

The Mantle of the Prophet

A Poetry Drama

by

CLINTON F. LARSON

Characters

Joseph Smith	Brigham Young
Hyrum Smith	Governor Ford
John Anderson	Thomas Hammond
William Clayton	William Marks
Stephen Forbes	Levi Neibaur
Dr. Richards	Carthage Greys
Nancy Dayton	Mob
Sidney Rigdon	Congregation

Act I

(Scene: Carthage, Illinois, at the time of the martyrdom of Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith, Hyrum, Dr. Richards, and other captive leaders are seen being brought from Carthage Jail before the Carthage Greys. Joseph, wearing a mantle, walks in the midst of the Greys though it is obvious that they want to kill him. He locks arms with some of them; Hyrum joins him. After a few moments of the derision of the Greys, Joseph and Hyrum withdraw to their friends.)

JOSEPH: I come to this hour through the meadows of spring.
No more can be done.

(He is seen in an identifiable stance that on August 8, 1844, is naturally assumed by Brigham Young, who receives "the mantle of the prophet.")

Some of you will die with me.

Prepare yourselves, brethren: only our blood

Will slake their thirst; you see them

Ready under the wavering restraints of the Governor.

Dr. Larson is associate professor of English at Brigham Young University, managing editor of *Brigham Young University Studies*, and president of the National Federation of State Poetry Societies. *The Mantle of the Prophet*, copyright, 1960, Clinton F. Larson. Cf. *Documentary History of the Church*.

Prepare yourselves, brethren, though our going
Will be easier than you imagine. Last night
I had a dream, and saw again my Kirtland farm.
It was covered with weeds and brambles
And I knew it was lost to me; the windows of the
house

Were empty and wore the countenance of night.
It was all strange: I entered the barn
Through broken doors and the floors were gone;
Behind me, then, the clamor of many men
Who came into the barn and said
That nothing was mine, the land nor the barn,
The harvest nor home, nothing,
And I wept; I said, "The Church gave it to me,"
And they said nothing was mine.
"It belongs to me or the Church," I said.
Their faces turned the color of ash and char
And they turned upon me and said,
"Neither to you nor the Church."
"Take it," I said and walked between them,
Out of the barn. It had been raining
And I walked about in the mud;
And I was away from home, even as I am
Now: behind, the knives and the screaming;
Ahead, the imperative Christ of my mission.
Home is not yet though we are in Zion;
Prophecy has made us, but what must follow?
Around me, my brethren; though we die,
We do not; to serve the Lord and His will
Is like the gift of the nativity, though from that
moment

He strode to the cross and the centuries of redemption.
Fix the time; the Greys in their hate lift us to Zion.
My conscience is the covenant of my being
Before God and before all men.

(They leave under guard and the Greys disperse. The lights dim slowly. Then two Mormons, John Anderson and William Clayton, enter alone.)

ANDERSON: We still have time. Robert and Frank will

help. There are many others.

CLAYTON: He went willingly, John. He could have saved himself many times.

ANDERSON: But he needs to be saved from himself.

He is hardly older than we; martyrdom
Is for the old, who may fulfill their lives.
The Church is a loose web, and the gales
Of our time will rend it if he leaves us now.
Europe has heard him, the migration begins:
Our people come; where his mantle is, the people
Come; it covers them with the light of the grove.
We stand here, impotent, and let him die.

CLAYTON: You have known it would come to this
Since you first heard of him: all is well.

ANDERSON: So quickly has he come to this that I wonder
That it was not yesterday his work began.
He has been many things to many men.
Consider, Clayton: he has given himself up
And nothing is solved; as before, nothing.
If they were to draw his corpse through the towns
Of Illinois behind a wagon to bump and roll
Through mud and filth, our enemies would not
change.

Those whom he satisfied are those for whom
He has become an instrument, for long ago,
When the Church was new and he old from the
malediction

Of those who would call his witness an illusion,
He saw it was useless ever to be known apart
From the Church, and so he would have it,
Though he should lose everything for that identity.
His strength or weakness is the Church.
Even you and I could face them, armed;
They circle and wait, painted and slaving;
The cowards are assembled, and I weary of them.
Let us ride into them, swinging and striking;
I am galled if I cannot.

(Clayton remains back.)

Then at least me!

(Several shots can be heard.)

