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THE DEATH OF A MORMON DICTATOR

LETTERS OF MASSACHUSETTS MORMONS, 1843-1848

EDITED BY GEORGE F. PARTRIDGE

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HE following eleven letters and one apostolic blessing are interesting as throwing light on the middle period of the history of the rise of Mormonism. All except the sixth and the twelfth, which were addressed to her sons-in-law, were received by Abigail, daughter of Thomas and Catherine Harback, who was born in Grafton, Massachusetts, in 1790, married Calvin Hall in 1812, and died at Sutton, in Worcester County, in 1819. "of an unknown epidemic."

1 Mrs. Abigail (Harback) Hall had nine children, the first born in 1812 and the last in 1828. Of these nine children, two daughters married Mormon preachers. Martha S. Hall, who was born in 1819, became the wife of Jesse Haven, in November, 1842.

This Haven seems to have become a person of some importance in the Mormon church. In view of the contents of the letters printed below, it is a matter of interest to know that Jesse Haven defended polygamy in print as far away as the Cape of Good Hope.2 One of the paragraphs in a pamphlet he published reads as follows:

That there has been a law revealed by which a man in Zion and in Zion only or at a place commanded by the Lord can have more than one wife, we by no means deny. This law was understood by the ancient Prophets Patriarchs and Apostles.

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1 William A. Benedict and Hiram A. Tracy, A History of the Town of Sutton, Massachusetts (Worcester, 1858), 655-658.

2 The treasure room of the Harvard College Library contains a copy of an eight-page pamphlet bearing no place or date of publication, with the following title-page: "Celestial Marriage and the Plurality of Wives. By Jesse Haven, One of the Presidents of the Seventies of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and President of the Mission at the Cape of Good Hope."
I never fully understood the place in holy writ where the Lord says he will have a tried people until I came here with the Church. Sometimes I almost fear that I shall give up but by the help of the Lord I mean to endure to the end. You know little concerning the Church, I can assure you; I think that if the saints were as wise before they start as after they get here, many would not have faith enough to come. A word to the wise is sufficient. Dear Mother pray for me that I may be of the household of faith.

I thought I would improve the opportunity and send you a letter by Charles White; he is to leave, I believe, for the East day after to-morrow, and I hope you will all write when he comes back in the fall, if not before. You must write before that; I can't wait so long.

Tell C—— that I lost the hair that she gave me and wish that she would braid me another wristlet with her hair and one of some of yours and of the rest of you and you can send them by Charles. How do you color black with logwood without cider? Please answer all my questions when you write. There was scarcely a night during the winter but what I dreamed of you and was back there with you but I always thought I was coming back and often thought I was waiting for you to come back with me.

Sarah Scott.

Vicinity of Nauvoo,
June 16, 1844.

My Dear Father and Mother:

For such I suppose I may call you, on account of the relationship that now exists between us. Altho' far distant, and having never had the privilege of beholding your faces, yet I rejoice exceedingly in the pleasure which I this day enjoy of sitting down to write a few lines to you so near and dear to me as you are. I have greatly desired to see you since I became acquainted with your daughter, and adopted into your family. But I have had to do with only hearing from you thus far. By a letter that Mrs. Haven received from you a few days since, we have the pleasing intelligence that you are all well, which blessing we also enjoy. I am glad that I ever became united to your family, for by this step I have gotten what Solomon says is a good thing. He says he that hath gotten a wife from the Lord, hath gotten a good thing,
So say I. And were it not for troubles that exist in the land, we would rejoice continually.

But because of the things that are and have been taught in the Church of Latter Day Saints for two years past which now assume a potentious aspect, I say because of these things we are in trouble. And were it not that we wish to give you a fair unbiased statement of facts as they really exist, we perhaps would not have written you so soon. But we feel it to be our duty to let you know how things are going on in this land of boasted liberty, this Sanctum Sanctorum of all the Earth, the City of Nauvoo. The elders will likely tell you a different tale from what I shall as they are positively instructed to deny these things abroad. But it matters not to us what they say; our object is to state to you the truth, for we do not want to be guilty of deceiving any one. We will now give you a correct statement of the doctrines that are taught and practiced in the Church according to our own knowledge. We will mention three in particular.

A plurality of Gods. A plurality of living wives. And unconditional scaling up to eternal life against all sins save the shedding of innocent blood or consenting thereunto. These with many other things are taught by Joseph, which we consider are odious and doctrines of devils.

