies from Michael H. Chandler, who had brought them to exhibit in the city, and with the mummies were a number of papyrus scrolls written in Egyptian hieroglyphics (History, II, 235). Smith immediately became interested in studying Egyptian and that interest broadened to include Hebrew. Smith commenced studying and translating the Egyptian records; then, soon after the school opened in the Fall, a professor of Hebrew, Joshua Seixas, was hired to teach a course in Hebrew. Smith's journal throughout this time often mentions his study of both Hebrew and Egyptian. He also managed to continue studying English grammar and mentions at least two occasions when he spent time teaching grammar to his family. On Wednesday, November 4, he wrote: "In the evening lectured on grammar at home" (History, II, 301), and on November 10, he noted, "Spent the evening around my fireside teaching my family grammar" (History, II, 307). That he would be teaching grammar to his family seems to indicate that he had acquired some confidence and competence in that area through his studies in the School of the Prophets. By increasing his English proficiency, Smith was also better preparing himself for the role of a frontier journalist.

E. SMITH'S ATTENTION DRAWN TO FRONTIER NEWSPAPERS

While engaged in these numerous time-consuming tasks of translating records, compiling revelations, and writing history, all while continuing his language studies--and directing the affairs of the church--Smith turned his attention to the frontier newspaper. In

September, 1831, the Prophet read a series of abusive letters written against him by Ezra Booth, an apostate from the church, and published in the Ohio Star at Ravenna, Ohio. These letters seemingly led to the next business of the church, which was to establish "a monthly paper at Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, to be called the Evening and Morning Star" (History, I, 217), for the benefit of those saints who had already moved to Missouri to establish a "City of Zion." Smith must have realized the impact the frontier newspaper could have on his people, or on non-Mormons as well, especially in the light of false accusations being printed and spread by persons such as Booth. Accordingly, plans were made for the church to publish a newspaper of its own, and a prospectus of the same was issued in February, 1832, and signed by W. W. Phelps. Smith received the first issue of "The Evening and Morning Star in July, noting that it "was a joyous treat to the Saints" (History, I, 273).

That the Mormon leaders would begin to employ the public newspaper at this time as a means of communication was more significant than they then realized, and little did Smith foresee that in the near future he would have a major role in the writing, printing, and publishing of other such frontier newspapers.

Smith soon learned that the involvement of the church in the newspaper business was no easy task. He wrote that "although many newspapers published the prospectus of our paper, yet it appeared to have been done more to calumniate the editor, than give publicity to the forthcoming periodical" (History, I, 273).

After this Smith began to include in his history, and continued hereafter to include, extracts from articles and editorials of various newspapers. Just how many of the numerous eastern and frontier newspapers he had at his disposal cannot be ascertained, but he evidently read many, as his history makes frequent reference to them. Obviously this was not the same uneducated boy who had lived in the backhills of Vermont. Nor was he still the same young man of whom his mother had said, "he seemed much less inclined to the perusal of books than any of the rest of our children."¹⁵

F. SMITH'S FIRST NEWSPAPER PUBLICATIONS

Joseph Smith's own signature first appeared in a newspaper column on February 2, 1833. However, this first attempt to put his own views before the American newspaper audience was far from prestigious. Among the many newspapers to which Smith was subscribing in 1832 and 1833 was a religiously oriented publication from Rochester, New York, the American Revivalist and Rochester Observer, edited by N. C. Saxton. Smith, apparently after following the articles printed in this newspaper and disagreeing sharply with the religious views contained therein, wrote, on January 4, 1833, in Kirtland, Ohio, his first "letter to the editor." To his dismay, only a short portion of this letter was published in the February 2, 1833 issue, the editor explaining that there was not

¹⁵Lucy Mack Smith, p. 82.

"room for the whole letter."¹⁶ Angered by this action, Smith wrote again, this time reprimanding the editor and stating boldly, "The letter which I wrote you for publication, I wrote by the commandment of God, and I am quite anxious to have it all laid before the public" (History, I, 326). Mr. Saxton took no heed of this petition, however, and published nothing more of Smith's letters.

Smith's first "letter to the editor" bears evidence of a maturing American writer and of his close ties to the thought and sentiments so typically Jacksonian. Saxton seems to note this when he states in congenial editorial comments that Smith's letter "is written throughout with much good feeling and urbanity." Saxton implies that he sees no signs of an uneducated writer. The "much good feeling" in Saxton's comments likely has reference to the emphatic millennialistic, Zionistic message which constitutes the brief portion of Smith's letter which Saxton printed.

The strains of millennialism and Zionism in this letter extract originate in Smith's scriptural documentation. Beginning with a brief description of the Book of Mormon and continuing into a series of biblical passages, Smith declares this Zionistic concept:

But the tribe of Juda [sic] will return to old Jerusalem. The city of Zion, spoken of by David in the 102 Psalm, will be built upon the land of America, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to it, with

¹⁶American Revivalist and Rochester Observer, 2 February 1833, p. 2, col. 6, in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Smith's complete correspondence is printed in History, I, 312-16, 326.

songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, and there they will be delivered from the overflowing scourge, that shall pass through the land.

The "overflowing scourge" of which Smith speaks is "a scene of blood-shed, as has not a parallel" which is to inundate the United States in the future. Smith then predicts "Pestilence, hail, famine, and earthquake" that will prepare the way "for the return of the lost tribes of Israel from the North Country." He also explains that the "people of the land referring to the Mormons . . . have already commenced gathering together to Zion, which is in the state of Missouri." The letter closes with a bold warning to the people of the land and a prophecy of the impending events:

Repent ye, Repent ye, and embrace the everlasting covenant, and flee to Zion, before the overflowing scourge overtake you. For there are those now living upon the earth, whose eyes shall not be closed sic in death, until they see all these things which I have spoken, fulfilled.

Thus replete with religious fervor, millennialism, Zionism and scriptural authority, Smith's first newspaper publication harmonized well with the revivalistic spirit of the Rochester Observer and was a fitting beginning in the newspaper career of an American prophet.

Smith's purpose in writing to a prominent American newspaper and thus getting himself involved as a writer in religious controversy was to attempt to correct what he believed to be erroneous ideas and philosophies being printed and propagated by various articles in that newspaper. One paragraph from the unpublished letter begins, "I think it is high time for a Christian world to awake out of sleep, and cry mightily to that God, day and

night, whose anger we have justly incurred" (History, I, 313).
 Motivated strongly by a sense of responsibility to warn the world,
 Smith dared expose himself and his weakness in writing to all those
 who would read his work in the newspaper. To Saxton he stated

that this purpose is what has caused me to overlook my
 own inability, and expose my weakness to a learned world;
 but trusting in that God who has said that these things
 are hid from the wise and prudent and revealed unto Babes,
 I step forth into the field to tell you what the Lord is
 doing, and what you must do, to enjoy the smiles of your
 Savior in these last days. (History, I, 313)

The phrase "I step forth into the field" obviously had reference to
 the field of newspaper writing, this letter being Smith's first
 venture in publishing an original article in a newspaper. However,
 the young novice would not venture into public writing again for
 some time. In the meantime, he would continue his development.

The bitter persecution which befell the Mormon settlements
 in Missouri in 1833 further demonstrated to Smith what a widespread
 influence, whether for good or for evil, the frontier newspaper
 could have upon his people. Consequently, Smith's efforts to use
 the newspaper increased as he sought to fight evil with truth in
 the printed word.

On July 20, 1833, in Jackson County, Missouri, a mob
 entered the printing establishment of The Evening and Morning Star
 and turned the office into a heap of ruins. The citizens of the
 community then forced the Mormons to draw up a memorandum which in
 part stated: "The Star is not again to be published nor a press set
 up by any of the society in this country" (History, I, 394).

Knowing how necessary a newspaper was to their survival, however, the leaders in Kirtland wasted little time not only in providing for a continuation of their first newspaper, but also in preparing to publish a second newspaper. On September 11 a council resolved that The Evening and Morning Star be transferred to Kirtland where its issues would be reprinted and that another paper be initiated entitled The Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate (History, I, 409).

Because of the steadily increasing conflicts between the Mormons and the residents of Missouri, the major concern of the Mormon leaders at this time was to obtain sympathy and protection from the government officials on whom they relied for a guarantee of their religious freedom. As a result, in a letter to Missouri dated December 5, 1833, Smith announced plans for another newspaper to curry favor with the Jacksonian Democrats:

We expect shortly to publish a political paper, weekly, in favor of the present administration; the influential men of that party have offered a liberal patronage to us, and we hope to succeed, for thereby we can show the public the purity of our intentions in supporting the government under which we live. (History, I, 450-51)

For some unexplained reason, however, this project, to be called the Northern Times, was never begun, but Smith's intentions to print such a paper imply a growing relationship between Smith and Jacksonian politics at this time.

Smith's second published newspaper letter appeared more than a year and a half after his first effort.¹⁷ Smith addressed this

¹⁷ Joseph Smith, "Correspondence," The Evening and Morning Star, II (September 1834), 382-83.

letter, written in answer to a railing attack made against him by the renowned minister, Alexander Campbell, to his close associate, Oliver Cowdery, editor of the Evening and Morning Star in Kirtland. Differing entirely in tone and content from the first letter and demonstrating greater versatility in writing technique, Smith's second letter effectively employs acrid sarcasm and irony to the end of chastening the Reverend Campbell. This letter to Oliver Cowdery opens,

Dear Brother,--

I have of late, been perusing Mr. A. Campbell's "Millennial Harbinger." I never have rejoiced to see men of corrupt hearts step forward and assume the authority and pretend to teach the ways of God--this is, and always has been a matter of grief.

The Millennial Harbinger, published by the Campbellite sect, was another of the many contemporary millennialist newspapers. Smith could have written his answer to that newspaper, but remembering the failure of the Rochester Observer to publish his first letter in its entirety, he chose to publish this letter in his own church newspaper, the circulation of which was likely as great as that of the Campbellite newspaper.

The letter is brief but interesting, sprinkled as it is with a good deal of "tongue-in-cheek" irony and sarcasm. One paragraph begins,

I have never been blessed, (if it may be called such,) with a personal acquaintance with Mr. Campbell, neither a personal interview; but the GREAT MAN, not unfrequently /sic/ condescends to notice an individual of as obscure birth as myself.

Smith censures Campbell for his "expositions of the falsity and incorrectness of the book of Mormon" and for his continuing "to

bark and howl, and cry, Joe Smith! false prophet!" But yet Smith wryly suggests his pleasure at Campbell's cries, for they "manifest to all men the spirit he [Campbell] is of," and serve "to open the eyes of the people." Almost humorously, the Prophet tells Campbell that,

while he is breathing out scurrility he is effectually showing the honest, the motives and principles by which he is governed, and often causes men to investigate and embrace the book of Mormon, who might otherwise never have purused it.

By no means a masterpiece, this second letter exhibits, however, a change from the Prophet's previous style in employing the techniques of irony. Typical of this letter and many others penned by Smith is the overabundance of commas, a trait common among journalists of the day.

In December of 1834, another letter which Smith penned, his third to be published, appeared in the Messenger and Advocate.¹⁸ Like the second, it was addressed to Oliver Cowdery. Merely six paragraphs in length, this piece consisted principally of a brief autobiographical sketch of Smith's youth. This account was motivated, the author tells the editor, by the recently published news that Oliver Cowdery was about to publish "a history of the rise and progress of the church of the Latter Day Saints" in which the "life and character" of Joseph Smith would appear. Desiring to correct the many misinformed who had cast aspersions on his character,

¹⁸Joseph Smith, "Correspondence," Messenger and Advocate, I (December 1834), 40. Hereafter: MA.

Smith offers the public this brief sketch describing his humble birth and boyhood. The letter is written in a mild and subdued tone, quite characteristic of personal confessionals found in the early Puritan writings. Writes the Prophet, "During this time, as is common to most, or all youths, I fell into many vices and follies." But, he explains,

. . . those imperfections to which I alude [sic], and for wich [sic] I have often had occasion to lament, were a light, and too often, vain mind, exhibiting a foolish and trifling conversation.

Smith further adds,

I do not, nor never have, pretended to be any other than a man "subject to passion," and liable, without the assisting grace of the Savior, to deviate from that perfect path in which all men are commanded to walk!

He closes the letter with warm expressions of esteem for Oliver Cowdery. The letter is simple, not eloquent, but expressive of a good deal of penitent inner feeling.

While Smith's first three published letters are brief and simplified, the fourth letter far excels the earlier works in length and quality. Significantly, the fourth letter was written after Smith had spent a season studying English in the School of the Prophets. That increased competence and grasp of the English language are manifest in Smith's next newspaper publication.

This letter, or rather really three separate letters, each a continuation of the other, addressed "To the elders of the church of Latter Day Saints," was submitted to John Whitmer, who had succeeded Oliver Cowdery at the helm of the Messenger and Advocate, and was published in three installments in the September, November,

and December, 1835, issues of that newspaper (MA, I, 179-82; II, 209-12; II, 225-30).

The first letter of the three part series bears as its central theme what might be called "Zionistic Utopianism." The letter is intended to give instructions to the elders of the church concerning the gathering of the Saints to Jackson County, Missouri, which place Smith, upon a visit there in 1831, had designated as Zion.¹⁹ In this letter he relates that by commandment he was directed to Missouri to "designate the very spot, which was to be the central spot, for the commencement of the gathering together of those who embrace the fulness of the everlasting gospel," and in that spot would take place "the upbuilding of an holy city, which should be called Zion." Later in the article, Smith relates his disappointment over the difficulty and persecution that his people had experienced in Missouri, even though they lived "in a free country, a land of liberty and of laws, guaranteeing to every man, or any company of men, the right of purchasing lands, and settling and living upon them." After warning against certain false notions that had arisen concerning the gathering, Smith then establishes the qualifications requisite of the Saints to live in this type of social order, namely the "first principles of the gospel." Most of the remaining letter consists of numerous scriptural quotations outlining these principles.

¹⁹ See discussion in H. Roger Grant, "Missouri's Utopian Communities," Missouri Historical Review, LXVI (October 1971), 20-48.

The Zionistic, Utopian social order here promoted by Smith was not a concept considered strange or displaced from the period in which he lived. Like many others of his time, Smith promoted a system of social unity which he called the "New Jerusalem." Emphasizing the need for social union within this Zionistic cause, Smith writes:

But we pause here and offer a remark upon the saying which we learn has gone abroad, and has been handled in a manner detrimental to the cause of truth, by saying, "that in preaching the doctrine of gathering, we break up families, and give license for men to leave their families, women their husbands; children their parents, and slaves their masters, thereby deranging the order, and breaking up the harmony and peace of society." We shall here show our faith and thereby, as we humbly trust, put an end to these faults [sic], and wicked misrepresentations

Social union, within the context of individual freedom was a cardinal principle of Smith's proposed Zion, and these concepts, in turn, bore strong resemblances to concepts which generally prevailed in the Jacksonian era.

The continuation of Smith's epistle to the elders of the church which appeared as part two in the November, 1835, Messenger and Advocate discusses further the subject of the gathering. The second letter opens with a reminder that the counsel being given serves two purposes: one, to assist the elders in "combating the prejudices of a crooked and perverse generation," and, two, in aiding "those who are anxiously inquiring, and have been excited to do so from rumor, in accertaining [sic] correctly, what my principles are." He then discusses the Zionistic cause in great detail, enhancing his case by scriptural argument. Smith writes,

Men and angels are to be co-workers in bringing to pass this great work: and a Zion is to be prepared; even a New Jerusalem for the elect that are to be gathered from the four quarters of the earth, and to be established an holy city: for the tabernacle of the Lord shall be with them.

He later adds, "I shall say with brevity, that there is a New Jerusalem to be established on this continent.--And also the Jerusalem shall be rebuilt on the eastern continent." In this and the first letter we find that Smith did not expect the immediate advent of Christ, but saw first the establishment of Zion, the gathering of the Jews to Palestine, the building of the temple, and other great works before that day came. Many other millennialists were crying that Christ's coming was at hand.²⁰

Approximately halfway through the second letter, Smith leaves the topic of the gathering and outlines the duties of the elders of the church in regard to warning the earth's inhabitants. The Prophet recommends that the missionaries teach the parents first, and then, if the parents give permission, to teach the children and the slaves. Again Smith stresses the need for social unity, particularly in the family.

More remarkable in these articles than the fact that Smith's ideas closely parallel the thought of his day, is that in contrast to the earlier articles which Smith submitted to the newspapers, these letters exhibit a greater degree of literary proficiency. They no longer bear the mark of utter simplicity, but are well organized,

²⁰Andrus, "Second Revolution," pp. 78-79.

flow smoothly and logically from one point to the next, express deep sentiments intelligently, and in short, echo the voice of an "educated" writer.

The last of Smith's letters in this three-part series was printed in the December, 1835, Messenger and Advocate. As in the previous two, the dominant subject is the gathering of the righteous, and the discussion centers on scriptural references, principally the parables of Jesus and an analysis of them in light of the gathering. Near the end of this article an interesting change occurs in the tone of the writing. The narrator's voice becomes a voice of indignation not unlike the Calvinistic "hellfire and damnation" sermons, replete as they were with colorful images and scriptural metaphors. A comparison with the rest of the article indicates that the writer simply got carried away, deviated from the subject at hand, and launched into an attack upon certain enemies of the church. Since other studies have not mentioned the literary technique of this letter, let us for a moment observe the crescendo of emotion evident in these lines:

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a mustard seed. Behold, then, is not this the kingdom of heaven that is raising its head in the last days, in the majesty of God; even the church of the Latter Day saints,--like an impenetrable, immovable rock in the midst of the mighty deep, exposed to storms and tempests of satan, but has, thus far, remained steadfast and is still braving the mountain waves of opposition; which are driven by the tempestuous winds of sinking crafts, have and are still dashing with tremendous foam, across its triumphing brow, urged by the enemy of righteousness, with his pitchfork of lies, as you will see fairly represented in a cut, contained in Mr. Howe's "Mormonism Unveiled?"