Then I have waited and talked, talked and waited,
And Joseph is gone. Like a thin mist,
I swirl about my words and they condemn me.
Joseph! *(He stands with his face down; the movements of his body indicate he is sobbing.)*

CLAYTON: "He was despised and rejected of men;
A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:
And we hid our faces from him;
He was despised, and we esteemed him not.
Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows:
Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities.
The Lord had laid on him the iniquity of us all."
We could have done nothing: we have wandered
For freedom and have not found it.
See, the swallow wheels and is gone,
But in our minds we follow it steadily
In a beam of light. The light leaps
About us now, the times change: I have seen
My hands harden in Illinois and you
Straighten for some great toil. We change,
Gain in our loneliness, lonelier still.
In the dry sand I have seen the fragile flower
Thrive; spiritual red and gold, blown
And burned in the white glare:
It means the rigor of Israel from Egypt.
All is well: Joseph has brought us
Out of ourselves, and in us Zion
Sings.

ANDERSON: Now Brigham will come home; he will ask
who let Joseph die. I will show him. We have become
women, full of sweet protestation.

(Stephen Forbes runs in, the mantle of the Prophet in his hands, with a few other things, including a Bible and a Book of Mormon.)

FORBES: I was able to get a few things. Some of the others have Joseph. He sprang to the window; but just as he was preparing to jump, he saw such an array of bayonets below, that he caught by the window casing, where he hung by his hands and feet, with his head to the north, feet to the south, and his body swinging downwards. He hung in that position three or four minutes, during which time he cried, two or three times, "O Lord, My God!!!" and, wounded to death, fell to the ground. While he was hanging in that position, Colonel Williams shouted, "Shoot him! God damn him! Shoot the damned rascal!" But no one fired. He seemed to fall easy. He struck partly on his right shoulder and back, his neck and head reaching the ground before his feet. He rolled on his face. Then they shot him. He was taken by one of them, who sprang to him from the other side of the fence, who held a pewter fife in his hand, and was barefoot and bareheaded. He set Joseph against the south side of the well curb, a little way from the jail. He cried, "This is old Joe; I know him. I know you, Old Joe. Damn you." Then he got a bowie knife to cut off Joseph's head and raised it to strike, but a light from the heavens burst upon Joseph, and between him and his murderers, and held them off. The hand with the knife fell powerless. The muskets of the four who had fired at Joseph fell to the ground, and everyone stood like stone. It was then that I went forward.

ANDERSON: We heard the shots, and you bring trinkets. We could have saved him.

FORBES: Joseph knew what was coming; we could not withstand him. But we have him and will bury him secretly.

ANDERSON: Take him home, to Nauvoo.

CLAYTON: Brother Forbes, what about Hyrum?

FORBES: Hyrum is dead. The others are wounded.

CLAYTON: Brother Young is in Boston,
But now the campaign is ended.
He must come west again;
The migrant must come home for Joseph.
What is to be done? The women will weep;
Their desolation will frame our days

And empty our homes. The aged woman
 Will ask, "Have they killed my sons?"
 Sorrow will lie in their homes and vanquish the city.
 It was to be in their time and in ours.
 Sorrow will vanquish the warmth of our people
 And make us wander, watchers of the sky.
 They have brought us from the childhood
 Of our listening and wonderinng, and they give us
 the staff,
 The mantle, the discontent. The women shall weep,
 And as deep as their sorrow runs so must our will.
 We shall reach with their sorrow
 As Joseph reached with prayer:
 What is to be done? But it will be done,
 Full of silence: the grass of the land
 Harkens, bends tumultuously, dies. The ice
 Comes in November; winter shall save us,
 And we shall move as one, breaking the cold will
 That keeps us less than we are.

FORBES: I see clouds over the land, like cotton,
 Blown: the wheelwright walks among them
 With the mantle of Joseph. Take it and keep it, John.

ANDERSON: If I could hold it, I would think him near.
(He takes the mantle.)

I take his night, his covering

THE VOICE OF

JOSEPH: O light of morning, light of spring,
 Shining sunstream in the glade,
 Vision of my prayer.

ANDERSON: City of darkness, the crossed staves,
 The murmuring streets: the houses hunch
 Behind the sagging gates; the orchards
 Shudder in the squalor of death.
 Where shall he be taken? Not even among his people
 Shall his grave be known; the wolves follow the scent
 And circle him. They wink in the darkness.

THE VOICE OF

JOSEPH: From the millenium of death, in the center of light,
 I read, "If any of ye lack wisdom, let him ask of God,

Who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not,
And it shall be given him."

ANDERSON: If not in his life, in what can one believe?

The word and prophecy embody themselves,
And when they fail, I honor a wraith.

