

# Diversity in Nineteenth-Century St. Louis

## A Scotsman's Description

*Rachel Cope and Robert D. Palmer III*

On February 26, 1840, Douglas Miln, a Scotsman visiting St. Louis, Missouri, wrote a letter to Reverend William Beckett of Aberdeen, Scotland. This document, 3 $\frac{1}{4}$  pages on 10" x 16" paper, has been preserved in the collections of the Filson Historical Society in Louisville, Kentucky. Specific details, such as whether the letter ever made its intended trans-atlantic voyage and how it ended up in this particular repository, remain unknown. It is clear, however, that during his sojourn in St. Louis, Miln penned keen observations of antebellum American culture, including a lengthy and straightforward description of early Mormonism. Consequently, the document reveals how The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was being discussed and exemplifies how geographically vast such conversations could be. Even more significantly, in a culture where Latter-day Saints struggled to gain a fair hearing, Miln's document, which relies heavily on John Corrill's history of Mormonism, suggests that the Saints sometimes succeeded in telling their own story to fair-minded inquirers. The letter is reproduced below with permission of the Filson.

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, St. Louis stood at the center of "trade and culture for the great western waterway system of the upper and lower Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois Rivers." River traffic made St. Louis less dependent economically on rural Missouri and Illinois and caused the city to thrive despite the economic downturn that began in 1837.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Stanley Kimball, "The Saints and St. Louis, 1831–1857: An Oasis of Tolerance and Security," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 4 (1973): 489; Thomas Scharf, *History of St. Louis*

Miln used his letter to assess American society and culture. He wrote of taxes, mob violence, and slavery, but used most of his ink to detail the religious diversity so prevalent in the American republic. He noted the stunning variety of denominations, described the religious practices of slaves, and compared Scottish and American Presbyterianism, but he seemed most interested in describing Mormonism. His fascination with the array of America's denominational choices may have been influenced by Scotland's simultaneous experience with religious diversity.

Beginning in the eighteenth century, rapid industrialization and resulting urbanization revolutionized Scotland's political, economic, and social landscapes. Poverty, disease, crime, and infant mortality rates increased, and religiosity waned. Many Scots were discouraged about the Presbyterian Church, Scotland's national denomination, which seemed "unable or unwilling to use its influence to mitigate the evils of the industrial age."<sup>2</sup> One result of the economic and social upheaval, according to historian Callum Brown, was a "belated but very rapid and extensive process of pluralisation in religion."<sup>3</sup>

In the 1820s and 1830s, Edward Irving and other Scottish clergymen fostered a revival; they believed Presbyterianism had strayed from primitive Christianity. Such meetings drew large crowds, evidencing a dramatic religious shift. The groundswell became strikingly evident in 1834, when the Evangelical Party gained the majority of seats in the General Assembly for the first time in a century. As a result, a long debate ensued, known as the Ten Years' Conflict.<sup>4</sup> By May 1843, Presbyterianism had fractured. More than four hundred ministers defected to form the Church of Scotland Free.

Mormonism joined the increasingly varied religious scene in Scotland during this tumultuous decade. Although Miln and probably Beckett were not likely aware of it, LDS missionaries were active in Scotland as Miln composed his letter. In the mid-1830s, Scotsmen Alexander Wright and Samuel Mulliner had joined the Church in Upper Canada. In 1839, they sent a copy of Parley P. Pratt's *Voice of Warning* to relatives in their homeland, where they were subsequently called to serve as missionaries. By May

---

*City and County from the Earliest Periods to the Present Day* (Philadelphia: L. F. Everts, 1883).

2. Frederick S. Buchanan, "The Ebb and Flow of Mormonism in Scotland," *BYU Studies* 27, no. 2 (1987): 28.

3. Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 17.