The Prophet further calls Alexander Campbell "one of the modern sons of Sceva, would would fain have made people believe that he could cast out devils, by a certain pamphlet (viz. the 'Millennial Harbinger,') that went the rounds through our country," and accuses several others, by name, of malicious lies against him. Finally, referring to the deeds of all these men, Smith concludes with this metaphorical allusion:

The above cloud of darkness has long been beating with mountain waves upon the immovable rock of the church of the Latter Day Saints, and not withstanding all this, the mustard seed is still towering its lofty branches, higher and higher, and extending itself wider and wider, and the charriot /sic/ wheels of the kingdom are still rolling on, impelled by the mighty arm of Jehovah; and in spite of all opposition will still roll on until his words are all fulfilled.

Smith then apologizes for deviating from the subject, returns to the topic of the gathering, and, after a few more paragraphs, concludes this third letter.

One important insight which can be drawn from a study of this final letter in the three-part series is that Smith has endeavored to include in his growing repertoire of literary techniques the use of metaphors and imagery. In this case, they serve the purpose of expressing emotion-laden censures and ring with an air of preachment and authority. From the view of good literature, however, the metaphors quoted above seem strained and overdone. The strange mixing of metaphors in "cloud" and "waves" and in "seed" and "wheels" detracts from the quality and gauge of control of the piece.

No new articles from Joseph Smith appear in the newspapers until some four months later. The numerous entries in Smith's

history that mention his daily study of Hebrew with the School of the Prophets all through the winter of 1835-36 indicate that he had little time for any other matters. Finally, in April, 1836, another letter from Smith to Oliver Cowdery, the editor, appeared in the Messenger and Advocate (II, 289-91). The subject of the letter is set forth in the first lines:

This place having recently been visited by a gentleman who advocated the principles or doctrines of those who are called abolitionists; if you deem the following reflections of any service, or think they will have a tendency to correct the opinions of the southern public, relative to the views and sentiments I believe, . . . you are at liberty to give them publicity in the columns of the Advocate.

Smith's letter unfolds with his sentiments on abolitionism and includes support for his arguments from the scriptures. He plainly wants no repercussions from Southerners who would think he is an abolitionist, for he asks the elders teaching in that region to quell such rumors, recognizing that the question of slavery was "a tender point, and one which should call forth the candid reflection of all men." Using a bit of flattery, too, he insists that the Southerners, being "persons of ability, discernment and candor," are in the best position to judge the matter. Smith views abolitionists as dangerous elements in society and states:

And when I see persons in the free states signing documents against slavery, it is no less, in my mind, than an array of influence, and a declaration of hostilities against the people of the South! What can divide our Union sooner, God only knows!

Turning next to the Bible, Smith explains the curse of Canaan which led to the slavery of the Negro. The fact that the curse has never been lifted, he claims, is evidence that slavery

is in the "designs of the Lord," at least for the time being. He then cites scriptural references to show that ancient prophets had slaves. The letter concludes with an appeal that the elders are to teach the masters of slaves, and upon the masters' receiving the gospel, and with their permission, the elders are to teach the slaves, but are not to stir up strife among them.

As in Smith's previous letters this letter also portrays a philosophy entirely indicative of the political and social milieu in which the writer lived. Smith was aware and knowledgeable of the vital issues of his day. He read the newspapers, he met and talked with prominent figures, he saw the comings and goings of such people as this abolitionist to whom he refers in this letter, and he had his own sentiments to offer on all the same issues. Though in this letter Smith offers a point of view toward slavery generally at odds with the sentiment prevalent among the New England literati, the mere offering of any view on this issue suggests his direct link to the Jacksonian Age.

The remainder of the year 1836 passed with no further articles by Smith appearing in any newspaper, but in 1837 two short notices appeared which demonstrate Smith's involvement in both Mormon and Jacksonian economics (MA, III [January 1837], 443; III [August 1837], 560).²¹ Although these two short writings are of no

²¹These two notices are connected with the rise and fall of the "Kirtland Safety Society Anti-Banking Company" of the Mormon Church. For further discussion see Leonard J. Arrington, "Religion and Economics in Mormon History," BYU Studies, III (Spring-Summer 1961), 15-33. Also, Scott H. Partridge, "The Failure of the Kirtland Safety Society," BYU Studies, XII (Summer 1972), 437-54.

value in assessing Smith's literary development, they nonetheless give validity to the argument that Smith was indeed a writer of Jacksonian times, a writer who took as his literary topics subjects of interest relative to Jacksonian democracy.

G. JOSEPH SMITH: THE FRONTIER EDITOR

It was because of the events surrounding the economic problems of the church, mentioned in these two newspaper inserts, that Smith came to occupy his first editorship of a frontier newspaper. Furthermore, as newspaper editors were so highly esteemed for their literary preeminence on the American frontier, Smith, in stepping into the editor's chair, was in effect assuming the role of a man of letters in American history.

According to a brief paragraph in Smith's history,

On the first of February, 1837, the firm of Oliver Cowdery & Co. was dissolved by mutual consent, and the entire establishment was transferred to Joseph Smith, Jun., and Sidney Rigdon; and Warren A. Cowdery acted as their agent in the printing office and bookbindery, and editor of the Messenger and Advocate. (History, II, 475)

No explanation is given for the change in ownership and editorship, but in May another brief entry in the history reads:

Some time this month, the Messenger and Advocate office and contents were transferred to William Marks, of Portage, Allegheny County, New York, and Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon continued the office, by power of attorney from said Marks. (History, II, 486)

Again, no explanation is given, but other sources²² indicate that in this case Warren Cowdery was removed from his responsibility

²²See Monte Burr McLaws, "Early Mormon Journalism and the Deseret News, 1830-1898," Diss. Univ. of Missouri 1971.

with the newspaper because of certain allegations he had printed against Smith at the time of the problems of the Kirtland Bank. Monte Burr McLaws, in his University of Missouri doctoral dissertation covering this early period, writes concerning Warren Cowdery that,

In assessing blame for the bank's failure, W. A. Cowdery committed an indiscretion that ended his editorial career. Smith, as object of his frank criticism, discontinued the Advocate and started the Elders' Journal. Published by the President of the Twelve Apostles and edited by the Prophet himself, the newly-named paper soon made it clear there would be a policy change.²³

The Messenger and Advocate actually continued through September, 1837, but in the August issue there appeared a prospectus for a new paper, the Elders' Journal, to be published at Kirtland, Ohio, and to be edited by Joseph Smith (MA, III [August 1837], 545). The prospectus indicated that the Elders' Journal was to be more explicitly a church apologist than its predecessors had been and that it was intended to counter the "lying mania" which plagued the church by way of publishing the correspondence of traveling elders. Thus, the newspaper's name. Sidney Rigdon, who wrote the prospectus, stated that history verified that the only thing that saved the name of the Waldenses from infamy and contempt was the effort they made to leave a true account of themselves in writing, and that the Mormons had a duty to do the same. The Elders' Journal, he offered, was intended to fulfill that duty. Being compelled, then, to remove the newspaper from the hands of a dissident member of the church, Smith himself took over as editor.

²³McLaws, pp. 12-13.

The first printing of the new Elders' Journal appeared in October, 1837. Very little of that first issue was penned by the new editor, however, for most of the issue consisted of letters from various elders of the church. The only portion undersigned by the editor is a brief introduction to a letter from an Elder Kimball to his wife.

The voice of the new frontier editor first comes forth in the second issue of the Elders' Journal, printed in November, 1837.²⁴ Beginning with a statement of editorial policy, Joseph Smith writes,

we calculate to pursue a different course from that of our predecessor /Warren Cowdery/ in the editorial department.-- We will endeavor not to scandalize our own citizens, especially when there is no foundation in truth for so doing.

The remainder of the editorial then consists of a letter which Smith had written to the Saints in the previous September while he and Sidney Rigdon traveled to Far West, Missouri. Smith's Missouri letter is a call for the gathering of the Saints to a place of "refuge and safety, in the day of the wrath of God which is soon to burst upon the head of this generation." Though repeating the theme of the gathering which Smith had discussed before, this letter carries a sound of urgency not heard before. One portion reads:

Now we would recommend to the Saints scattered abroad that they make all possible exertions to gather themselves unto those places; as peace, verily thus saith the Lord, peace shall soon be taken from the earth, and it has

²⁴Joseph Smith, "Editorial Commentary," Elders' Journal, I (November 1837), 27-29. Hereafter: EJ.

already began [sic] to be taken; for a lying spirit has gone out upon all the face of the earth and shall perplex the nations, and shall stur [sic] them up to anger against one another.

Also, Smith indicates that he is "much pleased" with his proposed "New Zion" and that he will soon move there himself. Here again is evidence that Smith was actively engaged in a cause stemming from beliefs not unlike the beliefs of many other religious Americans. The Prophet's editorial in the November Elders' Journal closes with a list of twenty interesting questions gathered by Smith in his travels from persons inquisitive about the Mormons. He promises to answer these questions in another edition.

After having published only two issues, Smith's newly acquired job as editor was temporarily suspended. Certain enemies of the church, wanting to abolish the paper, attacked the printing establishment and destroyed the press. Smith was forced to flee to Far West, Missouri, where he and others soon established a new press, but not until July of the following year did the third issue of the Elders' Journal appear.

The July, 1838, edition of Smith's frontier newspaper displayed a greater variation of his literary skills than had any previous publication to date. For this issue, Smith wrote a simple descriptive narrative, gentle sarcasm, a biographical sketch, and even poetic verse.

The feature article of this issue of the Elders' Journal is a letter written by the Prophet on May 4, 1838, in which he provides an optimistic, romantic description of the Missouri

region (EJ, I [July 1838], 33-34). In a simple letter style and bubbling with enthusiasm over the prospects of the frontier freedom, he boasts,

We might venture an assertion on this point, and that, without the fear of contradiction by those who are acquainted with the settlements in this vicinity, and that is, no part of the world can produce a superior to Caldwell County, if an equal.

Later he adds: "To all appearance the country is healthy, and the farming interest is equal to that in any part of the world; and the means of living are very easily obtained, not even luxuries excepted."

The romantic view of nature, so prevalent in the period, the popular idyllic portrayal of the open frontier--both are evident here. Smith writes:

The Saints here are at perfect peace with all the surrounding inhabitants and persecution is not so much as once named among them: every man can attend to business without fear or excitement, or being molested in any wise.

In every paragraph Smith extols the virtues of the western location of the Saints. The narrative resembles the romantic descriptions given by Alexis de Toqueville and many other romantic writers of the period.

An abrupt change in tone and technique appears under a second article on the editorial page of this issue (I, 42-44). Having promised in the previous issue to answer twenty frequently asked questions, Smith here gives his answers, all of which bear a tone of impatience, dogmatism, and gentle sarcasm. For instance: "Question 1st. Do you believe the bible? Answer. If we do, we are the only people under heaven that does. For there are none of

the religious sects of the day that do." Or this example:

"Question 10. Was not Jo Smith a money digger. ? Answer. Yes, but it was never a very profitable job to him, as he only got fourteen dollars a month for it." Smith's humor is at the expense of the questioner, and the curt answers are intended as reproof of those persons offering foolish questions.

Again the style changes as this issue closes with Smith's obituary of a fourteen-year old boy, son of the newspaper's publisher, Thomas B. Marsh (I, 48). Probably written for consolation of the parents, this lengthy obituary recounts an apocalyptic vision experienced by Marsh's son at the age of nine in which he saw events of the Second Coming and Millennial reign of Christ. Lofty idealism, infused with the Christian principles of hope and salvation, portray a boy who dies painlessly and righteously. The obituary then closes with an interesting twelve-line poem, written in the true tradition of the romantic school, as a final epitaph to the boy:

Thus ends the life of this dear youth,
Who loved the way that leads to heaven
In wisdom's paths he sought the truth,
His manners mild, his temper even,
In vision bright he soared above
And saw the Father face to face,
He heard the Angels sing God's love,
And saw his own abiding place;
He talked with Christ, and saw his name,
Within the book of life inscribed.
He's gone to realize the same,
With God and Angels to abide.

This was Smith's first published attempt at poetic expression, and although far from excellent poetry, it would have had some popular appeal and resembled much of the simple poetry churned out by many

minor poets of the day. Written in basic iambic tetrameter with a rhyme scheme abab cdcd efef, the poem bears the marks of a beginner, but it at least demonstrates Smith's continuing desire to improve his literary skills, even to the extent of experimenting with styles he had never tried before.

The fourth and final edition of the Elders' Journal, dated August, 1838, was published in the midst of great agitation and turmoil among the Latter Day Saints in Missouri. The idyllic Missouri setting had soon become a seething pot of persecution against the Mormons, and mobs threatened to drive Smith and his people out. Under these conditions Smith wrote his last editorial for this newspaper and in it his vexed, agitated, annoyed soul is unmistakably visible (EJ, I [August 1838], 54-55).

Smith's first remarks in this issue have to do with an oration given by Sidney Rigdon wherein he declared that the Saints would no longer take the persecution, but would stand up and fight (I, 53). Smith lends his support to these views, saying, "we are absolutely determined no longer to bear, come life or come death, for to be mobed [sic] any more without taking vengeance, we will not." In this spirit of defiance Smith begins the editorial which occupies four and one-half pages of the newspaper's columns. The editorial is harsh, censoring, and denunciating, and is aimed at numerous apostates from the church, principally Warren Parrish. Many of the apostates are named and labelled mercilessly for their lies, false teachings, and accusing publications. "Poor simpletons!"

Smith writes,

they do not know that he who sits in the heavens is laughing at them, that he has them in derision, and that after he has let them foam out their own shame, and completely work out their own damnation, that he will speak to them in his wrath.

He also calls them "a set of creatures, whose behavior would have disgraced a heathen temple," and by simile he describes the priests of the contemporary religions as they who "gathered around them in swarms, like the flies round Esop's [sic] fox, and opened both their eyes and ears to enjoy a good feast of lies."

Using some rather startling metaphors, Smith calls Parrish "mamma Parrish" and describes what became of certain libelous articles which Parrish had written:

Thus aided, mamma Parrish made a monstrous effort to bring forth. And when the full time of gestation was come, the wonder come [sic] forth, and the priests who were in waiting, seized the animal at its birth, rolled it up in their paper, and sent it abroad to the world; but Rich, Brynton, and Johnson, in the character of midwives, waited around the bed of mamma Parrish to get away the after birth; but awful to relate! they no sooner got it away than mamma expired; and the poor bantling was left on the hands of the priests, to protect and nurse it, without any friend.

These metaphors, which appear throughout the article in a railing expose' of the follies and maligning deeds of these apostates, though perhaps grotesque, are clever and approach in style the satirical images so often produced by Mark Twain. And certainly they portray the vexation of the writer whose Jacksonian ideals of democracy, equality, and freedom had crumbled all around him.

H. CONCLUSION

Following the fourth edition of the Elders' Journal the persecution steadily mounted until the dam broke. The Saints were driven from Missouri, their printing houses were burned, and the Prophet was imprisoned. The first phase of his editorial career ceased. He had come a long way, however, from the backhills of Vermont to the office of a frontier newspaper, the influence of which reached to many corners of the American West. The progress and training which enabled him to assume the responsibilities of a newspaper editor had been constant through his early work with the Book of Mormon, the compilations of his early revelations, the steady attendance upon the writing of a church history, the re-translating of portions of the Bible, his attendance at the School of the Prophets, and, finally, his on-the-job experience in working with the newspapers. The frontier newspapers, in general, proved highly influential upon him in the education they brought to his door; and his social environment, filled with the thought and philosophy of Jacksonianism and democracy, also contributed to the man that he was. By the close of 1838 Joseph Smith had become a figure of some prominence in the West, had become a writer for a frontier newspaper, and, in numerous ideas, was typically Jacksonian America.

Chapter 4

FROM PRISON TO PRINTING OFFICE, 1839-1842: RETURN TO EDITORSHIP

The dramatic saga of Joseph Smith's literary career did not terminate with the violent persecutions which befell the Latter Day Saints near the close of the year 1838. On the contrary, the mobbings, burnings, rapings, imprisonments, and eventual expulsion of the Saints from Missouri, rather than dampening the Prophet's spirit, actuated within him an even greater desire and need to dictate into print the intense emotions which now welled up inside him. He was a man who cared deeply about those who followed him, and, as boldness and daring had characterized him throughout his life, he was now even more willing to leap to the defense of his friends, regardless of the dangers. John Henry Evans, author of Joseph Smith, An American Prophet, aptly stated that

there was a driving force in the man, which enabled him to turn even defeat into another rung of the ladder up which he was climbing. From Palmyra to Nauvoo was a long road to follow, upgrade all the way and beset with boulders, sharp turns, and pitfalls.¹

With this kind of character, then, Joseph Smith over the next three years continued to develop as an American man of letters-- a writer of even greater convictions and a stalwart defender of the faith. His literary productions continued to exhibit strong

¹Evans, p. 8.

characteristics of Jacksonian thought and his prominence as a newspaper writer reached new heights. Beginning the period confined by his enemies in a frontier jail, he later escaped, assisted the Saints in founding Nauvoo, Illinois, and soon thereafter rose again to the position of newspaper editor.

In this chapter, then, we shall first consider the impact which Smith's prison confinement had upon his writings and examine three letters which were written under these conditions. Then we shall follow the sequence of events preceding Smith's return to the editor's chair and examine a large number of newspaper publications which Smith published as editor. In so doing, we shall note Smith's continuing literary development and his close adherence to Jacksonian concepts.