The wraiths of history evaporate in the real glare
That he withstood, until now. I have sought
The eternal prophet of the last days in the mansions
And gardens of Palestine, John, who lives,
But like the gift of frankincense and myrrh
Around the Savior. In an ancient temple
He called me aside, murmuring:

"If I tarry till he come, what is that to thee?

On the threshold of evening I speak to him:

The shaper of wood I know, him of the adze and
plane,

Of the earth and the fountain, abroad in the glen
For the bole and the staff, or before the sepulchre,

Awaiting the redemption of ancient time.

Now the sceptre of evening, the evening star,
The alcove where the voices gather him, questioning;
The hush of evening, as if were held the rose
Of the shadow, blooming and breathing among them

The infinite: Follow Me.

On whom the sceptre falls, on him the shade of life,
To remain in the trial as the vane of the Ghost.

Now the work of days is ended, and the shore where
I found him shines with the resurrection:

Where the sand gleams from the sea, my life is;

Where the waves vanish, I strive;

From the wood of Olivet he came, so I tarry there,
At the high wall, before the coincidence of death."

John kept me in my time, and I possess only

The mantle of Joseph. Shall I hold it

As if to encompass him or let it billow

With his ghost? Shall I keep his artifacts

And build a museum with the faggots of my will?

Shall I split the doctrinal rails and freight them

Through my mind like some crabbed schoolman

Thick with his own security? I shall carry
Joseph's mantle in the womb of night.

FORBES: Let us carry him home to Nauvoo.

CLAYTON: The maelstrom breathes the night wind:
In the vortex and vales of the land
The death's head glimmers,
Careening, suspended, wildly searching.
Spirit in us that is all we should have been
And yet is the aspect of our redeemer,
Rise magnificent in the martial gold,
Rise against the chaos:
Your shoulders move like grain on a hill,
Full and mellow;
Your arms carry the fallow sheaves;
Your hand rests as on a staff;
And your hair is the fusion of paths of flame:
Your eyes flicker and play
And stay the death's head from the province of man.

ANDERSON: I speak to the dead, to the still listeners
In the groves of night;
I speak in the dusk
Among the marble and pine
Where they lie.
Their quiet piety listens,
Their patience always in them living
Silently there.
The throng of the dead is vast
Beyond the forlorn word
And the hurrying sword of time;
They rest in the chapeled zone,
In the wood and stone,
In the groves of night.
Joseph, they call in the humming night
And in their voiceless being
Gather the living down
For the love of the earth.

ACT II

(Scene: Near Nauvoo, Illinois, more than a month after the martyrdom of Joseph Smith. Act II opens as the bier is being carried down the street. It is twilight, and it is somewhat difficult to distinguish between Mormons and non-Mormons, except that the latter are loud and insulting. The Mormons move very slowly and respectfully, even majestically; however, they feel the tragedy that their cause has suffered. Strains of "Come, Come Ye Saints" can be heard at appropriate times.)

ONE OF THE MOB: Ole Joe Smith—got 'im at last! Ain't they goin' fancy there! Decked out in their Sunday clothes. Hey, Ben, watch me! (He follows the Mormons, mimicking their posture and occasionally touching them.)

2nd OF THE MOB: (To Richards) Where's your harem, your majesty? Abraham? Sir?

1st: Bows and lace and fancy cuffs, ain't they fine? Ladies' men. What a religion they got! Let's get us one too so the women will like us better. They got *style*, friend.

3rd: Missionaries to the womenfolk!

RICHARDS: Kindly let us be. We wish to bury Joseph. (The Mormons put the bier down for a rest.)

MOB: Holy, holy, holy Joe!

CLAYTON: The rock is broken, the evening dies

MOB: Joe, Joe, prophet Joe! (They dance about, mockingly.)

3rd: Where's your religion now? Where's those visions? I'll be your prophet. Let *me* be your prophet!

CLAYTON: The land lies unharvested, the grain burns;
The houses lie open to dust, and the brown wind
Winds through the streets of tomorrow.
The day dies in the west, the sky is like
The fallow land; it stretches white and fallow
With the sun and prepares the grave of graves,
The vacant night. We gaze into the eyes of God,
The pitiless eyes, and find them desolate as pain.

2nd: And Joe said, let there be a vision, and there *was* a vision.

1st: Church, church, we got a church! Sprinkle me and deal me queens! My luck ain't so good.

2nd: Let's us elders play cards on ole Joe!

RICHARDS: (*Beckoning them away, but they move only slightly*) Leave us, and all will be well. Let us forget and remember. The Church is the Missouri.