4. N. Cameron and others, eds., *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1993), 816.

1840 they had baptized eighty individuals. Shortly thereafter, Orson Pratt organized in Paisley the first Scottish branch of the Church. By the end of the century, ten thousand Scots had embraced Mormonism; approximately half of this group emigrated to Utah.<sup>5</sup>

Writing in the middle, if not the midst, of the decade-long religious dispute in Scotland, Miln described early Mormonism at great length. He had been unaware of this church before his visit to the United States, but in St. Louis, a location that historian Stanley Kimball dubbed as “the most important non-Mormon city in Church history,” knowledge of the Church came readily to hand. For example, newspapers in St. Louis often detailed the conflict between Mormons and Missourians. Some Latter-day Saints appear to have sought employment and safety in St. Louis after an October 1838 executive order from the governor demanded that they leave Missouri. Many residents of St. Louis expressed sympathy and support for the Mormon exiles. Dissident Mormons also found a safe haven in St. Louis. Later, the burgeoning city served as an “emigrant center” for those migrating west.<sup>6</sup>

The only obvious source of Miln’s knowledge of Mormon history and doctrine is John Corrill’s fifty-page booklet titled *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, (commonly called Mormons;) including an account of their doctrine and discipline; with reasons of the author for leaving the church.*<sup>7</sup> Much of what Miln wrote about Mormonism is quoted verbatim from Corrill’s work. An early convert to the Church, Corrill served in the bishopric in Missouri and was frequently asked to keep church records. He accepted an assignment to write a church history after dissident John Whitmer refused to give his account to Joseph Smith.<sup>8</sup> But as the title of Corrill’s booklet conveys, he too was disaffected from Mormonism by the time he filed for copyright on February 11, 1839. He was excommunicated on March 17.

---

5. Buchanan, “Ebb and Flow of Mormonism,” 32–41.

6. Kimball, “Saints and St. Louis,” 489–519.

7. John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, (commonly called Mormons;) including an account of their doctrine and discipline; with the reasons of the author for leaving the church*, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. The text of Corrill’s booklet can also be seen at <http://www.olivercowdery.com/smithhome/1830s/1839Corl.htm>.

8. Lyndon W. Cook and Donald Q. Cannon, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 157; Joseph Smith Jr., *The History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 3:15–16.

Corrill's history is richly autobiographical. The first three chapters detail his conversion; the last chapter describes his alienation. Chapters 4–15, meanwhile, depict the divine origin and contents of the Book of Mormon, followed by a discussion of Mormon doctrine and some history. Taking Corrill's descriptions at face value, Miln quoted freely from the central part of the booklet, saying nothing of Corrill's more personal chapters.

Miln's evenhanded treatment of Mormonism is highly unusual given how controversial Mormonism was in antebellum America. Reports of the Church in newspapers and correspondence were often charged with emotion and overwhelmed by the vituperative editorial tone of the times. There is none of that in Miln's report, even though he clearly had Corrill's more emotional material at his disposal. By choosing to so straightforwardly cite Corrill's admittedly miraculous history, Miln becomes an example of a seldom-seen approach to Mormonism in the antebellum period: a truly dispassionate inquiry into the origins and significance of Mormonism.

What follows is a verified transcription of Miln's letter, including original spelling, syntax, capitalization, and punctuation. Angle brackets <like these> enclose words added by Miln. Strikeouts ~~like this~~ indicate words or characters deleted by Miln. Square brackets [like these] indicate editorial insertions for clarification. Bolded type **like this** indicates words quoted directly from John Corrill's history, described above.

## Letter from Douglas Miln to William Beckett

St. Louis, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1840

My Dear Sir,

I was duly favoured with your kind letter of the 30<sup>th</sup> September & 10 October, for which I tender you my best thanks. I value it more highly as it was a volunteer one. I not having fulfilled my part of the agreement in writing you first. I have also to apologize for not acknowledging its receipt sooner, but really the state of money matters has been such in this country, since I received it, that my whole time & energies have been occupied in the business in which we are engaged.<sup>9</sup> I trust however that this will be a sufficient excuse and I shall endeavour to make up by length & quantity for the time I have apparently negl[e]cted you.

An immense distance now separates us, and I think it would be putting pen ink & paper, not to mention time, to the worst possible use, to employ them in the discussion, of party or political questions and I shall not therefore make any comparison between this, & the Country of my birth in a political view, but simply remark that the more I see and compare this "The Land of Freedom!!!" with "the Aristocracy ridden & taxed devoured land" I have left behind the more I become confirmed in and the more I cherish my old Tory notions.<sup>10</sup> The Land of Freedom forsooth Wherein does the freedom consist? In the freedom with which mobs commit their riots—In the freedom of the Citizens abusing, robbing, stabbing, & murdering one another with impunity—In the freedom with which every unpopular law is broken, the Mobbocracy well knowing that the Government dare not enforce such, however just—In

---

9. In May 1837, the banks in New York City stopped payment by specie. Peter L. Rousseau has noted that it was "the *inability* of the Specie Circular to halt land speculation quickly that strained the reserves of the New York banks and contributed to a loss of confidence in their notes." Subsequent bank failures and high unemployment levels led to a five-year depression. Thus, "the Panic of 1837 was the culmination of a series of policy shifts and unanticipated disturbances that shook the young U.S. economy at the core of its financial structure." Peter L. Rousseau, "Jacksonian Monetary Policy, Specie Flows, and the Panic of 1837," *Journal of Economic History* 62 (June 2002): 460, 486.