A. WRITINGS FROM LIBERTY JAIL

Despite the extreme hardships endured in the period of imprisonment, this experience, strange as it may seem, contributed significantly to Smith's development as a writer. Previously, Smith's numerous duties and responsibilities had always occupied his full attention, but in Liberty Jail he could go nowhere and do nothing but think and write. As a result, according to the L.D.S. Church Historian, Leonard Arrington, "The Liberty jail experience gave him time to ponder his course, to synthesize ideas, to formulate goals, and to communicate in an unhurried manner with the Lord."²

²Leonard J. Arrington, "Church Leaders in Liberty Jail,"

The compelled meditation, the deep soul searching, provided by ample time in Liberty Jail contributed significantly to the quality of Smith's writings from the jail. Arrington states, "The literature which comes out of the Missouri confinement--the revelations, letters, diary entries--is magnificent, exalting, and eloquent."³ Not all the Liberty Jail literature was published in the newspaper, however, but three examples which were printed in Nauvoo, Illinois, are included in this study.

The Saints who escaped the Missouri persecutions fled first to Quincy, Illinois, and then by July, 1839, had settled in Commerce, later to be called Nauvoo, Illinois. There a monthly religious paper in pamphlet form edited by Don Carlos Smith, the Prophet's brother, was begun under the title Times and Seasons.

The Times and Seasons did not print any of the literature penned by Smith in Liberty Jail until nearly one year after his confinement there. The first item was not one of the "exalting and eloquent" pieces which Arrington refers to, but rather a more simply written correspondence dated March 22, 1839, which Smith had sent to a Mr. Isaac Galland, and which the Times and Seasons printed in February, 1840.⁴ Mr. Galland had demonstrated a sympathy toward the Mormons in a letter to D. W. Rogers and, therefore, Smith writes to him attempting to enlist his support in their

BYU Studies, XIII (Autumn 1972), 25.

³Ibid., p. 21.

⁴Joseph Smith, "Letter to Isaac Galland," Times and Seasons, I (February 1840), 51-56. Hereafter: TS.

cause. The Prophet first recounts emotionally the tragic persecutions:

I am bold to say sir, that a more nefarious transaction never has existed, since the days of yore, than that which has been practiced upon us. Myself and those who are in prison with me, were torn from our houses, with our wives and children clinging to our garments, under the awful expectations of being exterminated.

Smith also provides a simple description of the conditions in the jail where he and his friends sit:

We are kept under a strong guard, night and day, in a prison of double walls and doors, proscribed in our liberty of conscience, our food is scant, uniform, and coarse; we have not the privilege of cooking for ourselves, we have been compelled to sleep on the floor with straw, and not blankets sufficient to keep us warm; and when we have a fire, we are obliged to have almost a constant smoke.

But as Smith reflects further on the Mormon sufferings, his tone becomes more intense. Declaring himself to be an advocate of religious liberty, Smith declares that

if they [the Mormons] had been Mahomedans, Hottentots, or Pagans; or in fine sir, if their religion was as false as hell, what right would men have to drive them from their homes, and their country, or to exterminate them, so long as their religion did not interfere with the civil rights of men, according to the laws of our country?

The concluding paragraphs of Smith's letter to Galland discuss several important principles of Mormon belief which would appear to anyone closely acquainted with Mormon doctrines to resemble closely the Mormon "Articles of Faith."

These "Articles of Faith," which will also be discussed in this chapter, were not written and published by Smith until 1842, and are precise literary masterpieces in phrasing and content. Although the statements made in Smith's communication with Isaac

Galland lack that polished literary quality, they nevertheless appear to be the embryo of the later work. There is evidence that to some extent Smith, in working with various ideas and concepts, was writing them down, mulling them over, revising them, trying to express them more exactly, and, in the end, producing some highly successful literary expression.

Another letter written by Smith in Liberty Jail appeared two months later in the April Times and Seasons (I, 82-86). This letter had been written much earlier than the first, on December 16, 1838, and was addressed

To the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Caldwell county, and to those who are scattered abroad, who are persecuted and made desolate, and who are afflicted in divers manners, for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, by the hands of a cruel mob, and the tyrannical disposition of the authorities of this State.

The opening address and the style employed quite uniformly throughout the letter parallel the epistolary style of the letters of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. As Smith lay those long weeks in that jail, he undoubtedly thought of the Apostle, who like himself was imprisoned for the cause of righteousness, and either consciously or unconsciously, transferred the manner of Paul's Biblical phrases (as rendered by the King James scholars) into his own letter style. We can hear Paul, as well as Joseph Smith, saying, "Know assuredly Dear brethren, that it is for the testimony of Jesus, that we are in bonds and in prison." Like Smith's other published articles, this letter speaks bitterly of those who have persecuted the saints, accuses those who have betrayed them,

issues a warning of repentance, exhorts the faithful, and closes with the assertion that "Zion shall yet live: although she seemeth to be dead."

New heights of literary achievement were reached by the Prophet when, between March 20 and March 25, 1839, while sitting in the Liberty Jail, he penned a lengthy letter "To Bishop Partridge, and to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, in Quincy, Illinois, and to those scattered abroad, throughout all the regions about." When the letter was finally published in the Times and Seasons more than a year later, it was published in two parts in the May and July issues, and occupied nearly eight double-columned printed pages (TS, I, 99-104; I, 131-34).

This is one of the works which Arrington extols so highly. But though there is a high level of sublimity and eloquence reached several times in this letter, other portions vary considerably in style and quality. Moreover, the various levels of literary excellence and inspirational thought are in most cases clearly distinguishable one from another, as can be seen in the excerpts which follow. There are sections of high eloquence and of the highest literary quality, there are also other portions that are excellent literature, but are not quite so eloquent, and still other parts of the letter are less distinctive and are like Smith's previous letters, narrational, plain, and unembellished.

Like the December 16 letter from Liberty Jail, this letter of the following March blends in the stylistic overtones of the writings of the Apostle Paul. In addressing himself to the

Saints as "Your humble servant Joseph Smith jr. prisoner for Christ's sake," Smith again deliberately writes in the manner of the ancient apostle. Likewise, Smith discloses the same expression of love and fellowship for which Paul is noted in such statements as this:

Therefore under these circumstances, dearly beloved brethren, we are the more ready to claim your fellowship and love. Our situation is calculated to awaken our minds to a sacred remembrance of your affection, and kindness; and we think that your situation will have the same effect; therefore, we believe, that nothing can separate us from the love of God, and our fellowship one with another.

The epistolary quality of the above lines, that is, the simple conversational tone, is a good example of the first stylistic level present in Smith's letter.

Perhaps the same thing happened to Paul as happened to Joseph Smith during the time of his imprisonment. One would think that months of hardship and frequent persecution would harden the man, but this letter by Smith does not indicate any such characteristic. The style, however, reveals a man of feeling and deep compassion. Jeffrey O. Johnson, in compiling a collection of Joseph Smith's letters in the LDS Church Archives, notes this fact and comments that Joseph's holographs show a man of mellow spirit and deep sensitivity rather than bitterness. After months of imprisonment, . . . he is revealed by his letters as being still full of love and tender concern for others."⁵ Even though in many

⁵Johnson, p. 4.

parts of this letter Smith expresses defiance toward his persecutors, his indignation is in the form of a defense of those whom he loves.

Because of Smith's strongly projected tender, compassionate feelings and love for the Saints, the literary style and expression in this letter on several occasions reach new heights. In a rising crescendo of inspirational feeling, these words suddenly appear:

O God! where art thou? and where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place? How long shall thy hand be stayed, and thy pure eyes behold from the heavens, the wrongs and sufferings of thy people and of thy servants; and thine ears be penetrated with their cries? How long, O Lord! shall they thus suffer, before thine heart shall be softened towards them, and thy bowels be moved with compassion towards them? O Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven, earth, and seas, and of all things that in them is, and who controlleth and subjecteth the devil and the dark and benighted dominions of Shaole, stretch forth thy hand, let thine eye pierce, let thy pavilion be taken up, let thy hiding place no longer be uncovered, let thine heart be softened, and thy bowels moved with compassion towards thy people; and let thine anger be kindled against our enemies, and in thy fury let fall the sword of thine indignation and avenge us of our wrongs. Remember thy suffering saints, our God! and thy servants will rejoice in thy name forever.⁶

This is an example of the highest of the three styles employed in this letter. What Smith has written here is rapturous. It is a bursting, emotional outpouring, a pleading poetic invocation of the highest quality. In no previously published newspaper letter or editorial has Smith so well executed his literary technique.

⁶This and seven other portions of equal literary quality in Smith's letter are considered revelations by Latter-day Saints and are canonized as sections 121, 122, and 123 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Immediately following the eloquent passage quoted above, Smith reverts to his first, the plainer style. This rising and falling pattern occurs generally throughout the work, with the exception of a few passages that reach a respectable level of literary quality perhaps somewhere between the two extremes. Such a one is the following in which the Prophet's thoughts on love and friendship are excellently written, but in a style which does not reach quite the same eloquence achieved in the preceding quotation:

Those who have not been enclosed in the walls of a prison, without cause or provocation; can have but little idea, how sweet the voice of a friend or one token of friendship is, from any source whatever, and awakens and calls into action every sympathetic feeling of the human heart, it brings to review every thing that has passed, it seizes the present with the velocity of lightning, and grasps after the future with fond anticipation; it fills the mind with tenderness and love until all enmity, malice, hatred, past differences, misunderstanding and mismanagements are entirely forgotten or are slain victims at the feet of love.

The tone in this passage is neither invocative nor simply conversational. It is meditational, mellow, and expressive of warm feeling. The thought is wisdom spoken wisely.

Another well written passage of this second level might well be considered Smith's philosophy concerning the source of poetic imagination:

A fanciful, flowery and heated imagination [sic] be aware of, for the things of God are of vast importance, and require time and experience as well as deep and solemn thought to find them out; and if we would bring souls to salvation it requires that our friends should rise to the highest heavens, search into and contemplate the lowest abyss, expand wide as eternity and hold communion with Deity.

These and other passages clearly demonstrate Smith's remarkable development since his humble beginnings as an uneducated plowboy in the backhills of Vermont.

We should not terminate the foregoing discussion of Joseph Smith's eloquent Liberty Jail letter without also noting several ideas in that letter which further associate Smith with the Jacksonian age. In fact, one aspect of Smith's social philosophy relating to the importance of friendship and love has been identified already in a passage quoted above. This letter and other publications by Smith make it plain that he considered friendship and love important factors in the successful formation of a cohesive society, particularly the Zion society which he was striving to establish. Such a philosophy certainly would not have seemed strange nor out of place in that day when Jacksonian idealism fostered the growth of numerous Utopian and communal societies, all of which stressed brotherhood, equality, and union among all people.

What was unique about the Prophet's philosophy of love and brotherhood was his grand scale implementation of this concept. Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote that even though "man has a right to be employed, to be trusted, to be loved, to be revered, the power of love as the basis of a State, has never been tried." He further added, "What is strange too, there never was in any man sufficient faith in the power of rectitude to inspire him with the broad design of renovating the State on the principle of right

and love."⁷ Joseph Smith, however, was the exception and did strive to establish Zion on a broad scale.

Besides the element of love, Smith viewed economic equality as absolutely essential for the success of Zion, and he stressed this factor in one portion of the letter that he sent from Liberty Jail:

If there are any among you, who aspire after their own agrandizement and oppulence /sic/ while their brethren are groaning in poverty, and laboring under sore trials and temptations, they cannot be benefited by the intercessions of the Holy Spirit: we aught /sic/ at all times to be very careful that such high mindedness never have place in our hearts, but condescend to men of low estate, and with all suffering, bare /sic/ the infirmities of the weak /sic/.

Smith makes it clear, however, that he does not intend by this advice that a communal society be established at this time. He writes, "Again he would suggest to the brethren, that there be no organization of large bodies upon common stock principles until the Lord shall signify it in a proper manner." His apparent aim is to help the needy and establish a form of economic equality, but to maintain individuality through continuing private ownership. In both principles he was following the concepts of Jacksonian Democracy.

One additional precept which coincided with the principles of democracy and which the Prophet affirmed in this letter was that of religious equality. At no time did Smith deny any other person the right to worship according to his own beliefs. To the Saints

⁷Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Politics," Essays: Second Series in The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Centenary Edition (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903), III, 219-21.

he wrote: "There is a duty, which we in common with all men, owe to Government, laws, and the regulations in the civil concerns of life; these guarantee to all parties and denominations of religion equal, and inalienable rights." Further, he concludes that "the Mormons, as well as the Presbyterians and every other denomination, have equal rights to partake of the fruits of the great tree of our national liberty." On this note, in the true spirit of Jacksonianism, Smith closes his letter from Liberty Jail.

B. SMITH'S HISTORICAL EXTRACT

Once Joseph Smith and his associates had escaped their captors in Missouri and fled northward into Quincy, Illinois, the Prophet immediately resumed his responsibilities as leader of his people. He made arrangements to purchase thousands of acres of land, reorganized the church leadership, sought legal action for redress and compensation from the State of Missouri for the losses sustained by the Latter Day Saints, and turned again to the writing of a history of the Church.⁸

Previous mention has been made of the sporadic efforts which Smith made to maintain a church record and of his difficulties in doing so. All the evidence indicates that Smith was concerned not only with keeping a complete and accurate record as a witness of the events that had occurred, but also that he was very concerned with the literary quality of his work. The writing

⁸Evans, p. 145.

of Smith's history was important to his literary development because of the contributions which that history made both in providing a continuous literary practice and in providing substantial source materials for his newspaper publications. Initial evidence of this is seen in the first newspaper article that Smith published in Illinois.

Joseph Smith printed his first article in the new Times and Seasons in November, 1839 (I, 5-9). Entitled "Extract, from the Private Journal of Joseph Smith Jr.," the article is an autobiographical narration of Smith's experiences in Missouri, an article which he calls "A bill of Damages Against the State of Missouri on Account of the Suffering and Losses Sustained therein." The date given for its writing is June 4, 1839, which was one week before the Prophet recorded that he was again commencing his history.⁹ Written mostly in the same simple style typical of many of Smith's works, this account of the injustices suffered by the Saints is nevertheless moving and reveals some of the style and tone reminiscent of the early American romance narratives, such as the gripping Indian tales of James Fenimore Cooper. Here Joseph Smith tells of his capture by the mob:

I cannot begin to tell the scene which I there witnessed. The loud cries and yells of more than one thousand voices, which rent the air and could be heard for miles; and the horrid and blasphemous threats and curses which were poured upon us in torrents were enough to appal the stoutest heart.

⁹On Tuesday, June 11, Smith recorded, "I commenced dictating my history for my clerk, James Mulholland to write" (History, III, 375).

Descriptive clichés such as "loud cries and yells," "rent the air," "horrid and blasphemous threats and curses," and "appal the stoutest heart" were common in many of the frontier novels. Similar expression appears in Smith's description of events preceding his being taken away from his family: "When I entered my home, they clung to my garments, their eyes streaming with tears, while mingled emotions of joy and sorrow were manifest in their countenances." The impact of these lines is even more poignant in their being actual and not fictional.

The stylistic overtones of this journal extract change considerably as the narrative moves into the incensed writer's appeal for redress and restitution. He cries "that in a land which is the cradle of Liberty and equal rights . . . a persecution, the most unwarrantable, was commenced" which struck "a deadly blow . . . at the institutions, for which our Fathers had fought many a hard battle, and for which many a Patriot had shed his blood." The writer concludes his narrative with the expression: "I invoke the genius of our constitution, I appeal to the patriotism of Americans, to stop this unlawful and unholy procedure ." This is not the last time that Joseph Smith will turn to the Jacksonian precepts of liberty and equal rights in issuing his appeals to the body politic. There will be many more occasions wherein he will, in the spirit of democracy, turn defender of the faith as an inherent right and a free Jacksonian American.

C. INVOLVEMENT IN ILLINOIS POLITICS

Joseph Smith had reached a high degree of literary success in his letters from the Liberty Jail in 1839, but between that time and 1842, with the exception of the above journal extract, his literary production was sparse. Except for a few newspaper pieces relating to Smith's increasing political activities, no significant newspaper articles appeared. During this time, however, Smith continued to work on the historical record of the church and was also engaged in completing the Book of Abraham, a translation of the papyrus record which he had obtained with the Egyptian mummies in Kirtland, Ohio. He was, therefore, still heavily engaged in literary work, but was publishing very little in the newspaper.

With the rise of the city of Nauvoo came Smith's increasing involvement in political activities, and his newspaper writings, beginning in 1842, likewise lean increasingly toward political issues. In March, 1841, Smith had been appointed Lieutenant-General to the newly formed Nauvoo Legion (History, IV, 309); in May, notable political figures had begun visiting Nauvoo (TS, II [15 May 1841], 414); and by December, Smith was awaiting the outcome of the Democratic gubernatorial convention.¹⁰

Smith's first newspaper article of 1842 emphasizes the Jacksonian concept of equal rights and encourages the saints to vote for those who support equal rights regardless of party

¹⁰Thompson, p. 83-90.

affiliation. Smith printed these views on January 1, 1842, in the Times and Seasons in an article reporting the Democratic nomination of "Colonel Adam W. Snyder for GOVERNOR, and Colonel John Moore for LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR of the State of Illinois" (III, 651). Smith describes these men as "sterling men, and friends of equal rights--opposed to the oppressor's grasp, and the tyrant's rod," and he further states,

In the next canvass we shall be influenced by no party consideration /W/e care not a fig for Whig or Democrat: they are both alike to us; but we shall go for our friends, our TRIED FRIENDS, and the cause of human liberty which is the cause of God.

Smith's words echo the disappointment which the Mormons had experienced in the past with both the Whig and Democratic parties, as well as the Prophet's determination to follow men of sound principles wherever they could be found. In Missouri the Democrats in office had turned against the Mormons and, as a result, in the Presidential election of 1840, the Mormons in Nauvoo voted overwhelmingly for the Whig candidate, William Henry Harrison.¹¹ When political candidates began to recognize the power of the Mormon vote they began to visit Nauvoo seeking Mormon support.