Joseph says there are Gods above the God of this universe as far as he is above us, and if He should transgress the laws given to Him by those above Him, He would be hurled from his Throne to hell, as was Lucifer and all his creations with him. But God says there is no other God but himself. Moses says he is the Almighty God, and there is none other. David says he knows of no other God. The Apostles and Prophets almost all testify the same thing.

Joseph had a revelation last summer purporting to be from the Lord, allowing the saints the privilege of having ten living wives at one time. I mean certain conspicuous characters among them. They do not content themselves with young women, but have seduced married women. I believe hundreds have been deceived. Now should I yield up your daughter to such wretches?

Mr. Haven knows these statements are correct, for they have been taught in the quorum to which he belongs by the highest authority in the Church. He has told me that he does not believe in these teachings but he does not come out and oppose them; he
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thinks that it will all come out right. But we think God never has nor never will sanction such proceedings, for we believe he has not changed; he says "I am God I change not." These things we can not believe, and it is by Sarah’s repeated request that I write this letter.

Those who can not swallow down these things and came out and opposed the doctrine publicly, have been cut off from the Church without any lawful process whatever. They were not notified to trial neither were they allowed the privilege of being present to defend themselves; neither was any one permitted to speak on their behalf. They did not know who was their judge or jury until it was all over and they delivered over to all the buffettings of Satan; although they lived only a few rods from the council room. These are some of their names: William Law, one of the first Presidency; Wilson Law, brigadier general; Austin Coles, president of the High Council; and Elder Blakesly, who has been the means of bringing upwards of one thousand members into the Church. He has been through nearly all the states in the Union, the Canadas, and England preaching the Gospel. Now look at the great sins they have committed, the Laws' un-Christian-like conduct – Blakesly and others. Apostasy. If it is apostasy to oppose such doctrines and proceedings as I have just mentioned (which are only a few of the enormities taught and practised here), then we hope and pray that all the Church may apostatize.

After they had been thus shamefully treated and published to the world they went and bought a printing press determined to defend themselves against such unhallowed abuse. It cost them six hundred dollars. [They] commenced their paper, but Joseph and his clan could not bear the truth to come out; so after the first number came out Joseph called his Sanhedrin together; tried the press; condemned it as a nuisance and ordered the city marshal to take three hundred armed men and go and burn the press, and if any offered resistance, to rip them from the guts to the gizzard. These are his own words. They went and burnt the press, papers, and household furniture. The Laws, Fosters, Coles, Hickbies, and others have had to leave the place to save their lives. Those who have been thus unlawfully cut off have called a conference; protested against these things; and reorganized the Church. William Law is chosen president; Charles Evans, bishop, with the other
necessary officers. The Reformed Church believe that Joseph has transgressed in his priestly capacity and has given himself over to serve the devil, and his own lusts. We will endeavor to send you a paper and you can then judge for yourselves. They had only commenced publishing the dark deeds of Nauvoo. A hundredth part has not been told yet.

The people of the state will not suffer such things any longer. But I am sorry that the innocent must suffer with the guilty. I believe there are hundreds of honest hearted souls in Nauvoo, but none of them I think have forgotten what they were once taught: that cursed is he that putteth his trust in man. It would offend some of them more to speak irreverently of Joseph, than it would of God himself. Joseph says that he is a God to this generation, and I suppose they believe it. Any one needs a throat like an open sepulchre to swallow down all that is taught here. There was an elder once wrote in confidence to a friend in England; told him the state of the Church here, and they showed it to some of the elders there, and they wrote back to the heads of the Church, and it caused him a great deal of trouble. I think if you would once come here, you would not put so much confidence in all who go by the name of Mormons.

I am very much obliged for the pin ball; I think it is very pretty, and it comes from Mother so far, from old Massachusetts. I shall appreciate it highly. My health has been very good since I came to the West notwithstanding it is a sickly part of the country. I enjoy myself well this summer. My husband is everything I could wish, and I hope we may live all the days of our appointed time together. Joseph had two balls last winter and a dancing school through the winter. There was a theatre established in the spring; some of the twelve took a part—Erasus Snow and many of the leading members of the Church. Dear Mother, I hope the time is not far distant when we can enjoy each other’s society, but when and where I suppose time only will determine. There is a report that a mob is coming to Nauvoo.

SARAH SCOTT.

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*This letter was written up to this point by Isaac Scott, husband of Sarah. The rest is in his wife’s hand.*