10. The term Tory referred to a member or supporter of a major British political group in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Tories initially favored the Stuarts and later supported royal authority and the established church. They wanted to preserve the traditional political structure and defeat parliamentary reform.

the freedom of the rich tyrannising over the poor—and in the freedom which the political parties in power have of enriching themselves & their friends & harassing their oponents—and “therefore. I’ll none of it.”<sup>11</sup> The Government is weak & imbecile—It cannot, nor dare not enforce its own decrees, but must run & shift with every blast of popular clamour, however unwise & impolitic that course may be. This follows as a natural consequence seeing that the political & numerical majority of the country are one, and that the Rabble is the most numerous body. The Aristocracy (for it is absurd to speak of all men being free & equal) are the worst in the world, for they consist wholly of the rich. They have acquired riches, perhaps not by the most honorable means & they take pride, & glory in their illgotten gain, scarcely concealing their contempt & scorn of the poor. If a Stranger came amongst them, the question is not Is he honest or respectable? But it is Is he rich? Every one strives to be of this favoured class, and thinks himself better than his neighbours, and thus a mean jealousy & hatred continually subsists between them, which destroys all pleasures arising from social intercourse. You may think, and it may be the case, that I put the worst view before you or at least that I exaggerate but I am sorry to say it is correct in the main feature. There are [no] doubt many, very many, who act and do other wise, but these are only exceptions. It is true a man in this country, however lowly he may have been born, or however poor, may raise himself to, and fill the highest offices in the State but, how are these honors acquired? Seldom by honest & straightforward conduct. Every means however base & muckling<sup>12</sup> and every plan however deceitful is put in requisition

---

11. David Grimsted has suggested that “1835 represented the crest of rioting in the United States.” During that year, 147 riots were reported, 109 of which occurred between July and October. Approximately two-fifths of these riots were connected to sectional tensions: 46 were proslavery and 15 were racial. David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828–1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.

Speaking further about the prevalence of riots in nineteenth-century America, Theodore M. Hammett wrote, “The 1830s were a decade of heightened concern and disorder in the United States. . . . Mob violence of various motivations—religious, ethnic, and ideological—was increasing. Mayor Samuel A. Eliot of Boston noticed a ‘spirit of violence’ abroad in the city and in the nation.” Theodore M. Hammett, “Two Mobs of Jacksonian Boston: Ideology and Interest,” *The Journal of American History* 62 (March 1976): 845.

For example, the Broad Street riot of June 1837 was widely publicized; it started when a volunteer English fire company ran into an Irish funeral procession. This situation escalated into a thousand-person street brawl. Paul A. Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 68; Carl E. Prince, “The Great ‘Riot Year’: Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of Violence in 1834,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (Spring 1985): 1.

12. Muckling means “dirty, slovenly, disorderly.” Joseph Wright, *The English Dialect Dictionary* (1905), at Google books.

to obtain the object in view, but I have said enough, the very thought of such things is debasing.<sup>13</sup>

You say I am becoming the apologist of American Slavery. I solemnly deny the charge. No one would more gladly see or use their <his> endeavour to procure the abolition of Slavery than I. By saying that it existed only in name, I meant that Slavery did not bear that hideous and distorted form, set forth by Mr. Thomson and the other Abolitionists of Britain.<sup>14</sup> The slaves here are well clothed, well fed, and appear to be happy[.] they dress as well, if not better than the whites and far better than the free Negroes[.] If they are sick they are well attended to, and in their old age when unable to work they are protected and cherished.<sup>15</sup> At

---

13. Karen Halttunen discusses the social and cultural development of the upwardly mobile middle class in her book *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