It was about this time that Smith seemed to change his support from the Whigs to the Democrats. Edward G. Thompson's masters thesis on the political involvements of Joseph Smith indicate that

This change was probably aided by the fact that on June 4, 1841, Joseph visited for about two hours with Governor Thomas Carlin (A Whig Governor) at Quincy. They

¹¹Ibid., p. 77.

seemed to have had a very pleasant exchange, but within a few hours the Governor issued a warrant for Joseph's arrest which had been requested by the Missouri authorities.¹²

Carlin also advocated repeal of the Nauvoo charter. Thus, when the 1841 Illinois State Democratic convention nominated for governor Adam W. Snyder, who had assisted in passing the Nauvoo Charter in the Senate, Smith threw his support that way. It was through this letter that Smith publicized his support.

D. SMITH BECOMES A NAUVOO EDITOR

Just as Joseph Smith was turning his attention to political events the Times and Seasons, on February 15, 1842, announced a surprising change in the editorship of that paper (III, 696). Ebenezer Robinson, who had succeeded Don Carlos Smith as editor in September, 1841, published his "Valedictory," in which he announced the following:

I now take leave of the editorial department of the Times and Seasons, having disposed of my entire interest in the printing establishment, book-bindery, and stereotype foundery, and they are transferred into other hands. The Editorial chair will be filled by our esteemed brother, President Joseph Smith, assisted by Elder John Taylor, of the Quorum of the Twelve, under whose able and talented guidance, this will become the most interesting and useful religious journal of the day.

Three and one-half years had passed since Smith had worked as a newspaper editor, but he now returned to that position. His experience was limited in that he had previously published only four issues of a monthly newspaper, whereas now he would take the

¹²Ibid., p. 79.

helm of what had become a bi-weekly publication. Considerably more effort and skill would be required of him.

There were two reasons why Smith suddenly assumed once more the position of editor. The first reason is that he had completed the translation of the Egyptian records to be known as the Book of Abraham and "took over the editorship of the periodical specifically to supervise the publication of his translations of these ancient records."¹³ The second reason is that the church leadership was dissatisfied with the editorial policies of Ebenezer Robinson (History, IV, 494-95). In conjunction with that, however, Smith reported a revelation given January 28, 1842, which commanded him to have the twelve apostles "take in hand the editorial department of the Times and Seasons" (History, IV, 503); in doing so the Twelve transferred the publication and editorship to Joseph Smith.

The March 1, 1842, issue of the Times and Seasons began Smith's editorial career in Nauvoo. His opening editorial remarks read:

This paper commences my editorial career. I alone stand responsible for it, and shall do for all papers having my signature henceforward. I am not responsible for the publication, or arrangement of the former paper, the matter did not come under my supervision. (TS, III, 710)

The Times and Seasons, as the name implied, was devoted principally to religious subjects reporting the events of the times and emphasizing that it was the season for preparations to be made

¹³James R. Clark, "Joseph Smith and Lebolo's Egyptian Papyri," BYU Studies, VIII (Winter 1968), 201.

to usher in the millennial reign of Christ. The circulation of the Mormon newspaper was apparently rather extensive, for an article published October 15, 1841, "boasted that the paper circulated in every state and territory of the United States as well as in parts of Canada and Europe."¹⁴ This meant that Smith's name as editor of this newspaper would be spread widely to many regions of the country where he would receive widespread exposure as an American writer.

E. THE WENTWORTH LETTER

Joseph Smith had his debut as an editor in Nauvoo with the publication of a remarkable summary of the history of the church (TS, III, 706-10). This article has since become known as the "Wentworth Letter" because Smith states that,

At the request of Mr. John Wentworth, Editor, and Proprietor of the "Chicago Democrat," I have written the following sketch of the rise, progress, persecution, and faith of the Latter Day Saints, of which I have the honor, under God, of being the founder.

Unlike the 1838 and 1839 beginnings of the written history of the church, this second account was written to nonmembers of the church and was the first account published. Already Smith's name had gained such prominence that the editor of the Chicago Democrat wished "to furnish a Mr. Bastow, a friend of his, who is writing the history of New Hampshire, with this document." Smith complied with this request and succeeded in producing a brief but lucid

¹⁴McLaws, p. 17.

historical account starting with his own birth and sketching the events of the rise of the church up to the Nauvoo period. The sketch then concludes with thirteen of the most concise, yet comprehensive statements of doctrine ever penned by Joseph Smith. These thirteen have become known as the Latter-day Saints' "Articles of Faith."

The "Wentworth Letter" is remarkable from a literary standpoint not because of any contrived eloquence, but because of the eloquence achieved in simplicity. Speaking in the first person, Smith relates a candid, unembellished story of his own life in a manner devoid of boasting. Speaking of having been visited by "an angel of God sent to bring the joyful tidings," Joseph Smith states simply: "I was informed that I was chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring about some of his purposes in this glorious dispensation."

The same simplicity prevails in the "Articles of Faith" but is combined with a conciseness that allows each article to stand alone--complete and without need of further explanation. The first article reads: "We believe in God the Eternal Father, and in his son Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." The ninth article reads: "We believe all that God has revealed, all that he does now reveal, and we believe that he will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

Smith's previous effort to express the beliefs of the church, as mentioned in a letter to Isaac Galland, appears to have been the embryo of the Articles of Faith. A comparison of the ninth article, quoted above, with its earlier form will show the

synthesis and condensation of both form and idea which Smith managed to achieve in the "Wentworth Letter." The earlier form reads:

We believe that we have a right to revelations, visions, and dreams from God, our heavenly Father; and light and intelligence, through the gift of the Holy Ghost, in the name of Jesus Christ, on all subjects pertaining to our spiritual welfare. (TS, I /February 1840/, 54)

Having changed the emphasis from the right to revelations and the benefits derived therefrom to God's revealed word itself in the past, present, and future, Smith achieves a simpler, yet more striking, statement of belief.

Only a few beliefs of the church were summarized in Joseph Smith's earlier writing, but the thirteen statements penned in the "Wentworth Letter" provide probably the most complete and concise catechism of Mormon Doctrine that can be written.

The "Wentworth Letter," in addition to its stylistic qualities, also expresses a wide range of ideas consistent with Jacksonian concepts of that period. Revivalism and millennialism appear in Smith's account of the appearance of an angel who announced "that the time was at hand for the gospel, in all its fulness to be preached in power, unto all nations that a people might be prepared for the millennial reign." Utopianism appears again in the Prophet's account of the settlements made in Jackson County where "we made large purchases of land, our farms teeming with plenty, and peace and happiness is enjoyed in our domestic circle and throughout our neighborhood." Also, elements of romanticism, found in references to the aborigines, to works of antiquity, and to ancient history, are contained in this letter. Joseph Smith writes, "I was also

informed concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of this country, and shown who they were, and from whence they came." He speaks of ancient records "filled with engravings in Egyptian characters and bound together in a volume The whole book exhibiting many marks of antiquity in its construction and much skill in the art of engraving." And he adds that the book contained "the history of ancient America . . . from its first settlement by a colony that came from the tower of Babel at the confusion of languages to the beginning of the fifth century of the Christian era."

Another concept which also appears in the "Wentworth Letter," is that of Christian primitivism. Smith writes as the sixth "Article of Faith," "We believe in the same organization that existed in the primitive church, viz: apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, etc." This turning back to the primitive church of Christ for organizational patterns and doctrine was a fundamental religious philosophy of Mormonism. All in all, the "Wentworth Letter," in addition to being a highly successful literary work, exhibits many ideas closely resembling the thought of Jacksonian America.

F. THE NEW EDITOR'S NEWSPAPER WRITINGS

The second number of the Times and Seasons (III, 15 March 1842) to appear under the editorship of Joseph Smith carried both the commencement of the long awaited "History of Joseph Smith" and the conclusion of the Book of Abraham which had been initiated in the previous issue. This History continued serially in sixty-one

of the sixty-three issues of the Times and Seasons which were printed in the remaining years of Smith's life and until the newspaper terminated on February 15, 1845.¹⁵

Space will not allow in this study a literary analysis of the "History of Joseph Smith" as it was published in the Times and Seasons. Suffice it to say that the literary quality of portions of that work, particularly the account of the First Vision, is demonstrative of Joseph Smith at his best writing ability. Regardless of his reasons for writing the history, it was only after years of training and actual writing experience gained through numerous channels that Smith successfully proceeded with the history.

During the eight-month period in which Smith served as editor for the Times and Seasons he rose to his peak in the volume of newspaper articles which he wrote and gained national prominence as a result of his writings. Considering the fact that during this period Smith was also maintaining the constant writing and publishing of historical extracts, the number of articles which he published was phenomenal. Because of the large number of newspaper publications written by Smith in this period we shall examine them under four subject headings: articles which reflect the relationship and reputation of Joseph Smith among other journalists, articles which defend the Mormon position politically and religiously, editorials centered on the scripturally based doctrines of the church, and the letters sent to the newspaper by the Prophet while

¹⁵A survey of issues of the Times and Seasons reveals that only in the May 15, 1844, and June 1, 1844, issues were extracts from Smith's history not printed.

temporarily absent from the printing office because of charges and persecutions which had arisen.

When Joseph Smith began to publish the Book of Abraham and his church history, these literary productions almost immediately began to attract considerable attention wherever the Mormon newspaper circulated. Within a relatively short time other newspapers, following the prevalent pattern of the era, began to reprint portions of Smith's work with accompanying commentaries. Smith recorded on May 16 the following:

Several of the most widely circulated papers are beginning to exhibit "Mormonism" in its true light. The first cut of a "facsimile" from the Book of Abraham, has been republished both in the New York Herald and in the Dollar Week Bostonian, as well as in the Boston Daily Ledger, edited by Mr. Bartlett; together with the translation from the Book of Abraham.
(History, V, 11)

Smith's reputation steadily increased across the eastern portions of the United States as his literary work spread through the various newspapers. Whether despised or revered, his name became better known in many circles not only as a Prophet of the Mormons, but also as a reputable editor and man of letters.

Another Latter Day Saint publication which was initiated at this same time was likewise beneficial in printing and circulating Joseph Smith's writings. The Prophet himself gave the following description and purpose of this new newspaper just two weeks after he published his first issue of the Times and Seasons:

Saturday evening the 16th March, 1842.

On this day the first number of The Wasp, a miscellaneous weekly newspaper was first published at my office, William Smith, editor, devoted to the arts, sciences,

literature, agriculture, manufacture, trade, commerce, and the general views of the day, on a small sheet, at \$1.50 per annum. (History, IV, 600)

The Wasp in the future would reprint a number of Joseph Smith's articles thereby increasing their circulation. Thus both Mormon and gentile newspapers played an important role in the dissemination of Smith's writings to many points of the country where otherwise his name would have remained unknown. Because of their habit of reprinting interesting information or bits of curiosity found in whatever source available, the editors of non-Mormon newspapers were quick to take advantage of gossip and tales related to the curious Mormon sect, generally for muckraking purposes, but occasionally to sympathize with them. In such a manner the name of Joseph Smith eventually attracted considerable interest and recognition, both as a religious leader and an editor, throughout large areas of the country.

Smith, in the meantime, paid close attention to the press and what the editors were saying of the Mormons. As editor of the Times and Seasons he communicated frankly with journalists and frequently made mention of the ill or good they were doing for the Mormon cause. Two of the editors who earned the Prophet's praise were James Gordon Bennett, editor of the New York Herald, and Colonel John Wentworth of the Chicago Democrat. In editorial comments supplied in his newspaper of April 15, 1842, Smith wrote of the former:

Now James Gordon Bennett is one of the most able editors, and his Herald one of the best conducted papers this world ever saw. He is a more moral man, a greater benefactor of the human race, and a better Christian, than any sectarian editor on this continent; and the New York Herald diffuses more useful knowledge and correct information than all their

illiberal, bigoted, prejudiced, narrow contracted papers combined. (TS, III, 758-59)

As for Colonel Wentworth, Smith stated that "The west can boast of no more able editor, nor can any of her growing cities produce a better conducted paper." Smith also added, "He Wentworth certainly is one of the most brilliant stars in the constellation of Illinois--and as a political leader he has no superior."

Smith's regard for Bennett and Wentworth, it seems, had grown more out of the impartial and fair representation which the Herald and Democrat had given the Mormons than from Smith's "newspaper sense." So grateful was Smith to Bennett for "his very liberal and unprejudiced course" toward him, that he persuaded the Nauvoo council, on December 18, 1841, to pass a resolution expressing gratitude to Bennett and recommending all citizens to subscribe to the New York Herald (History, IV, 477-78).

More important, however, is the fact that here we find two of the leading newspapers in the country widely disseminating Smith's writings and thereby increasing his stature as a writer, even making comparisons between Smith and the more prominent American authors. A reprint from Bennett's Herald in the Times and Seasons of May 2, 1842, illustrates this point (III, 773). The article, entitled "The Mormons--A Leaf from Joe Smith," accompanies a chapter from Smith's Book of Abraham and comments:

This Joe Smith is undoubtedly one of the greatest characters of the age. He indicates as much talent, originality, and moral courage as Mahomet, Odin or any of the great spirits that have hitherto produced the revolutions of past ages.

Bennett's article continues with praise for Smith's spiritual influence which, as he sees it, is much needed in a materialistic world. He further comments:

We certainly want some such prophet to start up, take a big hold of the public mind--and stop the torrent of materialism that is hurrying the world into infidelity, immorality, licentiousness, and crime.--Professor Lyel, Richard Adams Locke, Dr. Brisbane, Master Emmerson [sic], Prophet Brownson, Horace Greely, and all the materialists of the age, ought to take a leaf of common sense out of Joe's book.

Smith's editorial comments following this article refer to Bennett as one who "acts with more candor and honesty, and is more of a gentleman and philanthropist than most of the editors of the present day" (TS, III, 775). He adds sardonically,

The very pious and holy editors of the "Baptist Advocate,"-- "The New York Evangelist," and the "Christian Advocate and Journal," and many other of the holy order that we might mention, would do well to pattern after the moral honesty and righteousness of Mr. Bennett.

Further comments on the editorial policies of various newspapers appear in the May 16 issue of the Times and Seasons (III, 790). In this issue Smith expresses pleasure "that the press is changing its tone a little, in regard to the subject of Mormonism." He again mentions Bennett and Wentworth, but also includes as "honest and candid journalists," "Mr. William Bartlett, of the Dollar Weekly Bostonian" and "Mr. Joel Munson, editor of the New York State Mechanic." Thereafter follows a reprint of an article from the Dollar Weekly Bostonian entitled "The Mormons--Joe Smith, the Prophet." In part it reads:

Joe is decidedly the greatest original of the present day. * * * * We should not be surprised if Joe should become as omnipotent as ever the Pope was in his palmiest days.

He is a genius--and a rare one We have so high an opinion of Joe Smith that we intend to open a correspondence with him in order to acquaint ourself /sic/ with all his secret springs of action, and thus get all the secrets of his success, public, and private, worldly and ecclesiastical.

There is an ambiguous tone present in this article with the possibility that the writer was mocking Smith, but Smith took the comments literally, and hence his praise for the editor.

The last editorial in which Smith comments regarding newspaper reactions to Mormonism appeared in the Times and Seasons of August 1, 1842 (III, 874-78). Preceding this date, on June 25, 1842, Smith had published in the Wasp a lengthy exposé of the apostate activities of Dr. John C. Bennett,¹⁶ an article which was soon reprinted in Smith's own newspaper (TS, III /1 July 1842/, 839-42). Then on August 1, owing to a large number of articles appearing in various newspapers regarding the Bennett affair, Smith published additional comments aimed at revealing the facts in the matter. As Bennett had published falsified stories against the Mormons in the Springfield Sangamo Journal, Smith especially desired to demonstrate the truth to that newspaper. Smith writes,

As John C. Bennett and the Sangamo Journal have called upon several persons, in this city, to come out and make disclosures, relative to the things about which they /Bennett and the Journal/ have been writing: they /persons in Nauvoo/ have responded to the call, and publish the following . .

. .

Thereafter follow affidavits from Nauvoo citizens disclaiming the Bennett charges. Smith then includes extracts from several other

¹⁶ Joseph Smith, "Editorial Commentary," The Wasp, I (25 June 1842), 41-42. Hereafter: Wasp.

newspapers to prove to Bennett that not everyone is believing his fictitious charges as they have appeared in the Sangamo Journal.

Of a column in the St. Louis Gazette favorable to the Mormons,

Smith remarks:

The Gazette is entitled to our thanks for his liberality and patriotic course towards Dr. Bennett, and the Mormons. If editors generally would act thus legally and wise, such catch pennies as Bennett, Harris, and about niney-nine others, would find their common level in their own infamy.

Smith likewise prints extracts from the Missouri Reporter and the Bostonian, both of which cast doubts on Bennett's stories. Smith's editorial closes with a petition to the editor of the Quincy Whig to print a short piece which in effect states that "not all Mormons are perfect." In a rather caustic tone and with reference to the Old Testament "scapegoat" practice, Smith cleverly writes of Bennett as a scapegoat:

In regards to his being a scape goat to carry the sins of others, we think that he will do pretty well if he is able to carry his own sins without fainting. We neither want Bennett to sacrifice a lamb, nor do we want a goat to carry our sins into the wilderness, we are ready to atone for our own sins and to answer for our own transgression. We further hope that all other goats that are in our midst will pack up their sins and walk, but if when they get away they should try to persuade the public that they are somebody's else sins and not their own that they are packing, we may give the public information relative to the matter.

