THE GROWTH OF THE MORMON CHURCH
IN KIRTLAND, OHIO

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claimed to have jointly experienced a vision of the state of man in a future life. They saw that there were three degrees of glory, as Paul had announced in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians; one was like the sun, another like the moon, and a third like the stars in glory. As they elaborated the concept, they explained that even those who are called the wicked men of the earth, adulterers, liars, thieves and murderers, were included in a condition of glory and that only a very few would experience the unknown and unrevealed terrors of an awful hell. The highest glory, the Celestial Kingdom, was reserved for those who accepted Mormonism and faithfully adhered to its teachings throughout life. Those who did not hold fast to the faith, together with the ordinarily religious and honorable people of the earth, were provided with an intermediate glory.

The concept was twice modified; once in January of 1836, to provide Celestial glory to persons who would have accepted Mormonism if it had been available when they lived on earth, as well as to persons who died before reaching the age of accountability; again, at Nauvoo, in 1843, to

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14 Doctrine and Covenants, Section 76. Roberts has perpetuated in Mormonism an extravagant and unjustified priority for Joseph Smith's concept of heaven and hell as elaborated here. Deism, Unitarianism and Universalism all preceded the Mormons in the abolition of hell. See Roberts Comprehensive History, I, pp. 273-274.

15 Smith, History, II, p. 360.
indicate that there were three degrees within the Celestial kingdom and that the highest of these was reserved for those who obeyed the law of Celestial marriage—including plurality of wives. 16

When the extension of cosmic doctrine was completed, it furnished the Mormon with an answer, or an indicated answer, for every question from one eternity to the other. The whole plan was conveniently expressed in a couplet: "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become." Against the immensity and promise of this view of life in totality, the pleasures and terrors of the transitory present were as nothing. The doctrine supplied a sphere of operation in which the Mormon could build and dwell without fear of eviction regardless of whatever persecution and mobbing might rage about him in the real world. For those whose science and history was oriented in the Bible, this explanation was logical and satisfying. If it failed to satisfy the learned, as the wisdom of God always had, it was, for the average Mormon, verity itself. It was added gradually as companion doctrine to the original ideas of gathering the Saints and building Zion; it soon infiltrated every aspect of the Church. For a generation the original ideas, reinforced by common suffering in many cities hopefully begun, held sway. But when

16 Doctrine and Covenants, Section 131. Date in dispute.