14. Miln likely refers to British Abolitionist and member of Parliament George Thompson (1804–78), who, in 1831, joined the Anti-Slavery Society in London. Thompson was asked to spread the message of “immediatism,” the idea that slavery was a sin and had to be abolished right away. In 1832, he traveled to Scotland, where he met William Lloyd Garrison and became committed to the abolition of slavery in the United States and other parts of the world. Consequently, Thompson toured the United States as an antislavery lecturer in 1834 and 1835. In 1840, he played a leading role in the World Anti-Slavery Convention. Later, in 1846, he joined with American abolitionists, including Frederick Douglass, to help lead the “send back the money” campaign. He returned to the United States in 1850 with the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law. He met with President Abraham Lincoln and participated in the flag raising at Fort Sumter in April 1865. For additional information, see, C. Duncan Rice, “The Anti-Slavery Mission of George Thompson to the United States, 1834–1835,” *Journal of American Studies* 2 (April 1968): 13–31. For information on earlier British Abolitionists, see D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition: Between the Conversion of Wesley and Wilberforce* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); William Hague, *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner* (London: Harper Press, 2007).

15. Miln describes slavery as a paternalistic system; his comments essentially imply that slaveholders assumed a parental role in the lives of their slaves. Paternalistic perceptions of slavery are explored thoroughly by historian Eugene Genovese, who contends that this ideology affected the master-slave relationship in the antebellum South. He explains, “Southern paternalism, like every other paternalism, had little to do with Ole Massa’s ostensible benevolence, kindness, and good cheer. It grew out of the necessity to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation.” Noting the complexity of this system, slaves “turned the dependency relationship to their own limited advantage. Their version of paternalistic dependency stressed reciprocity.” Within the context of their limitations, they “drew their own lines, asserted rights, and preserved their self-respect.” In particular, they asserted their autonomy in the religious choices they made.

their work they are forever singing—the jest and the laugh is constantly in their mouth and they are as merry as the day is long.<sup>16</sup> Some with whom I have conversed tell me that they would not accept of their freedom if their masters would give it them.<sup>17</sup> In the city they have a church of their own & a preacher of their own colour.<sup>18</sup> Those who belong to

---

By combining Christianity with African traditions, they created a “religion of resistance that accepted the limits of the politically possible.” Despite the many oppressive problems that resulted from the paternalistic view, slaves embraced the “spiritual power and ability to make a harsh world as pleasurable as possible.” Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 146–47, 254, 544.

16. Lawrence Levine explained, “Throughout slavery black workers continued to time their work routines to the tempo of their music in much the same manner as their African ancestors.” He further concluded, “Slave music, slave religion, slave folk beliefs—the entire sacred world of black slaves—created the necessary space between the slaves and their owners and were the means of preventing legal slavery from becoming spiritual slavery.” Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 7, 80; see also Lawrence W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 35–58.

17. The slave trade played a significant role in St. Louis. For example, William W. Brown a man who had escaped slavery and later became a conductor on the Underground Railroad in Buffalo, New York noted, “Though slavery is thought, by some, to be mild in Missouri, when compared with the cotton, sugar and rice growing states, yet no part of our slaveholding country is more noted for the barbarity of its inhabitants than in St. Louis. It was here that Col. Harney, a United States officer, whipped a slave woman to death. It was here that Francis McIntosh, a free colored man from Pittsburg, was taken from the steamboat Flora and burned at the stake. During a residence of eight years in this city, numerous cases of extreme cruelty came under my own observation; to record them all would occupy more space than could possibly be allowed in this little volume.” Brown also explained, “Missouri, though a comparatively new state, is very much engaged in raising slaves to supply the southern market.” William Wells Brown, *The Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1847; Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1969), 8, 36.

18. The First African Baptist Church, organized in 1826, was the first fully independent black church in St. Louis. John Berry Meachum, a skilled former slave, pastored this church until his death in 1854. Slaves had to have certificates from their masters to attend black churches, and preachers were not allowed to speak about the emancipation of slavery. Some preachers encouraged obedience and loyalty to masters, suggesting that the enslaved could anticipate better things in the life hereafter; others focused on obedience to God. Slaves were most responsive to the latter. They wanted to receive comfort and inspiration—many viewed religion as a “survival mechanism.” See Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 87; Lewis G. Jordon, *Negro Baptist History, USA, 1750–1930*

this church are of the Baptist persuasion but many of them attend the churches of their owners, where they have a gallery set apart for themselves.<sup>19</sup> Selling is the worst feature of Slavery, but then it is generally the worst Slaves who are sold—no one will sell or part with a good or well behaved servant.<sup>20</sup>

---

(Nashville: Townsend, 1930), 89; Charles V. Hamilton, *The Black Preacher in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1972), 44–45, 37.