Smith has learned well by now the effective use of the newspaper as the best means of giving the public correct information. A considerable amount of publicity surrounded various occurrences in Nauvoo, and communications in numerous newspapers from Illinois to the eastern seaboard conveyed the name of Joseph Smith into thousands of American homes. Just how much attention was given Smith's writings

by the individual subscribers cannot be ascertained, of course, but it would be safe to say, judging by the frequency with which his name appeared in papers, that Smith's reputation as a religious phenomenon and as a newspaper editor was at least as great as, and perhaps greater than, the reputation gained by a multitude of minor romantic writers of the day and by a good number of editors whose names also became quite familiar in the columns of many newspapers.

In a number of the newspaper articles which Smith wrote while editor in Nauvoo he assumes the role of "Defender of the Faith," defending the political and religious views of himself and his people. Among political issues, abolitionism caused Smith the greatest concern, but the necessity of defending his position on that issue arose as a result of a letter he published in the March 15, 1842, Times and Seasons (TS, III, 724). This brief letter was in response to correspondence between Dr. Charles V. Dyer, of Chicago, and General John C. Bennett, of Nauvoo, which had previously been printed in a paper called the Genius of Liberty, and was afterward reprinted in the same March 15 issue of the Times and Seasons. Two months later the Wasp also published this series of correspondence (I, 28 May 1842, 26-27).

Dyer and Bennett discuss in their letters the subject of American slavery and the sentencing of three men of the Quincy Mission Institute to twelve years confinement in the Missouri penitentiary for no criminal cause. Both Dyer and Bennett express anti-slavery sentiments as well as desires for penal reform. Smith replies to

Bennett's letter:

I have just been perusing your correspondence with Doctor Dyer on the subject of American slavery, and the students of the Quincy Mission Institute, and it makes my blood boil within me to reflect on the injustice, cruelty, and oppression, of the rulers of the people--when will these things cease to be, and the Constitution and Laws again bear rule? I fear for my beloved country--mob violence, injustice, and cruelty, appear to be the darling attributes of Missouri, and no man taketh it to heart! O, tempora! O, mores! What think you should be done?

The manner in which Smith expressed himself--"it makes my blood boil within me to reflect upon the injustice, cruelty, and oppression"--while referring to slavery and penal form led his readers to believe he was an abolitionist. This misunderstanding later became a cause of concern to Smith.

Also peculiar in this brief letter is Smith's insertion of hitherto unused Latin phrases at the end. Apparently such Latinisms, although commonly used in the florid style of many journalists, rise from the influence of John C. Bennett upon Smith. Bennett's letters all portray him as highly educated and well read and are heavily laden with classical images, Latin phrases, and elaborate literary allusions. Smith, apparently impressed by Bennett's education and background, was quick either to imitate or borrow these literary devices.

The topic of abolitionism returned to haunt Smith a few months later by way of a political address delivered by Governor Joseph Duncan on April 4, 1842. The June 1 issue of the Times and Seasons carried a reprinted report of that speech in which Duncan made reference to the Dyer-Bennett-Smith correspondence which he

had read in the Mormon newspaper (III, 806). This report quoted the Governor as saying:

It struck us with a good deal of astonishment that Joe Smith and Gen. Bennett should thus publicly avow their abolition principles in the very face of the proclamation of the prophet, as the military leader of the Mormons, to all his followers to vote for Mr. Snyder for Governor WHO IS HIMSELF ONE OF THE LARGEST SLAVE HOLDERS IN THE STATE. To us it displayed an inconsistency irreconcilable with common honesty.

In the same issue of the paper, Smith, faced with the accusation of being an abolitionist, disclaims the accusation. He states,

In regard to the correspondence between Dr. V. Dyer and Gen. Bennett, referred to by Mr. Duncan, his statements are foul perversions of truth; the correspondence does not shew either myself or Gen. Bennett to be abolitionists, but the friends of equal rights and privileges to all men. (TS, III /1 June 1842/, 808)

One month later Smith further explained his stand on this issue by publishing this response:

We have received a letter from the south asking us if we believe in the principle of stealing slaves from their masters. We unequivocally state that we do not! Nor do we believe at all in the principles of modern abolitionists; we are opposed to the principles of oppression only, and would say as Paul said to servants--"servants obey your masters,"--and we hold the rights of all men sacred, and would be the last to infringe upon any man's property. (TS, III /1 July 1842/, 843)

Smith's affirmation of "equal rights and privileges to all men," coupled with his stand against abolitionists, seems contradictory and inconsiderate of the slaves as men. However, Smith's philosophy is based on a statement he made years earlier in a letter to Oliver Cowdery and the Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate, wherein he explains the apparent contradiction. In that letter, which was

discussed in a previous chapter of this study, Smith gave scriptural basis to his stand on slavery, explaining that slavery was included in the Lord's purposes and that only He could abolish it. Smith wrote:

What could have been the design of the Almighty in this wonderful occurrence is not for me to say: but I can say, that the curse is not yet taken off the sons of Canaan, neither will be until it is affected by as great power as caused it to come: and the people who interfere the least with the decrees and purposes of God in this matter, will come under the least condemnation before him. (MA, II /April 1836/, 290)

Not desirous of interfering with the eternal purposes, Smith refuses to turn abolitionist.

The significance of the preceding articles on abolition in regard to this study is that they lend further credence to the thesis that Smith was a Jacksonian in his newspaper writings. That is to say that Smith was not merely a journalist of the Jacksonian era, but, more importantly, that the topics and discussions contained in his various writings were indeed the same vital issues about which most Americans were thinking and about which other men of letters were writing. Here, then, is evidence that Smith was certainly involved in the abolition debate, which was central to American thought.

In defending the Saints against the false charges made in Governor Duncan's speech (wherein Smith had been labeled an abolitionist), Joseph also expresses his views on yet other important topics of the period: religious equality and the separation of church and state. Duncan had referred to the Mormons as a peculiar people

governed by their own special laws, but Smith refutes that, saying,

Gov. Duncan knows that the law knows no difference between Mormon citizens and other citizens, and that there is no law in the United States, or in this state to prevent people from worshipping the Almighty God according to the dictates of their conscience; that under the broad flag of American liberty the Methodists, Presbyterians, Catholics, Universalists, Friends, or Latter Day Saints, are all one. (TS, III /1 June 1842/, 807)

Having expressed his views on religious equality, Smith next makes comments in reference to Duncan's charges that the Nauvoo charter gave Mormons special privileges. In response, Smith further asserts views regarding the separation of church and state:

This blending of religious with civil affairs, is merely to deceive mankind; as citizens of this republic we have the privilege of using such privileges as other men, and of voting for whom we please . . . /;_/ but we think that our city charter, political intrigue, and city ordinances, make a curious compound when mixed up with religion.

As in many other cases, Smith maintains adherence to principles which are basically Jacksonian, but which are fundamental to Mormon belief as well. In the final analysis, Smith's defense of the Saints, as illustrated in all these writings, centers on the same theme--the Jacksonian concepts of liberty and egalitarianism.

The third grouping of writings produced by Smith during his occupancy of the editor's chair in Nauvoo consists of four rather comprehensive doctrinal treatises, all of which are remarkable primarily for their close adherence to scriptural bases, and secondly, for their orderly structure and logical arguments. These four treatises can also be regarded for their literary merit, whereas Smith's Nauvoo editorials studied thus far do not demonstrate any

particularly noticeable literary technique which was not common among journalists of that day.

Most basic to these four articles is the pervasive use of the biblical standard both as example and evidence for the writer's arguments. In most of Smith's letters and articles, in fact, the scriptures play a principal role in establishing and sustaining major points of doctrine and in defending the Mormon position. John Henry Evans noted the importance of the scriptures to Smith's writings when he said, "In the main, the appeal of Joseph Smith's ideas lay, strangely enough, not in their newness, but rather in their oldness. Instead of being either strange or novel, they were scriptural merely."¹⁷ Smith and his followers, as Marvin S. Hill has noted, had adopted the tenets of primitivistic Christianity which included strict adherence to the teachings of the ancient prophets and early Christianity.¹⁸

Smith's methodology in using the scriptures, however, was unique among religious thinking men of his day in the literal interpretation which he gave the scriptures. Gordon Irving's study in this area confirms the Mormon literalism. He states:

For the Mormons of the 1830s the literal view of the scriptures involved several accepted assumptions: the meaning of the various books was both clear and consistent, historical accounts were accurate and factual, biblical prophecies were to be fulfilled exactly as written, and

¹⁷Evans, p. 213.

¹⁸Marvin S. Hill, "The Role of Christian Primitivism in the Origin and Development of the Mormon Kingdom, 1830-1844," Diss. Univ. of Chicago 1968.

many parts of the Bible were of direct application to modern times. There was thus no need to seek some hidden or allegorical meanings which might be behind the words of the book; rather, the message of the Bible lay on the surface to be discovered and readily understood by any man possessed of an average amount of common sense.¹⁹

Judging by the content of Smith's articles wherein the scriptures are abundantly used, it appears that Smith was totally ignorant of the whole body of scriptural exegesis which had accumulated for hundreds of years in Christian literature. He never vacillates nor theorizes on the interpretation of any scripture. Irving notes, in fact, that "Joseph Smith went so far as to say that the Mormons believed what the Bible foretold, while the sects of the day only held to 'interpretations' of the book."²⁰

Thus Smith's literary use of the scriptures rings with an authoritative air. In the words of John Henry Evans,

Joseph Smith's grasp of the doctrines of the Bible is one of the amazing things about him. It is as if a native of pre-Christian Palestine had come to life and explained certain biblical passages in their setting. His style, whether or not one agrees with his interpretation, is clarity itself. --which is more than can be said in truth of the average commentator.²¹

These characteristics of Smith's scriptural interpretation appear in the religious treatises which he published editorially in Nauvoo.

Smith's feature article for the April 1 Times and Seasons was entitled "Try the Spirits" (III, 743-48), and although it is basically a doctrinal treatise, this article illustrates effective

¹⁹Gordon Irving, "The Mormons and the Bible in the 1830's," BYU Studies, XIII (Summer 1973), 476-77.

²⁰Irving, p. 477.

²¹Evans, p. 11.

compositional organization and logic, as well as the characteristics of primitivism. The article commences with a statement of purpose: "Recent occurrences that have transpired amongst us render it an imperative duty devolving upon me to say something in relation to the spirits by which men are actuated." The article develops scriptural examples of confrontation with spirits and then continues with contemporary examples, mentioning particular religious groups and their practices, namely, the "Shakers," the "Jumpers," the "Primitive Methodists," the "Quakers," the "French Prophets," and the "Irvingites." Smith also mentions the alleged spiritual experiences of the proclaimed prophetesses Joanna Southcot and Jemimah Wilkinson. Next he logically discusses why the spirits by which these groups and individuals were moved could not have been of God. Finally, he examines occurrences of spirit manifestations among the Latter Day Saints and explains their source.

The literary style of the article is, like the content, unusual for Smith. In the first place, the style of this and the other three doctrinal pieces is considerably more elevated than the editorial pieces. The doctrinal pieces share a sermonizing quality and even an analytical tone. The voice of authority prevails also and the reader gets the impression that he is listening to "one who knows." The following extract, from which the title of the article is derived, exemplifies the use of the scriptures while posing a rhetorical question:

"Try the spirits," says John, but who is to do it? The learned, the eloquent, the philosopher, the sage, the divine, all are ignorant. The Heathens will boast of their

Gods, and of the great things that have been unfolded by their oracles. The Mussulman will boast of his Koran and of the divine communications that his progenitors have received, and are receiving. The Jews have had numerous instances both ancient and modern among them of men who have professed to be inspired and sent to bring about great events, and the Christian world has not been slow in waking up the member.

"Try the spirits;" but what by? are we, to try them by the creeds of men? What preposterous folly, what sheer ignorance, what madness. Try the motions and actions of an eternal being, (for I contend that all spirits are such,) by a thing that was conceived in ignorance, and brought forth in folly--a cobweb of yesterday. Angels would hide their faces, and devils would be ashamed and insulted and would say, "Paul we know, and Jesus we know, but who are ye?" Let each man or society make a creed and try evil spirits by it and the devil would shake his sides, it is all that he would ask, all that he would desire. Yet many of them do this and hence "many spirits are abroad in the world."

This passage, though containing a few grammatical flaws, demonstrates, in content and style, a writer of intelligence, perception, and conviction. The passage shows exuberance and an expressive cadence, blended well with some fine, balanced sentences. Furthermore, the writer seems knowledgeable concerning the doctrines and activities of other religious movements, for he makes direct reference to several.

Joseph Smith's second doctrinal composition in the Nauvoo period was entitled "Baptism for the Dead" and appeared April 15, 1842 (TS, III, 758-59). Comparable in quality to the first article and likewise relying heavily on scriptural documentation, this work focuses on the question of the destiny of men after death. Here is an example, in the form of a story illustration, of Smith's literary technique in this composition:

I will suppose a case which is not extraordinary:--Two men who have been equally wicked, who have neglected religion,

are both of them taken sick at the same time; one of them has the good fortune to be visited by a praying man, and he gets converted a few minutes before he dies; the other sends for three different praying men, a tailor, a shoemaker, and a tinman. The tinman has a handle to solder on to a can; the tailor has a buttonhole to work on some coat that is needed in a hurry; and the shoemaker has a patch to put onto somebody's boot; they none of them can go in time, the man dies and goes to hell: one of these is exalted to Abraham's bosom; he sits down in the presence of God, and enjoys eternal, uninterrupted happiness, while the other who was equally as good as him, sinks to eternal damnation; irretrievable misery, and hopeless despair; because a man had a boot to mend, the button hole of a coat to work, or a handle to solder on a saucepan. The plans of Jehovah are not so unjust; the statements of holy writ so visionary; nor the plan of salvation for the human family so incompatible with common sense; at such proceedings would frown with indignance, [sic] angels would hide their heads in shame; and every virtuous, intelligent man would recoil.

By means of a clever literary device in the form of a story, Smith vividly expresses in this piece a pertinent point of logic. The article as a whole again shows Smith doing some of his best writing. The compositional sequence is logical and orderly and the language simple, but interesting. Still, Smith's conclusions are derived entirely from holy writ.

"The Temple," Joseph Smith's third religious article, begins as a commentary on the progress of the construction of the Nauvoo Temple but becomes a powerful statement on Mormonistic Zionism (TS, III [2 May 1842], 775-776). In form, it is not like the two formal, polished essays which preceded it, but is more candidly expressed and conveys a degree of exuberance originating in the author's joyful anticipation of the temple's completion. Smith's Zionistic philosophy is expressed in these words:

The building up of Zion is a cause that has interested the people of God in every age; it is a theme upon which prophets,

priests, and kings have dwelt with peculiar delight; they have looked forward with joyful anticipation to the day in which we lived; and fired with heavenly and joyful anticipations they have sung, and wrote [sic], and prophesied of this our day;--but they died without the sight; we are the favored people that God has made choice of to bring about the Latter Day glory; it is left for us to see, participate in and help to roll forward the Latter Day glory.

Smith's reflections on the subject of Zion indicate that he fully anticipates the fulfillment of the prophecies and the establishment of Zion is his own day. The building of the temple in Nauvoo and the general progress of the Mormon Church he sees as "a work that is destined to bring about the destruction of the powers of darkness, the renovation of the earth, the glory of God, and the salvation of the human family."

Article number four, "Gift of the Holy Ghost," was published June 15, 1842 (TS, III, 823-826), and might well be called chapter two of the article entitled "Try the Spirits." But while the former article dealt with spirits in general, this article centers on the Holy Ghost and, more specifically, on the gifts of the spirit of which the Apostle Paul speaks on several occasions. Christian primitivism is again a dominant thread of the essay, with considerable reference to New Testament sources, and the essay is artistically sound and of commendable quality. Both Smith's primitivism and his rhetoric are illustrated in the following quotation from the essay: "We believe in the gift of the Holy Ghost being enjoyed now, as much as it was in the apostles days . . . [;] we believe that holy men in these days speak by the same principle." Smith and his followers were peculiar in that they insisted that all orders of the Gospel as practiced anciently were to be identically

established in their time. This philosophy is central to Smith's essay.

Following the printing of the foregoing four doctrinally related newspaper articles by Joseph Smith, there appeared in the editorial columns of that periodical in the succeeding three months other articles of similar orientation and type. However, because of events which occurred in Nauvoo beginning about mid-July, 1842, it appears that none of these pieces was the work of Joseph Smith. Smith, again fleeing from persecution and arrest, had gone into hiding and his editorial assistant, John Taylor, had assumed the full responsibility of the Times and Seasons. Nevertheless, even while in hiding, Smith submitted some additional newspaper writings.

The last articles which Smith wrote for the newspaper while he was still the editor were a direct result of his forced leave of absence. These writings include two letters written "To all the Saints in Nauvoo" and a valedictory letter which officially terminated Smith's editorial career. The two letters which Smith wrote during his seclusion compare in some degree to the letters which he wrote as a prisoner from Liberty Jail. These letters, however, are considerably shorter, and are not written in the epistolary style of the Apostle Paul, do not sustain the same degree of emotional intensity, nor do they maintain the same level of sublime eloquence as the Missouri letters.²²

The first letter, dated September 1, 1842, was read to the Saints on Sunday, September 4, and was published a week and a half

²²Latter-day Saints also include these letters as revelations in their Doctrine and Covenants, sections 127, 128.

later (TS, III 15 Sept 1842, 919-920). At the outset of the letter, Smith reveals his intentions to remain hidden, saying, "I have thought it expedient, and wisdom in me to leave the place for a short season, for my own safety and the safety of my people." He adds, "When I learn that the storm is fully blown over then I will return to you again." Smith speaks of his situation in the tones of mellow resignation and powerful assurance reflected in the following paragraph:

And as for the perils which I am called to pass through, they seem but a small thing to me, as the envy and wrath of man have been my common lot all the days of my life; and for what cause it seems mysterious, unless I was ordained from before the foundation of the world, for some good end, or bad as you may choose to call it. Judge ye for yourselves.--God knoweth all those things, whether it is good or bad. But nevertheless, deep water is what I am want to swim in: it all has become second nature to me. And I feel like Paul, to glory in tribulation, for to this day has the God of my Fathers delivered me out of them all, and will deliver me from henceforth; for behold, and lo, I shall triumph over all my enemies for the Lord has spoken it.