CLAYTON: We have come to the wall.

The centuries moulder on the shores of Africa;
Out of the pall of Europe the word of God came,
Saying here, here shall be the veil of Him
Through whom I speak, but now in the wide gaze
Of the sky, we whisper of prayer in the grove.
A hundred wings rise from the river and vanish
Beyond the plain, and the wagons wander
In Eden but find no home.

MOB: Bury ole Joe! (*They begin kicking at the coffin.*)

ANDERSON: Hold there! (*He faces one of the non-Mormons whose hands are raised. Slowly, deliberately, he takes the man's hands and forces him to his knees.*)

You have had enough. I cannot bear that.

(*His voice filled with grief*)

I hear his voice in the upper room,

Calling by the Susquehanna, calling

And he shall bear no more.

I ask you to move me aside;

I beg of you, test me.

Let me have your hand,

And I shall pour you full of my history.

From Norge, the chain mail and the ship

Over the North Sea, I shall find you

And bring you down. . . .

Mark how the temperate air of my friend

Stays him but not me, how the level sword

Moves from side to side. . . .

I ask you, grip me, and I shall feel

The helm again and the broad release of the sea.

Westward I move, breathing the test

Of the landward storms, and the gulls

Hovering over the foamed water. . . .

I ask you, again, and I shall be free.

RICHARDS: Brother Anderson, they may go now. (*The mob disperses, but a few skulk on the periphery.*)

ANDERSON: I was not with the Prophet long.

RICHARDS: But you know him. He would not be saved, but let them do their work.

ANDERSON: But now what? Where he is, the vision may also be.

RICHARDS: The sword is fashioned and tempered. We breathe the dust and remember. The Twelve remain.

FORBES: A mere quorum beside him.

CLAYTON: Whose hand becomes him?

The light in the Temple came,
The covenants came like the clarion of Moroni
From the wilderness of Sidon:
The ancient land, the land was his
Where he walked, the sky where he looked.
The grain grew under his gaze;
The silk of Canaan in his voice.
We listened and forgot the world.
His call was the ache of knowing
The morning and evening of God
As He walked in the upper room,
And though we tried to call him young
The elderly God opened our souls
Like the green and wondering spring,
And we could not speak for wonder,
The faceted truths and imperishable love.
We gave ourselves to the god he saw
And witnessed God in us as Joseph lived,
But now his body declines to dust,
His hand invites the bone.

FORBES: And shall he live in us as we go? We leave the fields and cities, lost in ourselves.

RICHARDS: The Twelve remain.

FORBES: We are lost to him.

(Nancy Dayton approaches.)

FORBES: Nancy . . . we are about finished. We shall return to Nauvoo.

NANCY: I saw Brother Brigham before you left.

He was quiet in the city's square,
Before the Temple. He took a stalk

And rolled it in his hands and let it fall.
Then he bent over slowly, his great shoulders
Dusty and heavy, and picked it up,
And gazed into his hands for the moment
Of my telling it. I thought he saw me,
But I am not sure.

FORBES: Did he go into the Temple?

NANCY: No. A carriage came. Brother Rigdon, I think.

FORBES: Where are they now?

NANCY: I got here ahead of them, with Father. They were
in Nauvoo a few hours.

RICHARDS: (*Approaching*) And what of the Church?

NANCY: That was the reason. We shall hear from them.

ANDERSON: We should bury Joseph soon.

NANCY: When I was not the woman I am,
I spoke to you of the Church,
And you told me of Joseph.
He was the flame of your eyes.
John, they question and flicker,
And Stephen Forbes, beside me,
Is like a bundle of straw.

YOUNG: (*Approaching*)

Will he never have his rest?

He is brought to and fro, wandering in death.

RIGDON: Brother Brigham, we must be watchful. We must
go secretly.

YOUNG: Brother Richards, where are you taking him?

RICHARDS: Beyond the town.

YOUNG: To the agreed place?

RICHARDS: Yes.

RIGDON: Until a chapel can be built.

YOUNG: A chapel, Brother Rigdon?

RIGDON: Where the Saints may come to honor their Pro-
phet. He was the Prophet.

YOUNG: And did he leave us nothing?

RIGDON: We must guard what remains.

YOUNG: Nothing more?

RIGDON: At Kirtland the voices of the past rose behind the
veil,

As if carried in the arms of morning.
Joseph spoke and the vision of time was upon him.
Can that be again? What he received is ours.
Let us keep him apart in Adam-ondi-ahman.
Let us fulfill the promise of Canaan
And rest in the land and remember him.