19. Albert Raboteau explored the centrality of religious belief and practice to slaves. He explained, “One of the most durable and adaptable constituents of the slave’s culture, linking African past with American present, was his religion.” Some slaves formed their own churches while others attended religious services with their masters. Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The ‘Invisible Institution’ in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 4. In St. Louis, several churches allowed slaves to attend church meetings with their masters. Although slaves were assigned to specific pews, “the blacks and whites were taught together and took communion together as members of the same congregations until after the war.” Donnie D. Bellamy, “The Education of Blacks in Missouri Prior to 1861,” *The Journal of Negro History* 59 (April 1974): 147.

Speaking of slave religion, William Brown noted, “It is not uncommon in St. Louis to pass by an auction-stand, and behold a woman upon the auction-block, and hear the seller crying out, ‘How much is offered for this woman? She is a good cook, good washer, a good obedient servant. She has got religion!’ Why should this man tell the purchasers she has religion? I answer, because in Missouri, and as far as I have any knowledge of slavery in other states, the religious teaching consists in teaching the slave that he must never strike a white man; that God made him for a slave; and that, when whipped, he must not find fault—for the Bible says, ‘He that knoweth his master’s will and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes!’ And slave-holders find such religion very profitable to them.” Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 37.

20. Two million slave sales took place in the antebellum South. Walter Johnson noted, “In the four decades before the Civil War, the tiny capillaries of trade that distinguished the early years gave way to a new pattern of trade. Although much of the trade remained rural and the majority of the traders itinerant, the tributaries of trade were increasingly gathered into a pattern of trade between large urban centers. This new intercity commerce was dominated by well-organized permanent firms, as opposed to one-time speculations and itinerant trade that constituted the continuing rural trade. Slaves were gathered in Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Norfolk, Nashville, and St. Louis and sent south, either overland in chains, by sailing ships around the coast, or by steamboats down the Mississippi. These slaves were sold in the urban markets of Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, Natchez, and especially New Orleans. Contrary to the popular image, most of these slaves were not sold quickly at large public auctions but in extended private bargains made in the slave pens maintained by slave dealers.” Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 7, 17.

Slave William W. Brown was hired out on a year contract to a slave trader (or “soul driver”) Mr. Walker of St. Louis. Brown worked as a steward on the boat that

By the bye speaking about selling human flesh—what do you think of selling a white man such a thing now & then occurs here, and I think it would be a good thing if something similar were done in Britain.<sup>21</sup> When a person in this country is convicted of vagrancy and has no visible means of supporting himself, his services for 6 months are sold to the highest bidder—a much better and less expensive plan, in my opinion, than sending him to prison. Since my arrival here some four or five of these sales have taken place—the last was on the 15<sup>th</sup> instant when a vagrant or loafer, as the term here is, of the name of James Clark was sold. What price he brought or who bought him, I have been unable to learn but I understand that his predecessor was purchased for the mighty sum of fifty cents about 2/3<sup>d</sup> sterling.<sup>22</sup>

I now turn to a more pleasing and I have no doubt especially to you a more interesting subject—religion. In this small city containing only about 20,000 Inhabitants the number of religious sects is incredible.<sup>23</sup> We have Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, two different sects of Presbyterians, two of Methodists, Baptists, Unitarians, Jews & some others

---

transported slaves from St. Louis to New Orleans. Describing this experience, he wrote: "There was on the boat a large room on the lower deck, in which the slaves were kept, men and women, promiscuously—all chained two and two, and a strict watch kept that they did not get loose." In Natchez, the slaves were kept in slave pens, and several were sold. They then embarked upon the remainder of the journey to New Orleans. Brown recalled, "Here the slaves were placed in a negro-pen in a small yard, surrounded by buildings, from fifteen to twenty feet wide, with the exception of a large gate with iron bars. The slaves are kept in the building during the night and turned out into the yard during the day. After the best of the stock was sold at private sale at the pen, the balances were taken to the Exchange Coffee-House Auction Rooms, kept by Isaac L. McCoy, and sold at the public auction." Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 14–15.

21. William Brown noted that he had met a young white man in St. Louis who had been sold into slavery as a young boy by a store he had worked for. The man informed the boy's poverty-stricken widowed mother that her son had passed away of yellow fever. Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown*, 26.