The balance of the letter then consists of instructions regarding work on the Nauvoo temple and baptisms for the dead, both of which were concerns which Smith discussed in the previous articles, "Baptism for the Dead" and "The Temple." Maintaining the subject of baptism as a concern, Smith closes the letter, promising, "I will write the word of the Lord from time to time, on that subject, and send it to you by mail, as well as many other things."

Smith's second communication to the Saints was dated only five days later, September 6, and resumed, as he had promised, "The subject of the baptism for the dead" (TS, III 1 Oct 1842, 934-36). The first half of the letter carries this doctrinal discussion,

presented through Smith's usual masterful handling of scriptural topics; the second portion of the letter, however, demonstrates a dramatic change in literary style. As in the Liberty Jail letters, there suddenly appears, as this excerpt shows, a gradually swelling influx of feeling, an increasing intensity of the language and syntax, and a mounting lyrical quality:

How what do we hear in the gospel which we have received?
 A voice of gladness! A voice of mercy from Heaven; and a
 voice of truth out of the earth, glad tidings for the dead:
 a voice of gladness for the living and the dead; glad
 tidings of great joy; how beautiful upon the mountains are
 the feet of those that bring glad tidings of good things;
 and that say unto Zion, behold! thy God reigneth. As the
 dews of Carmel, so shall the knowledge of God descend upon
 them.

This crescendo of emotion continues to increase until it culminates in the following lines:

Let the mountains shout for joy, and all ye valleys cry
 aloud; and all ye seas and dry lands tell the wonders of
 your eternal King. And ye rivers, and brooks, and rills,
 flow down with gladness. Let the woods, and all the trees
 of the field praise the Lord: and ye solid rocks weep for
 joy. And let the sun, moon, and the morning stars sing
 together, and let all the sons of God shout for joy. And
 let the eternal creations declare his name for ever and
 ever.

Certainly the spirit and power of the psalmist are reflected in these passages, as well as the lyrical qualities of pastoral poetry.

Smith's literary style here reaches a level of excellence comparable to that eloquence attained in the letters written in Liberty Jail.

G. CONCLUSION: THE END OF SMITH'S EDITORIAL CAREER

Joseph Smith's career as a newspaper editor ends here.

Regretfully, Smith chose at this time to relinquish his editorial

duties to John Taylor. In a closing "Valedictory," published November 15, 1842, Smith wrote:

I beg leave to inform the subscribers of the Times and Seasons that it is impossible for me to fulfill the arduous duties of the editorial department any longer. The multiplicity of other business that daily devolves upon me, renders it impossible for me to do justice to a paper so widely circulated as the Times and Seasons. I have appointed Elder John Taylor, who is less encumbered and fully competent to assume the responsibilities of that office, and I doubt not but that he will give satisfaction to the patrons of the paper. As this number commences a new volume, it also commences his editorial career. (TS, IV, 8)

John Taylor's first comments as an editor are these:

The patrons of the Times and Seasons will unquestionably be painfully disappointed on reading the above announcement. We know of no one so competent as President Joseph Smith to fill the editorial chair of which the papers that have been issued since he has been editor are sufficient evidence. (TS, IV, 8)

Knowing how much the Times and Seasons had relied on Smith's writings, Taylor also indicates that he has extracted a promise from the Prophet that he will continue "to contribute to its columns with his pen when at leisure."

Since Smith did not return from exile until January 10, 1843 (History, V, 247-48), his newspaper valedictory ended his newspaper publications for the period 1839-42. Having begun the period in a Missouri jail, Smith returned to editorship in Nauvoo, but terminated the period in exile. But throughout the period, Smith penned numerous newspaper publications, even from jail and exile, rising in national prominence as a newspaper editor, achieving some literary success in many writings, and defending and teaching the principles which he had adopted. Sprinkled throughout these writings are philosophies congruent with those of the Jacksonian Age.

Chapter 5

THE CLOSING YEARS, 1843-1844: THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

Joseph Smith's growth and achievement as a writer did not end with his departure from editorial responsibilities, but continued until his death in 1844. A study of this final period will show Smith's continued development as an American journalist, further expansion of his former ideas as well as the development of new ideas, new means of expressing these ideas in refined and varied literary techniques, and, in the end, a complete turn to political writings as Smith became a candidate for President of the United States, completely immersing himself in Jacksonian politics.

The year 1843 began with Smith's return from exile to Nauvoo. Having relinquished the editorship of the Times and Seasons, Smith wanted relief from his troublesome concerns. However, the first letter which Smith published following his return was a paradoxical harbinger of events to come. To the editor of The Wasp, Smith wrote this curt statement:

Dear Sir: I have, of late, had repeated solicitations to have something to do in relation to the political farce about dividing the country; but as my feelings revolt at the idea of having any thing to do with politics, I have declined in every instance in having anything to do on the subject. I think it would be well for politicians to regulate their own affairs.

I wish to be let alone, that I may attend strictly to the spiritual welfare of the church. (Wasp, I, /28 Jan 1843/, 159)

Apparently tired of the exasperating events and the men of political office who had combined to drive him from his family, Smith vows, prematurely, as we shall discover, to have nothing more to do with politics.

A. SMITH'S LITERARY INNOVATIONS

For Joseph Smith the year 1843 was a year for experimenting with innovative forms of literary expression. The man who probably influenced his literary work most during this period was William W. Phelps, one of Smith's scribes and close associates.¹ On February 1, John Taylor printed an interesting article entitled "Ancient Poetry" (TS, IV, 81). The article was a poetic analysis and critique, not just of poetry in general, but of two particular poetic pieces which had recently come into Taylor's hands. These two pieces--a sixteen line poem by Phelps addressed to Joseph Smith, and Smith's seventy-eight stanza reply--were printed in full in that issue of the paper (TS, IV, 81-85).

We have noted only one previous publication by Smith in verse, that being a twelve-line epitaph to the deceased son of Thomas B. Marsh (EJ, I /July 1838/, 48). Therefore, it seems remarkable

¹Future literary analyses of Joseph Smith's writings, should they be forthcoming, may well verify that much of Smith's literary success in this period was due to Phelps' influence.

that Smith would suddenly churn out these three hundred and four lines of rhyme. The inspiration to experiment must have come from W. W. Phelps.²

Phelps' poem, which he dedicated to the Prophet, is called "Vade Mecum," or "Go with me," and consists of the following four four-line stanzas, also in a regular iambic tetrameter, with the rhyme scheme in couplets, aabb ccbb ddbb eebb. The theme centers on a quest for religious Utopia, a spiritual paradise:

Go with me, will go you to the saints that have died,--
To the next better world, where the righteous reside;
Where the angels and spirits in harmony be
In the joys of a vast paradise? Go with me.

Go with me where the truth and the virtues prevail;
Where the union is one, and the years never fail;
Not a heart can conceive, nor a nat'ral eye see
What the Lord has prepar'd for the just. Go with me.

Go with me where there is no destruction or war;
Neither tyrants or sland'rers, or nations ajar;
Where the system is perfect, and happiness free,
And the life is eternal with God. Go with me.

Go with me, will you go to the mansions above,
Where the bliss, and the knowledge, the light and the love,
And the glory of God do eternally be?--
Death, the wages of sin, is not there. Go with me.

Nauvoo, January, 1843.

²Whether it can be deemed significant, however, it should be noted that Joseph Smith enjoyed making rhyme. An acquaintance of Smith wrote, "When with us, there was no lack of amusement; for with jokes, games, etc. he [Joseph Smith] was ready to provoke merriment, one phase of which was matching couplets in rhyme." (Benjamin F. Johnson, My Life's Review [Independence, Mo., 1947], pp. 92-93, quoted in Hyrum L. Andrus, Joseph Smith, The Man and the Seer [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1960], p. 36)

Since Phelps' poem reached Smith immediately after Smith's distressing exile, it is probable that the message of Phelps' poetry deeply touched the Prophet. At least it influenced and motivated Smith sufficiently that he penned a lengthy answer to the Phelps piece.³ Smith's reply was called "A Vision." The theme and subject matter of "A Vision" were not original with Smith at the time that he wrote this poem, however. Rather, the contents were from a "Vision of the Glories," or revelation, which he had written eleven years earlier in Hiram, Ohio (History, I, 245-52),⁴ and which he only now had transformed into verse. As a result, Smith's work greatly expands the theme introduced by Phelps, is entirely apocalyptic in nature, unfolds a full descriptive account of the glories of heaven, and answers Phelps' request in the affirmative:

I will go, I will go, to the home of the saints,
Where the virtue's the value, and life the reward;
But before I return to my former estate
I must fulfil /sic/ the mission I had from the Lord.

The poem continues in a high tone of exuberance and religious fervor comparable to any religious literature of the romantic age. However, in literary quality, in poetic wormanship, this work falls short of being great poetry.

³Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, in their anthology of Mormon Literature, propose that Phelps himself was the author of this answer (A Believing People /Provo: Brigham Young Univ. Press, 1974/ p. 258 fn.).

⁴Doctrine and Covenants, Section 76, recorded February 16, 1832.

John Taylor's critique of the poem is given at the time Smith's work appeared. Taylor's initial comments are:

The following very curious poetic composition, is at once both novel and interesting; for while the common landmarks of modern poetry are entirely disregarded; there is something so dignified and exalted conveyed in the ideas of this production, that it cannot fail to strike the attention of every superficial observer. (TS, IV /1 February 1843/, 81)

Taylor, too, is impressed more by the ideas than by the poetic form, but concerning the form he has this to say:

Concerning the style of the poetry, there seems to be a native simplicity, a brilliance of thought, and an originality in the composition, that can only be equalled in the oracles of truth; and by those who profess the same spirit: and when the muse of those ancient poets was fired by the spirit of God, and they spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, there was a richness, a dignity and a brilliance of ideas; and an exuberance of thought that ran through all their productions, as in the fascinating beauties of poesy they rolled forth the words of eternal life, with all their richness, and dignity, and glory; while at the same time they paid little or no attention to the rules of poetic composition.

Taylor, therefore, excuses the unusual poetic style, saying that when prophets receive revelation they do not worry about such things.

In this romantic vein Taylor continues to compare Smith to the ancient prophets whose songs and poetry reveal no common poetic meter.

Taylor's opinion and defense of Smith's poetry, however, are too subjective and inconsistent with actual facts. In the first place, when "The muse" of Joseph Smith "was fired by the spirit of God," he wrote the revelation from which the poem was made, not the poem itself. It is the revelation, then, which should be compared to the works of the ancients.

Smith's poetic composition, like Phelps' poem, is written in iambic tetrameter, but it differs from Phelps' work in the rhyme scheme. Each of Smith's stanzas rhymes in the second and fourth lines only, a rhyme which is not repeated in the succeeding stanzas, and the first and third lines remain unrhymed. Many of the stanzas are good quality poetry in comparison to much of the romantic verse which was appearing in the newspapers of the 1840's, but many stanzas are strained and weak as a result of Smith's effort to maintain as near as possible the thought and sequence contained in the revelation. None of the verse attains the poetic quality for which the great poets are known, but Smith's effort is comparable at least to the lesser works of such a poet as Longfellow. The monotonous sing-song effect of "Song of Hiawatha" is not unlike the rhythm found in Smith's poem.

Here are some of the better lines from the heaven-sent invocation of "A Vision":

2. Wherefore, hear, O ye heavens, and give ear O ye earth;
And rejoice ye inhabitants truly again;
For the Lord he is God, and his life never ends,
And besides him there ne'er was a Saviour of men.
3. His ways are a wonder; his wisdom is great;
The extent of his doings, there's none can unveil;
His purposes fail not; from age unto age
He still is the same, and his years never fail.

And these lines exemplify the apocalyptic qualities of the work:

16. Hosanna forever! They open'd anon,
And the glory of God shone around where I was;
And there was the Son, at the Father's right hand,
In the fulness of glory, and holy applause.

17. I beheld round the throne, holy angels and hosts,
And sanctified beings from worlds that have been,
In holiness worshipping God and the Lamb,
Forever and ever, amen and amen!

The millennialistic spirit is caught in the following lines:

48. Yea, the righteous shall dwell in the presence of God,
And of Jesus, forever, from earth's second birth--
For when he comes down in the splendor of heav'n,
All these he'll bring with him, to reign on the earth.

And finally, Smith's poem closes with a repeated affirmation to
Phelps' request:

78. I will go, I will go, while the secret of life,
Is blooming in heaven, and blasting in hell;
Is leaving on earth, and a budding in space:--
I will go, I will go, with you, brother, farewell.

Considered in light of Smith's progress as a writer, the poem just examined is a step forward. Not that Smith was highly successful in his experimentation with the poetry medium, for he was not, but the mere attempt indicates growth. It reveals an increasing interest in literary form and expression. "A Vision" also reveals the depth and stretch of his poetic imaginations, and one is inclined to agree with John Taylor when he says of Smith:

Uncontrolled by the narrow limits of this earth, and raised above all sublimary objects, his mind soars aloft into other kingdoms, unravels the secrets of eternity, and contemplates the organization of worlds, in other spheres. . . . Our poet seems to be perfectly at home among heavenly worlds, and converses about their proceedings with as much familiarity as one could do about his domestic economy.

"A Vision" was, therefore, Smith's first major innovation in his literary techniques in 1843. The second innovation appeared in the next issue of the Times and Seasons.

Having tried his hand at poetic composition, Smith's next newspaper publication was a powerfully composed allegorical satire designed to incriminate every newspaper editor in America who had ever written anything against him. This satire was contained in a letter to the editor and received front page coverage (TS, IV /15 February 1843/, 97). It begins:

Sir, ever since I gave up the editorial department of the "Times and Seasons," I have thought of writing a piece for publication, by way of valedictory, as is usual when editors resign the chair editorial. My principal remarks I intended to apply to the gentlemen of the quill, or, if you please, that numerous body of respectable gentlemen who profess to regulate the tone of the public mind, in regards to politics, morality, religion, literature, the arts and sciences, &c. &c. viz. the editors of the public journals; or if you please, I will designate them, the lions of the forest.

A tone of sarcasm is present from the beginning, and the stage is set for the allegory in the designation of the editors as "lions of the forest." Thereafter proceeds the allegory wherein Smith represents himself as a "fawn," while an "ass" represents the apostate John C. Bennett. In part, we quote:

It came to pass that as I went forth like a young fawn, one day, to feed upon the green grass in my pasture, an ass saw me, and brayed, and made a great noise; which a neighboring lion hearing roared, even as a lion roareth when he beholds his prey: at the sound of his voice the beasts of the field were alarmed, and the lions in the adjoining jungles pricked their ears and roared in their turn, and behold all the lions of the forest, alarmed by the noise, opened their mouths and uttered forth their voice which was as the roaring of a cataract, or as the voice of thunder. . . . I asked, is it possible that so many lords of the forest, such noble beasts, should condescend to notice one solitary fawn, that is feeding alone upon his pasture; without attempting to excite either their jealousy or anger.

The allegory continues, showing that the lions acquire the "voice of men" and begin to utter such things as "murder! Desolation!! Bloodshed!!! Arson!!! Treason!!! Joe Smith and the Mormons!!! Our nation will be overturned!!!" The fawn denies all these charges, replying,

It is true that I once suffered an ass to feed in my pasture: he ate at my crib and drank at my waters, but possessing the true nature of an ass, he began to foul the water with his feet, and to trample under foot the green grass and destroy it. I therefore put him out of my pasture, and he began to bray.

The allegory mentions further

a few /lions/ possessing a more noble nature than many of their fellows, /who/ drew near, and viewing the animal found that he was nothing more than a decrepid /sic/, broken-down, worn-out ass that had scarcely anything left but his ears and his voice.

James Arlington Bennett, a New York politician of great influence, enters the story by way of this description:

Among these was a great lion, whose den was on the borders of the eastern sea; he had waxed great in strength; he had terrible teeth, and his eyes were like balls of fire; his head was large and terrific, and his shaggy mane rolled with majestic grandeur over his terrible neck; his claws were like the claws of the dragon; and his ribs were like those of the leviathan.

The allegory tells how even this great lion has degraded himself and joined "in with the braying of an ass." The allegory concludes with a strong prophetic judgment pronounced upon James A. Bennett, by way of a first person authorial intrusion into the allegory, as well as a final judgment pronounced upon all the other lions. Smith maintains the allegory to the end of the letter.

Smith's originality and creativity are displayed well in this literary satire. The allegorical figures are well chosen and strongly impress upon the reader the scorn which the author feels for antagonistic newspaper editors. Each of the principles in the allegory becomes a vivid portrayal of a real-life situation. All in all, Smith's second attempt at a new literary expression is highly successful.

The final creative literary piece for the year 1843 is an unusual letter which Smith wrote in reply to a letter from James Arlington Bennett, the very "lion" of whom the above satire speaks (TS, IV /1 November 1843/, 372-75). The letter is unusual because it is deliberately euphuistic in style, designed to counterattack the apparently affected intellectuality of Bennett's letter, and contains a good deal of bantering with foreign phrases and word definitions. Smith makes it obvious that he considers Bennett's philosophizing exemplary of man's reasoning when void of godliness.

One of Bennett's first statements is, "I am capable of being a most undeviating friend, without being governed by the smallest letter from religious influence" (TS, IV /1 November 1843/, 371). Smith replies that sincere friendship "must arise from love, and that love grow out of virtue, which is as much a part of religion, as light is a part of Jehovah."

Bennett remarks, "as you have proved yourself to be a philosophical divine, you will excuse me when I say that we must leave their influence to the mass." Smith, playing upon an exercise in scriptural logic, answers,

The meaning of "philosophical divine," may be taken in various ways. If, as the learned world apply the term, you infer that I have achieved a victory, and been strengthened by a scientific religion, as practiced by the popular sects of the age, through the aids of colleges, seminaries, Bible societies, missionary boards, financial organizations, and gospel money schemes, then you are wrong; such a combination of men and means, shows a form of godliness without the power; for is it not written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the rudiments of the world and not after the doctrines of Christ." But if the inference is, that by more love, more light, more virtue, and more truth from the Lord, I have succeeded as a man of God, then you reason truly; though the weight of the sentiment is lost, when the influence is left to the mass. "Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles?"

Bennett also states, "The boldness of your plans and measures, together with their unparalleled [sic] success, so far, are calculated to throw a charm over your whole being, and to point you out as the most extraordinary man of the present age." Smith warily sidesteps the flattery by asserting that the boldness of the plans originated with God and that he "stood alone, an unlearned youth, to combat the worldly wisdom, and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries," and that if any of his work has thrown any charm around his being, "it demonstrates the fact, that truth is mighty and must prevail; and that one man empowered from Jehovah, has more influence with the children of the kingdom, than eight hundred millions led by the precepts of men."

Bennett next vainly asserts, "But my mind is so mathematical and philosophical a cast, that the divinity of Moses makes no impression on me, and you will not be offended when I say that I rate you higher as a legislator than I do Moses." In response to

this, Smith launches into an intellectual exercise of word definitions, quoting a number of foreign phrases from Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek, German, Portuguese, and other languages, which do not really lend to the subject discussed, but which, according to B. H. Roberts, editor of Smith's history,

are a mere pedantic display, doubtless admitted in this instance, in a spirit of humor by President Smith, as an offset to Bennett's assumption of so lofty an intellect--a mind of "so mathematical and philosophical a cast--that the divinity of Moses," etc., made no "impression" on him. (History, VI, 75 fn.)

Roberts feels also that the strong influence of W. W. Phelps is upon Smith in this unusual digression with words. Phelps was known for this kind of turgid style, and although Smith had once said, "Brother Phelps makes such a severe use of language as to make enemies all the time" (History, V, 391), for his intended purposes in this letter, he imitates Phelps in derision of Bennett.

Bennett next offers himself as Smith's right hand man, but Smith refuses the offer in this powerful paragraph, a literary gem:

I combat the errors of ages; I meet the violence of mobs; I cope with illegal proceedings from executive authority; I cut the Gordian knot of powers; and I solve mathematical problems of Universities: WITH TRUTH, diamond truth, and God is my "right hand man."

Finally, Bennett, after all the flattery, gets to the point. He asks Smith to support him in a bid for the governorship of Illinois, but Smith's answer is another striking piece in literature:

... shall I stoop from the sublime authority of Almighty God, to be handled as a Monkey's cat's paw; and pettify /sic/ myself into a clown to act the farce of political demogoguery? No, verily no! The whole earth shall bear witness that I, like the towering rock in the midst of the ocean, which has withstood the mighty surges of the warring waves, for centuries, am impregnable, and am a

faithful friend to virtue, and a fearless foe to vice; no odds /can dissuade me/, whether the former was sold as a pearl in Asia, or bid as a gem in America; and the latter dazzles in palaces, or glimmers among the tombs.

Thus closes the third literary piece of 1843 in which Smith employed a creative literary technique unlike any of his other writings. The first was a poetic composition, the second a satirical allegory, and this, the third, an exercise in euphuistic logic and satire. This last item, the Smith-Bennett correspondence, gained a considerable circulation and apparently received much public attention. A brief note in the new Nauvoo Neighbor, which had replaced the publication of The Wasp, reported:

We find that Gen. Joseph Smith's correspondence with Arlington Bennett is attracting the attention of many of our leading papers; it has been published by several of the most prominent in the Union, among which is the "New York Herald," and "Niles National Register."⁵

It is evident that by this period in his life Smith had not only achieved national recognition and prominence as a leader of his people, but also as a writer, and he was now to become even more famous.

B. JOSEPH SMITH: POLITICAL WRITER

Despite the statement printed early in 1843 that Smith's "feelings revolt/ed" at the idea of having any thing to do with politics," virtually all of the literature which he published in the newspapers in 1844 was of a political nature. In all, there are six major writings which we will examine that were written by

⁵The Nauvoo Neighbor, I (21 February 1844), 170. Hereafter: Neighbor.

the prophet before his assassination on June 27, 1844. These six include: correspondence between Joseph Smith and John C. Calhoun; two articles: "A Friendly Hint to Missouri," "The Globe"; Smith's "Views of the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States"; and correspondence between Smith and Henry Clay.

In the fall of 1843, the Honorable John C. Calhoun, Senator from South Carolina, announced his bid for President of the United States. On November 4, 1843, Joseph Smith wrote Senator Calhoun a letter asking the question: "What will be your rule of action, relative to us as a people, should fortune favor your ascension to the chief magistracy?" (TS, V 1 January 1844, 393-94) Calhoun's reply to Smith of December 2 reads, "I would strive to administer the government according to the constitution . . . , but as to the sufferings of the Mormons in Missouri," he responded, "that according to my views the case does not come within the jurisdiction of the federal government, which is one of limited and specific powers" (TS, V 1 January 1844, 394). This answer greatly vexed Smith who then executed a masterful response which he published, along with the previous correspondence between the two gentlemen, in the first issue of the Times and Seasons in 1844 (V, 1 January 1844, 394-96). The Nauvoo Neighbor reprinted the "Correspondence of Gen. Joseph Smith and Hon. J. C. Calhoun" on January 10 (Neighbor, I 10 January 1844, 146-47). Smith's second letter to the Senator is a positive assertion of belief in constitutional government, an affirmation of Jacksonian democracy,

a strong verbal assault against weak government leaders--all in all an exceptionally well-written literary production.

Smith writes his letter to Calhoun "as a law abiding man; as a well wisher to the perpetuity of constitutional rights and liberty, and as a friend to the free worship of Almighty God," saying "I am surprised, that a man, or men, in the highest stations of public life, should have made up such a fragile view of a case" as Calhoun has made of the Missouri outrages. Calling Calhoun's answer very "complacent," and "like the forced steam from the engine of a steam boat, which makes the show of a bright cloud at first, but when it comes in contact with a purer atmosphere, dissolves to common air again," Smith begins his verbal onslaught. Smith states, "Your second paragraph leaves you naked before yourself, like a likeness in a mirror, when you say that 'according to your view, the federal government is one of limited and specific powers.'" Here the intensity of the language begins to increase, as so often occurs when Smith writes on emotional subjects, and in the crescendo the quality of the writing improves also. Authoritatively, prophetically, emotionally, Smith, in a manner similar to hell-fire and damnation sermons, writes:

If a general government has no power to reinstate expelled citizens to their rights, there is a monstrous hypocrite fed and fostered from the hard earnings of the people! A real "bull beggar" upheld by sycophants; and, although you may wink to the priests to stigmatize; wheedle the drunkards to swear, and raise the hue and cry of imposter false prophet, God damn old Joe Smith, yet remember, if the Latter Day Saints are not restored to all their rights, and paid for all their losses, according to the known rules of justice and judgment, reciprocation and common honesty among men,

that God will come out of his hiding place and vex this nation with a sore vexation--yea, the consuming wrath of an offended God shall smoke through the nation, with as much distress and woe, as independence has blazed through with pleasure and delight. Where is the strength of government? Where is the patriotism of a Washington, a Warren and Adams? and where is a spark from the watch fire of '76, by which one candle might be lit, that would glimmer upon the confines of democracy?

As Joseph Smith defends the powers of constitutional government, he declares Congress to be "THE SUPREME LAW OF THE LAND," to which the states are subject, and he continues, "should a state refuse submission, that state is guilty of insurrection or rebellion." He therefore challenges Calhoun to re-read the constitutional amendments to discover for himself what powers Congress really has, and, Smith tells him, "God . . . will raise your mind above the narrow notion, that the general government has no power--to the sublime idea that Congress, with the President as executor, is as Almighty in its sphere, as Jehovah is in his." With this concise statement of political doctrine, Smith concludes his letter.

His ideas, as revealed in this excellent letter, show tenacious adherence to democratic ideals based strictly on the constitutional framework. Also, his tenor is one of an extraordinary boldness and confidence before men of high rank. This confidence shows not only in the tone of the letter, but also, in the quality of the writing. Here is a writer with a firm grasp of language, thought, and expression.

"Friendly Hint to Missouri" was first printed in the Nauvoo Neighbor (I, 13 March 1844, 182), and soon thereafter reprinted in

the Times and Seasons (V, 15 March 1844, 473-74). In this article Smith emphasizes peace as his theme. Unlike so many other writings in which Smith forcefully challenges his enemies and persecutors to retreat, this article displays an exceptionally benevolent, mellow tone of gentle persuasion; the theme of peace is carefully enveloped in a peaceful style. For example, we note the subdued tone of the opening paragraph of this article:

One of the most pleasing scenes that can transpire on earth is, when a sin has been committed by one person against another, to forgive that sin: and then, according to the sublime and perfect pattern of the Savior, pray to our Father in heaven, to forgive also. Verily, verily such a friendly rebuke is like the mellow zephyr of summer's eve: it soothes; it cheers and gladdens the heart of the humane and the savage.

Smith's public meditations on the subject of peace evoke from him the mood and expression of a poet. He muses, "Peace, lovely child of heaven; peace, like light from the same great parent, gratifies, animates and happifies the just and the unjust, and is the very essence of happiness below, and bliss above." We note in the following excerpt the effective descriptive similes which add a lyrical quality to the writing:

But the peace maker, O give ear to him! for the words of his mouth, and his doctrine, drop like the rain, and distil as the dew; they are like the gentle mist upon the herbs, and as the moderate shower upon the grass. Animation, virtue, love, contentment, philanthropy, benevolence, compassion, humanity, and friendship, push life into bliss, and men a little below the angels . . . and the sweet odour that is wafted by the breath of joy and satisfaction from their righteous communion, is like the rich perfume from the consecrated oil that was poured upon the head of Aaron; or like the luscious fragrance that rises from the fields of Arabian spices.

Having prefaced the principal focus of the article with these rather lofty, poetic expressions, Smith addresses the people of Missouri in the hope of gently persuading them to make restitution for the losses sustained there by the Saints. Here enter the political overtones of the article. Appealing to the humanitarian spirit of the Missourians, Smith says that he is "confident in the virtue and patriotism of the noble-minded western men." He adds his belief that "the best blood of the west, united with the honor of the illustrious fathers of freedom, will move, as the forest is moved by a mighty wind, to promote peace and friendship in every part of our wide spread, lovely country." In the "voice of reason, the voice of humanity, the voice of the nation, and the voice of heaven," and gently quoting the law, Smith petitions Missouri to cleanse herself of her guilt and be forgiven. The article thus ends after having maintained a consistency of mood and style throughout. Smith's poetic expressions highlight the mood and lend to the effective outcome of the work.

C. SMITH'S PRESIDENTIAL PLATFORM

Smith's next newspaper article, entitled "The Globe," dealt directly with significant political decisions which Smith made during the winter of 1843-44. Despairing over the consistent failure of prominent political figures to render justice in behalf of the Mormons, Smith himself decided to campaign for the Presidency of the United States.⁶ Then on January 29, 1844, the council of the

⁶Richard D. Poll, "Joseph Smith and the Presidency, 1844,"

church officially nominated Smith to be a candidate for President (History, VI, 188) to run against Martin Van Buren and Henry Clay, both of whom had disappointed the Mormons. From the response which Smith made at the time of his nomination (History, VI, 188) and the intensity with which he became involved in the ensuing campaign, it is apparent that Smith's campaign was in earnest.

"The Globe" first appeared in the April 15 Times and Seasons (V, 508-10), and again in the April 17 Nauvoo Neighbor (I, 202). It was written to Francis Preston Blair, editor of the Washington Globe, who had printed a critical and derogatory essay on Smith's "Views of the Powers and Policy on the Government of the United States," a political treatise in pamphlet form which the Prophet had printed on February 24, 1844 (History, VI, 224), and soon thereafter mailed "to the President and cabinet, supreme judges, senators, representatives, principal newspapers in the United States . . . and many postmasters and individuals" (History, VI, 188-89). Immediately after having received Smith's pamphlet, which appears in this study shortly, numerous editors began printing their various commentaries regarding Smith's political platform. Blair's comments angered Smith and motivated this emotional newspaper response.

In this article, Smith once again becomes "defender of truth" and outspokenly turns on his assailant. Smith denies alliance with the Whig party, of which the Democrat Blair accuses

Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, III (Autumn 1968), 18.

him, defends his position on the establishment of a national bank, prison reform, and slavery, and derides the dishonest editors and politicians who have troubled him so often. In a satirical comparison of "virtuous" Nauvoo with the deplorable conditions of the country in general, Smith inserts his ironic revision of a popular hymn:

Hail Columbia, "free and equal"--
Lo, the saints, the Mormons, bless ye!
Felt thy glory most severely,
When Missouri gave them jesse.

Hail Columbia, "free and equal"--
Negro slaves, like common cattle,
Bought and sold for cash at auction;
Prayers and chains together rattle!

Hail Columbia, "free and equal,"--
"Liberty," as patriots won it;
Crown'd the "head" of freemen's money;
Now the goddess sits upon it!

Hail Columbia, "free and equal"--
"Gold and silver" is thy "tender;"
Treasury notes, (aside from Biddle,)
Foreign loans, and fallen splendor!

Smith also cleverly turns the motto of Blair's Jacksonian newspaper--"The world is governed too much"--to his own use and concludes his article affirming a need for God in government and the principles of unity, liberty, and charity:

As the "world is governed too much" and as there is not a nation or dynasty, now occupying the earth, which acknowledges Almighty God as their law giver, and as "crowns, won by blood, by blood must be maintained," I go emphatically, virtuously, and humanely, for a THEODEMOCRACY, where God and the people hold the power to conduct the affairs of men in righteousness. And where liberty, free trade, and sailor's rights, and the protection of life and property shall be maintained inviolate, for the benefit of ALL. To exalt mankind is nobly acting the part of a God; to degrade them, is meanly doing the drudgery of the devil. Unitas libertas, caritas--esto perpetua!

All of Smith's political writings of 1844 received considerable attention and rapid circulation through the country's newspapers, and each editor was quick to praise or ridicule their contents. When "The Globe" began to circulate, the editor of the Warsaw Signal printed an excerpt which he called a "choice poetical morceau" and commented sarcastically,

Now Jo, we were aware that you were a great statesman, jurist and general but we never before knew that you were a poet. This, however, is now settled; and hereafter you will not only rank with Cicero, Burke, Coke, Alexander, Caesar, Hanibal /sic/, and Napoleon but your name shall be registered on the tablets of fame by the side of Homer, Shakespeare, Milton and Byron.⁷

Here, then, is further evidence of the attention raised by Smith's writings throughout the cities of the nation. As an American writer of the Jacksonian period he received much attention; as a presidential candidate and writer in 1844, his reputation was greatly increased.

The political pamphlet of which we have spoken did not become a newspaper publication until May 8, 1844, on which date it appeared in the Neighbor (II, 214). One week later the Times and Seasons printed the same (IV, 15 May 1844, 528-33). However, long before this, from the time that the editors received the actual pamphlet in the mail, excerpts and extensive editorials focusing on Smith's political philosophy had begun circulating widely throughout the nation.

Joseph Smith's "Views on the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States" is by far the broadest, most

⁷"Editorial Commentary," The Warsaw Signal, New Series, No. 11, Whole No. 128 (25 April 1844), 2.

comprehensive treatise on political thought which the Prophet ever composed and contains more to link Smith directly to the political machinery of Jacksonian democracy than any other publication.⁸

Having once vigorously declared that he wanted nothing to do with politics, Smith in this one brilliant undertaking placed his name before America as a candidate for President of the United States.

Smith's "Views on Government" is a carefully outlined, skillfully worked essay which conforms to high standards in both compositional form and literary quality. From the introductory paragraphs, through the body of the essay, and to the summation, the essay is carefully organized paragraph by paragraph with clear, concise transitions from one subject to the next. In style, the essay exhibits an intelligent vocabulary and provocative ideas framed in coherence and simplicity. The only thing that mars the quality of the work is the unnecessary insertion of a foreign phrase at the end of each of several paragraphs. Again, these probably arise from the influence of W. W. Phelps, Smith's scribe when the pamphlet was dictated.

The basis for Smith's views of government is the constitution itself and all the rights provided by that document. His essay begins with Smith's concern "for the happiness of all men, both in time and eternity." Smith is troubled, he states, "by the conditions of a free country where some two or three million

⁸See Poll, pp. 17-21, and Martin B. Hickman, "The Political Legacy of Joseph Smith," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, III (Autumn 1968), 22-27.

of people are held as slaves for life, because the spirit in them is covered with a darker skin than ours" and by the needless incarceration of thousands in penitentiaries. He wonders why, when equal rights are guaranteed by constitutional provision, these things should occur. Then, citing and quoting from the patriots of American liberty--Franklin, Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, the younger Adams, and finally, Jackson--Smith traces the development of America's greatness. Moreover, with reference to Jackson, Smith proves himself a pure Jacksonian disciple. Smith declares,

General Jackson's administration may be denominated the acme of American glory, liberty and prosperity, for the national debt, which in 1815, on account of the late war, was \$125,000,000. and lessened gradually, was paid up in his golden day; and preparations were made to distribute the surplus revenue among the several states: and that august patriot, to use his own words in his farewell address, retired leaving "a great people prosperous and happy, in the full enjoyment of liberty and peace, honored and respected by every nation of the world."