22. Michael Hoffman explained, "Most so-called indentured servants were forced into servitude involuntarily, sometimes as punishment for crimes they committed. Let it be said, in many cases Blacks in slavery had it better than poor Whites in the antebellum South. This is why there was such strong resistance to the Confederacy in the poverty-stricken areas of the mountain south, such as Winston County in Alabama and the Beech mountains of North Carolina. Those poor Whites could not imagine why any White laborer would want to die for the slave-owning plutocracy that more often than not, gave better care and attention to their Black servants than they did to the free white labor they scorned as trash." Michael A. Hoffman, *They Were White and They Were Slaves* (Wiswell Ruffin House: 1993), 54. Miln is being sarcastic in his reference to the "mighty sum."

23. The U.S. Federal Census of 1840 reports that St. Louis had a population of 16,469.

whose names I forget, besides a good number who attend no church & make no professions as also <professed> Deists and Infidels. The most numerous as they indeed are in all the <South> Wester[n] States are the Catholics. The next are the Presbyterians—the third in numbers are the Episcopalians—the Baptists, Methodists & Unitarians are about equal & the Jews are also pretty numerous—the Presbyterians as I have before mentioned are divided into two sects and style themselves First Presbyterians & 2<sup>nd</sup> Presbyterians but the difference in their peculiar tenets I have been unable to discover.<sup>24</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> are the most numerous of the two, & have two churches—the latter only one. The Church which I attend is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Presbyterian of which the Rev<sup>d</sup>. M. Potts is pastor.<sup>25</sup> They are altogether different from those of Scotland. The Totalism is made a church question & one cannot be a member without joining that society. Convivial parties, Cards, Novels, The Theatre, and the innocent dance are also forbidden. Likewise cooking & other such things on Sunday. If a member is known to have committed any of these enormous sins, he is first reprimanded and if the offense is repeated, expulsion follows. This appears to me to be "righteous overmuch." M. Potts is a good preacher, as long as he keeps teatotalism, Novels, the Theatre & but once he touches on these things he is apt to get into extremes. I cannot say I like them—and I often feel inclined to attend the Episcopal Chapel. The other sects are I suppose similar to those of the same persuasion at home but they all seem more or less inclined to fanaticism—In fact they seem rather to be acting hypocritically than under the influence of true religion.

The different religious sects in this country are innumerable and new ones are springing up every day. There is one sect which I believe you have not heard of, at least I never did until my arrival here. they call themselves "Mormons" or "Church of Christ latter day saints."<sup>26</sup> Their origin is said to be thus—**Sometime in 1825** one Joseph Smith Junior was informed by an angel that there was a valuable record concealed in the earth and that the time had now arrived for it to be brought forward

---

24. For a discussion of religious diversity in nineteenth-century America, see William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

25. The Second Presbyterian Church was founded in 1838. It met temporarily at Fifth and Pine Streets. From 1840 to 1870, church meetings were held in a Greek Revival structure at Fifth (Broadway) and Walnut Streets. William Stevens Potts served as pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in St. Louis from 1828 to 1835. He then served as pastor of the newly formed Second Presbyterian Church from 1839 to 1855.

26. As noted in the introduction, Miln's descriptions of Mormonism are essentially extensive quotes from John Corrill's fifty-page pamphlet, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints (commonly called Mormons)*. **Bold** words indicate word-for-word quotations.

& published to the world.<sup>27</sup> After being warned several times he went to the place pointed out by the Angel & found the record engraved on leaves or plates of gold-fastened together by rings. These plates were about 6 by 8 inches square and very thin. They were carefully enclosed in a stone box provided for that purpose, which Smith broke open. After he obtained the plates and before he left the place he began to contemplate the vast riches he would acquire by their means. While thus thinking and contemplating upon the subject, the Angel hid the plates from his view and chastised him for his wickedness in acting contrary to the commandment for the Angel had informed him that it was for the bringing about of gods purposes in the salvation of his people that the Lord gave him access to the plates, but as he thought to become rich & aggrandize himself, that therefore he should not obtain the plates again until he had repented of his folly. About two years elapsed before he again got possession of the plates—after which through much difficulty on account of persecution & poverty, he translated them by degrees, with the assistance of others who wrote as he dictated.<sup>28</sup> One Martin Harris who contributed much towards the publication of the Book, drew off several of the characters written on the plates which were said to be the reformed Egyptian and took them to the learned in New York to see if they could be translated but he was requested to bring them the plates, which Smith was forbidden to do of the Lord, but was commanded to translate them himself which he did by the help of what he calls the Urim & Thummim—two stones set in a bow and furnished him by an Angel for that purpose. After finishing the translation the plates & stones of Urim & Thummim were again taken and concealed by the Angel for a wise purpose and the translation was published to the world 1829 & 1830.<sup>29</sup> I have obtained a copy of this Book, it is about the size of a common pocket bible & contains 620 closely printed pages—its title runs thus

“The Book of Mormon: An account written by the hand of Mormon, upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi. Wherefore it is an abridgment of the record of the people of Nephi; and also of the Lamanites; written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and

---

27. Corrill's pamphlet incorrectly states that Joseph learned of the gold plates in 1825. Joseph received this message from the angel Moroni on September 21, 1823.

28. Joseph Smith waited four years after receiving the first message from Moroni before getting possession of the plates. He did, however, receive them in 1827, as Corrill noted.

29. On June 11, 1829, Joseph Smith obtained a copyright for the Book of Mormon from the U.S. district court for the Northern District of New York in Utica, New York. Two months later, Oliver Cowdery delivered the first twenty-four pages of the manuscript to Grandin's print shop in Palmyra, New York. The first copies of the Book of Mormon were printed and available for sale in March 1830. The entire 5,000-copy print run of the first edition was not completed until the summer of that same year.

also to Jew and Gentile; written by way of commandment and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation. Written and sealed up and hid up~~unto~~the Lord that they might not be destroyed; to come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof: sealed by the hand of Moroni and hid up unto the Lord to come forth in due time by the way of Gentile: the interpretation thereof by the gift of God. An abridgement taken from the book of Ether: also which is a record of the people of Jared: who were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people when they were building a tower to get to heaven: which is to show unto the remnant of the House of Israel what great thing the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever, and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God manifesting himself unto all nations. And now if there are faults, they are the mistakes of men; wherefore condemn not the things of God; that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ."

**In the course of the translation, the plates were shown to eleven persons by the special command of God—three of whom had it manifested and shown to them by an Angel from heaven who declared the truth of the book and the other eight saw the plates and handled them, and all were commanded to bear testimony to the world of the truth of what they had seen and handled—their affidavits are therefore publis[h]ed in the end of the book. The Book of Mormon contains an account of the posterity of Joseph who was sold into Egypt. It gives the history of their journey from Jerusalem across the ocean to this land (America) and their settlement here, with their manners, customs wars and more especially their religion, which was the same as existed among the Jews both under the law of Moses which they brought with them and also the gospel after Christ in its purity.**

**The Mormons believe in the same God, in the same Saviour and in the same Gospel that other professions do and they believe as firmly in the scripture of the Old and New Testaments as any other people. They look upon their new revelations only as bringing about the fulfilment of the Bible. The main difference between them & other professions is that they believe rather more firmly in the promises of God, especially those that require great faith for their fulfilment. They believe on the subject of prophets, prophesying and the gifts of revelation in modern times. They believe in and constantly practice they laying on of hands & praying for the healing of the sick, and if unsuccessful they blame the patients want of faith. They believe that baptism by immersion is for the remission of Sins & they laying on of hands for <the gift of> the Holy Ghost.**

Smith gives out that he is and is believed by the others of the sect to be a prophet He receives revelations direct from God, Consecrates High Priests, Bishops, Priests, Elders, Teachers and Deacons—and dispenses his gifts by the laying on of hands.

Soon after the publication of the Book of Mormon they increased rapidly & emigrated in a body to this State. Great numbers flocked to join them and the surrounding Inhabitants grew jealous of their increased power & strength and persecuted & harassed them. One of the High priest after the order of Melchisedeck (for they have different grades of priesthood) at a fourth of July oration stirred up the people to **resist & follow to their houses**, any, who would abuse them, and to make it **a war of extermination to one or the other party**.<sup>30</sup> These feelings were much fostered & party spirit at last grew so high that at the next election, when one of the Mormons & another citizen quarrelled—sides were taken and a general conflict ensued. **This affray increased the excitement on both sides** and meetings were held at which very inflammatory speeches were delivered. At length the Mormons declared war & took the field in open<& armed>defiance of the laws of the state. They had a company organized called the Destructionist whose commander was named the Destroying Angel. This company's duty was to burn & destroy whomsoever and whatsoever fell into their hands. Several battles took place sometimes with success to the one party and sometimes to the other. The Governor of Missouri was at last obliged to call out all the force under his command and after a severe conflict the Mormons were driven out of the state. They have since taken refuge in Illinois where they still remain. They are now peacable & are increasing rapidly in numbers & wealth. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1830 they numbered but six members but now they are estimated at from twenty to thirty thousand.