Following Jackson's administration, however, Smith claims, "our blooming republic began to decline under the withering touch of Martin Van Buren." The decline continued, Smith says, "till General Harrison appeared as a star among the storm clouds, for better weather," but "This good man died before he had the opportunity of applying one balm to ease the pain of our groaning country." Tyler's tenure in office Smith calls "three years of perplexity and pseudo whig democrat reign." And, as a result, he concludes, "the glory of American liberty is on the wane."

Having described the state of the nation, Smith next outlines his proposals and political platform for the amelioration of these

conditions. Each proposal is precise and bold. He suggests that the size of congress be reduced to one-half, that congressmen's pay be reduced to two dollars per day, and that the offices in government be reduced in number. He proposes broad prison reforms, including pardoning most convicts and setting up a rehabilitative system wherein prisoners work and are educated rather than kept confined all the time. He proposes the abolishment of slavery under a system whereby Congress will pay the slave owners for the slaves out of revenues taken from the sale of public lands. In light of previous statements wherein Smith declared himself not to be an abolitionist because the time for the release of slaves was up to God, we presume, then, that Smith feels that the time is now come for their release. Smith also asks for the abolishment of military court martials.

Smith continues his proposed changes in government by insisting that economy, equality, and honesty govern in all things. He next proposes the establishment of a national bank with branches in each state and a standard currency throughout the country. He states further, "Give every man his constitutional freedom, and the president full power to send an army to suppress mobs." Critically he adds,

Like the good Samaritan, send every lawyer as soon as he repents and obeys the ordinances of heaven, to preach the gospel to the destitute, without purse or scrip, pouring in the oil and the wine; a learned priesthood is certainly more honorable than a "hireling clergy."

Smith also supports the expansion of the United States to the west coast, which means annexing the Oregon territory, and he

suggests, at their request, the annexation of Texas, Mexico, and even Canada.

Before summarizing his essay, Smith makes one final declaration. He states,

We have had democratic presidents; whig presidents; a pseudo democratic whig president; and now it is time to have a president of the United States; and let the people of the whole union, like the inflexible Romans, whenever they find a promise made by a candidate, that is not practiced as an officer, hurl the miserable sycophant from his exaltation, as God did Nebuchadnezzar, to crop the grass of the field, with a beast's heart among the cattle.

Smith claims to stand for the basic Jacksonian precepts of liberty, equal rights, and "unadulterated freedom," and seeks for honesty and integrity among government officials. He also expresses political views on every major issue of the day, following in the main the democratic ideals of Jacksonian democracy.⁹

D. SMITH'S FINAL NEWSPAPER PUBLICATION

The final major newspaper publication by Smith was his correspondence with Henry Clay, who had risen as the Whig candidate for the presidency after the bid of John C. Calhoun had failed to materialize. As he had done with Calhoun, Smith had written to Henry Clay in November, 1843, asking "What will be your rule of action relative to us as a people, should fortune favor your ascension to the chief magistracy?" (Neighbor, II [29 May 1844], 226)

⁹See also "Correspondence of Central Committee for Government Reform of New York with Joseph Smith," The Nauvoo Neighbor, II (22 May 1844), 222. This brief newspaper letter by Joseph Smith explains Smith's position on uniform land laws and was given at the request of the Central Committee.

Clay's answer was as non-committal as Calhoun's and was just as displeasing to Smith. Clay in part wrote:

Should I be a candidate, I can enter into no engagements, make no promises, give no pledges, to any particular portion of the people of the United States. If I ever enter into that high office, I must go into it free and unfettered, with no guarantees but such as are to be drawn from my whole life, character and conduct. (Neighbor, II /29 May 1844/, 226)

Smith's rejoinder to the Clay response was not forthcoming until six months later, at which time he wrote that he had waited since November "in the fond expectation" that Clay would explain the

best method and means which would secure to the people, the whole people, the most freedom, the most happiness, the most union, the most wealth, the most fame, the most glory at home, and the most honor abroad, at the least expense.

Smith states, however, "I have waited in vain." The letter which follows was published with the previous correspondence first in the Nauvoo Neighbor in May, 1844, and then in the Times and Seasons in June (V, 1 June 1844, 544-48). Of all Smith's letters ever printed in the newspaper, this one is the most caustic, even vehement, exercise aimed at anyone. His attack is so pronounced that it seems as if Smith's vexation has filled to overflowing. If a literary term were to be applied, "Juvenalian satire" might be too mild. This critical letter borders on "invective."

Telling Clay that his public declarations "have been made . . . soft to flatter, rather than solid to feed," Smith declares, "You seem to abandon all former policy which may have actuated you in the discharge of a statesman's duty." Smith compares Clay's

evasive answer to "a lottery vender's sign, with the goddess of good luck sitting on the car of fortune, a-straddle of the horn of plenty, and driving the merry steeds of beautitude without reigns or bridle," and accusingly asks, "Can anything be drawn from your life, character or conduct that is worthy of being held up to the gaze of this nation as a model of virtue, charity and wisdom? Are you not a lottery picture, with more than two blanks to a prize?"

Smith's condemnation of Clay proceeds with a long list of accusations. He condemns Clay for his policies regarding affairs with the British, the Oregon territory, the Missouri Compromise, and for his duel with John Randolph, with which act, says Smith, "the notorious Henery [sic] Clay dropped from the summit of a senator to the sink of a scoundrel." Smith laments the fact that Clay is so pliable and easily dissuaded from political issues and accuses him of shrinking back from his previous stand on tariffs, a national bank, and the annexation of Texas. And Smith derides Clay for suggesting, as his solution to the Mormon problem, that the Mormons emigrate to Oregon. "Such cruel inhumanity; such noble injustice; such honorable cowardice; such foolish wisdom, and such vicious virtue, could only emanate from Clay," Smith writes. His closing remarks are the woeful tones of a man disappointed with rampant corruption and the failure of imperfect government to provide liberty and equality for its people:

I mourn for the depravity of the world; I despise the hypocrisy of christendom; I hate the imbecility of American statesmen; I detest the shrinkage of candidates for office, from pledges and responsibility; I long for

a day of righteousness, when he, "whose right it is to reign, shall judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth," and I pray God, who hath given our fathers a promise of a perfect government in the last days, to purify the hearts of the people and hasten the welcome day.

On this note of mixed indignation and lamentation, Joseph Smith's last newspaper letter ends. The literary quality of this piece suffers under the strained emotional tenor of the writing, and some sections that are actually bombastic detract considerably. Nevertheless, this letter makes a positive contribution in that it further emphasizes Smith's allegiance to Jacksonian democracy and also illustrates the extent to which Smith, by June, 1844, had become involved in and knowledgeable about government affairs.

E. CONCLUSION

Only two small items from the pen of Joseph Smith appeared in the Nauvoo newspapers following the correspondence with Henry Clay. One was a warning against using bogus paper money which had appeared in Nauvoo (Neighbor, II [12 June 1844], 234), and the second was a proclamation from Smith as Mayor of Nauvoo defending the council's closure of the Expositor newspaper (Neighbor, II [19 June 1844], 239). Within a week of the last of these, Joseph Smith was dead, a victim of assassination, and there ended the remarkable, unusual career of a religious leader, writer, politician, and staunch advocate of Jacksonian democracy.

CONCLUSION

The interesting, remarkable, but unusual, literary development of Joseph Smith, as evidenced in his newspaper writings, vividly demonstrates the ability of a man to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds in order to achieve a measure of success. Emerging from years of educational deprivation as a youth with only a scant understanding of rudimentary reading and grammar, Smith was certainly not a likely candidate to become a noted American newspaper writer. In Smith's life, however, dramatic occurrences altered his course and caused him to channel his efforts in such a manner that he became a Jacksonian Man of Letters.

Joseph Smith deservedly earns the title "Jacksonian." Diffusing throughout nearly all of Smith's newspaper writings are the major precepts and ideologies of Jacksonian democracy. Smith's letters, articles, and treatises repeatedly emphasize the democratic ideals of liberty, union, individuality within equality, and the constitutional rights of the common man. These writings contain views on abolitionism and expansionism, or project the concepts of Utopianism, Zionism, millennialism and Christian primitivism. Even Smith's rare poetic compositions manifest the qualities of romanticism. These concepts are clearly Jacksonian. Smith himself was Jacksonian. Don C. Setiz, author of Uncommon Americans,

writes of Joseph Smith: "Now, although he had set up a people apart from others, in spite of all temptations Joseph remained an American, an autocrat at home, a Democrat in his beliefs."¹

On the other hand, the age did not necessarily produce Joseph Smith. In the words of Hyrum L. Andrus,

We cannot conclude that Joseph Smith borrowed his major ideas from his historical setting, but the claims he made and the principles he set forth were compatible with the spirit and aspirations of the age²

Because Smith's ideas coincided with the spirit of the age, then, is sufficient evidence to label him a Jacksonian Man of Letters.

The evidence that Joseph Smith progressed and developed as an American writer is also conclusive. That development commenced as a direct result of Smith's strict attention to arduous, time-consuming tasks which he felt compelled by his religious experiences to perform. His literary experience began with the tedious undertaking of translating ancient scriptural records and continued with additional literary endeavors in behalf of his faith--including such various endeavors as compiling and revising scriptures, initiating an historical account, and attending grammar classes. Steadily, through all these exertions, Smith gradually became more adept in literary expression.

In the early 1830's, then, when religious issues of the day attracted Smith's attention to the frontier newspapers, Smith, because of his previous preparations, felt sufficiently competent

¹Don C. Seitz, "Joseph Smith--Seer and Statesman," Uncommon Americans (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merritt Co., 1925), p. 10.

²Andrus, "Second Revolution", p. 71.

to begin writing newspaper letters and articles for publication. From the beginning these articles demonstrated varying degrees of success in literary quality, but were written in simplicity and plainness, a style which Smith deliberately determined to follow. Scriptural language and documentation also permeated some of this literature. Though none of these writings was highly artistic or eloquent, they compared favorably with other newspaper writings being published.

By 1837 Smith's literary experience was sufficient to warrant his stepping into the editor's chair of a church-owned frontier newspaper, the Elders' Journal. While this paper terminated after only four issues, this journalistic responsibility provided Smith with additional incentives to continue his literary development. His writings during this period included some simple descriptive narrative and a little romantic poetry, but also some censoring literature filled with imaginative but harsh similes and metaphors.

Suffering imprisonment in the Liberty Jail in the winter of 1838-39, Smith had a rare opportunity to achieve new heights of literary success. Portions of the literature which Smith produced during his confinement were highly expressive, artistic and eloquent; other portions resembled the epistolary style of the Apostle Paul. Smith could not consistently maintain this high standard of excellence, however. Once out of prison, his writings seldom reached this same height. Rather he turned often to historical narratives, vigorous and sometimes even harsh

expressions of grievances, and political writings--writings which were more didactic and less stylistic.

Smith's greatest growth as a newspaper writer occurred as a result of his return to editorship in 1842 with the Times and Seasons. During this period Smith reached his peak in literary output and acquired national prominence as a newspaper editor. Also, the quality of many of these writings was particularly notable. From the remarkable simplicity of the "Wentworth Letter" to the orderly logic of his scripturally based doctrinal treatises to the lyrical quality of letters which Smith wrote when forced into hiding (letters which approached the excellence of the Liberty Jail literature)--in all of these Smith reached a high degree of success as a Man of Letters.

Following Smith's resignation of the editorial post, he continued his newspaper writing with creative innovations in literary style, including a lengthy poetic work, a strong allegorical satire, and a piece of lesser quality containing a euphuistic style. These works, rather than being improvements upon his style, however, were more an expansion of his creative powers.

The final phase of Smith's newspaper literature was the year 1844, in which Smith campaigned for the United States presidency. The bold political writings which he penned at this time attracted national attention and stirred widespread interest in Smith and his presidential platform. Although dominant among these political pieces were Smith's caustic attacks against editors and politicians, rising far above these in literary power and profundity of ideas was one skillfully worked composition containing Smith's explicit

views on government. This comprehensive and remarkable treatise was written to no avail, however, for his untimely death in June, 1844, ended Smith's political and writing career.

In the final analysis, Joseph Smith was a Jacksonian man who developed into a newspaper writer, but not a great newspaper writer. He achieved considerable prominence as a newspaper writer in his day, but that reputation obviously dwindled rapidly upon his death, for he is not now remembered as a journalist. In this regard he was like many minor authors whose popularity runs high during their lifetime, but whose works go unread afterward.

The literary quality of Smith's newspaper literature, though highly successful in several instances, is, for the most part, of minor quality when compared with the literature of great journalists. However, this is not to say that his work is unimportant. It is important in the ways discussed in chapter one. It is also highly interesting and deserving of further study.

This study was not meant to be an in-depth analytical examination of each of Smith's newspaper writings, but hopefully such studies will be forthcoming. There is a need, and an interesting opportunity, for literary research into all Smith's writings, including his revelations, scriptural translations, and history. Such research ought to include stylistic analyses, with close comparisons made between time periods and types of literary production. When Smith once stated, "No man knows my history (History, VI, 317)," he could well have added, "No man knows my writing," for that is the way it appears to date in the field of American literature.

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JOSEPH SMITH AS A JACKSONIAN MAN OF LETTERS:

HIS LITERARY DEVELOPMENT AS EVIDENCED

IN HIS NEWSPAPER WRITINGS

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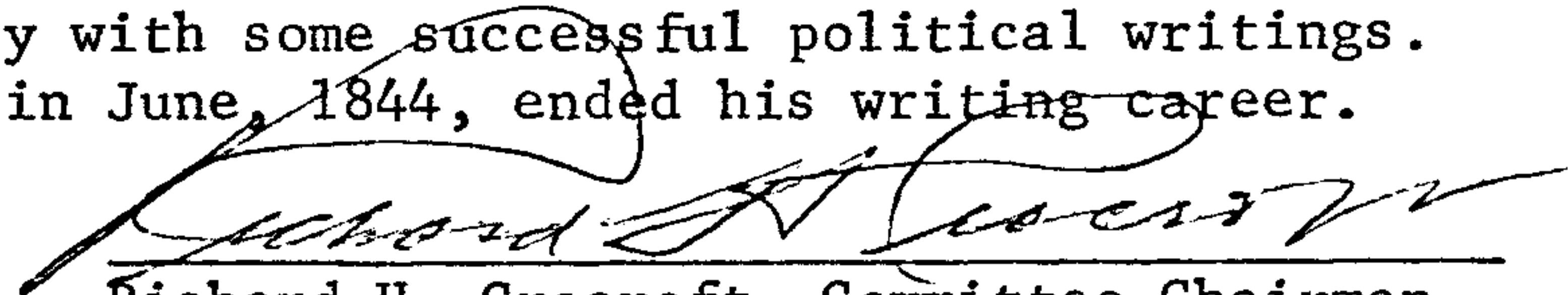
M. A. Degree, December 1976

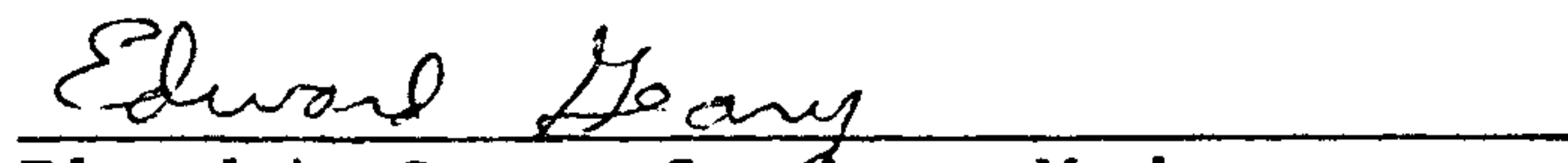
ABSTRACT

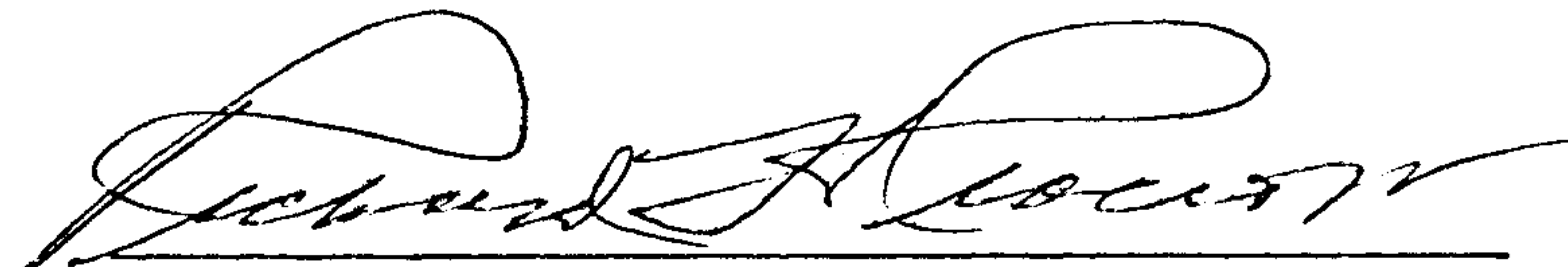
This study examines the newspaper writings of Joseph Smith, Jr., the Mormon Prophet, traces his development as an American writer as evidenced in his newspaper publications, and notes the major concepts contained therein which demonstrate that Smith may deservedly be called a "Jacksonian Man of Letters."

Emerging from his youth lacking even rudimentary writing ability, Smith began his development with the translation of ancient scriptural records. Literary experiences with other scriptures, historical records, and even grammar classes augmented his development. Smith later turned his attention to frontier newspapers and served briefly as an editor. Jail confinement provided further stimulus to his literary development. Returning to editorship in 1842, he increased his literary productivity and rose to national prominence as a journalist. After resigning this post, Smith penned several creative literary innovations and, in 1844, campaigned for the United States presidency with some successful political writings. Smith's untimely death in June, 1844, ended his writing career.

COMMITTEE APPROVAL:


Richard H. Cracroft, Committee Chairman


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