In relation to church matters at home, I am glad that you are in so prosperous a condition and hope for a long continuance. The new Entrance, railing & Gate I have no doubt will improve the appearance of the Relief Church very much but I am afraid it is much in the same state as the Irishman's gun, requiring a new Stock, a new lock and a new barrel. The present site & building is a great drawback to your success but I hope that by the time I return to Aberdeen that this will be remedied. The Churches on the whole in this country are mean on the outside but inside they are elegantly fitted up with mahogany sofa seats & they are rather too comfortable for they make one feel inclined to take a nap. They want however the solemnity & gloomy grandeur of our old Gothic Churches.

In regard to my own personal affairs—I am weal, stout, & hearty, have never been better in my life and <am> fatter than ever I was—the

---

30. Corrill is referring to an oration given by Sidney Rigdon, then serving as First Counselor in the First Presidency, during a Fourth of July celebration held in Far West, Missouri, in 1838. In this fiery speech, Rigdon suggested that Church members should no longer tolerate mob violence or anti-Mormon persecution. Although he contended that Mormons should not be the aggressors, he encouraged his audience to fight for their rights, even to the point of extermination. This speech alarmed non-Mormons who attended the celebration; antagonism mounted upon its publication. See Mark F. McKiernan, "Sidney Rigdon's Missouri Speeches," *BYU Studies* 11, no. 1 (1970): 90–92.

climate seems to agree with me well and of course I will also try & do my utmost to keep on good terms with it—The cold this winter I am told has been more severe here than it has been known for many years past.<sup>31</sup> The winter is now nearly over, the rivers are beginning to open, & business is becoming brisk. Steam Boats are puffing away at a great rate, the streets are groaning under the weight of the heavily laden wagons.<sup>32</sup> Emigrants are arriving & the streets are crowded, yea almost impassable.

Expecting to hear from you soon and again thanking you for your letter and kind wishes

I remain

My Dear Sir

Yours very

sincerely

Douglas E. Miln

P.S. I saw your Brother at Toronto several times, but I had only the pleasure of seeing Mr. Beckett once—the night I spent at their house—but you know or at least have heard of such a thing as love at first sight. When you write them, be so kind as send my best respects.

D. E. M.

paid Single Sheet

The Rev<sup>d</sup>. William Beckett

22 S. Andrews Street

Aberdeen

Scotland

Via New York & Liverpool

---

31. According to the NOAA's National Weather Records, the average temperature for the month of January 1839 was 37.2 degrees Fahrenheit, whereas in January 1840 the average temperature was 26.3 degrees Fahrenheit. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "National Weather Service Weather Forecast Office, St. Louis, MO," [http://www.crh.noaa.gov/lsx/?n=cli\\_archive](http://www.crh.noaa.gov/lsx/?n=cli_archive).

32. Steamboats were first used in 1817.

Rachel Cope ([rachel\\_cope@byu.edu](mailto:rachel_cope@byu.edu)) is Assistant Professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. She received her PhD in American History from Syracuse University, where she was awarded the Outstanding Dissertation Prize and the 2009 Doctoral Prize for exemplifying excellence in scholarship and research. Rachel was the recipient of dissertation fellowships from the history department and the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University; in addition, she was a research fellow at Haverford College and the Massachusetts Historical Society, as well as the BYU Studies Research Editorial Fellow from 2009 to 2010. Her research interests include conversion, revivalism, missiology, and women's religious history.

Robert D. Palmer III ([rpalmer11@law.du.edu](mailto:rpalmer11@law.du.edu)) received a BA in history from Brigham Young University, where he was awarded an ORCA research grant in Church History. He has previously worked as an intern at BYU Studies and at the Museum of Church History and Art. Rob is currently attending the University of Denver, Sturm College of Law, and will receive his Juris Doctor in May 2011.