YOUNG: The Twelve remain.

RIGDON: What of the Twelve? We have Joseph.

YOUNG: They lead. The Church cannot remain here among
its enemies. It will wither as the vine in the land of
Joseph's death.

RIGDON: The voices come round me again.

Here he lies, waiting for his peace
When we have found ours.
His enemies will know his quiet spirit
That like a summer cloud gleams white
Over the fields of Zion. This is the soft land,
Where maize and the grain fill our arms.

YOUNG: We are as straws together in a swirl of wind;
We pass over the land until the wind puts us down.
Joseph, the Twelve remain, and the ache
Of your vision is with us and must be fulfilled.
I have stumbled in your presence, wondering
How to serve you and whom you served.
My hard hands have taken yours, inquiring.
How can I be of use? I have looked into your eyes
And seen the far horizons of the West,
The wagons and the prairie white and golden
Under a summer day. I have seen the cleavage
Of land from the mountains. In the depths
Of my heart I wander there, where the gulls
Ride above a silver sea and the sky
Like a veil hangs over a great valley.
How can I know where this may be,
Except as I remember you in my stride
That brings me west? I have come from the East
To find you, and I have found you only here,
As you are carried in death, so I must find you
Beyond the river, along the trail

To Laramie, or if not there, westward still
 Where the people may gather, where
 The mountains decline with the sun.
 I have seen the inland sea in the silence
 Of your eyes. Where can you have gone but there?
 You are gone, and I look around at the strange land;
 You are gone, and I hear the wind answer me.
 In the west the valley lies: the great blue peaks
 Rise in the haze where the wagons go; where we go
 The land is like the palm of God. Joseph,
 I await the touch of your hand and your arm about
 me

To guide me there; where you call, I must go
 As I have always gone.
 Brother Rigdon, he must rest, but we shall not.
 We cannot abandon him, though we leave him in
 Illinois.

(Everyone goes but Clayton; as Joseph's bier disappears he begins speaking. He can hardly be seen in the dusk as he finishes speaking.)

CLAYTON: The wind comes, the heavens swell from the
 invisible Ghost:

All is well. . . The voices hollo in the fields;
 Joseph! Joseph! You are as near as the word of God.

(The scene is the same as before. However, it is morning, and the Saints are gathering to walk into Nauvoo, where a conference of the Church is to be held.)

HAMMOND: Let's go before the Governor gets here.

NANCY: Let him ease his choked conscience.

HAMMOND: He wades through Illinois like a woman with
 her skirts held high. He tickles my gorge like a feather
 with his sickly talk.

NANCY: When he heard of the murder, they say he thought
 we would release the Legion upon him. He went eighteen
 miles beyond Carthage.

ANDERSON: We should have.

HAMMOND: Why? We swagger with platitudes and cove-
 nants, and to what purpose? The Carthage Greys ended the
 comedy in black face before the jail. Ford directed their

performance by disbanding the Legion.

NANCY: Brother Hammond, do not protest too much. The Prophet is gone. The Twelve gather in Nauvoo for the conference.

HAMMOND: Show me what can be done! Brigham should go to school with the children. Can he ever be what we have lost? He is as unlettered as a nursery tale and nearly as profound.

FORD: (*Enters in some haste*) Let me explain before you go to Nauvoo.

FORBES: Governor Ford, no more of you! You desecrate the living as well as the dead. You martyr the memory of Joseph, showing the same white face to your friends and to us. What are you, the same thing to all men, a rooting liar and trimmer to gain your political ends?

FORD: You—all of you—you do not understand me! Let me explain again. The Carthage Greys were the legal militia. If some of them have been guilty of insubordination, they will be punished.

HAMMOND: We heard you speak of them when Joseph was delivered into your hands, when you saw an opportunity for a little advantage. And you call the calculation of murder insubordination! You gave them what they wanted to hear. "Caw, caw," they cried, "hurrah for Tom Ford!!"

FORD: So many factions and sects in Illinois! I go between them, wondering whether I can call any of them Americans. You Mormons ride the centrifuge and spin away from sanity, your eyes glazed over with zeal, so that you cannot see the least thing practically, but only in terms of some preconceived principles that are not even consistent among themselves. You beat the drum of your own martyrdom; you invite the fire. You ride my wits down with your deliberate zealousness. You want me to stand alone against my people, who have elected me to office.

FORBES: You betrayed Joseph to the mob of your own making.

You have not stirred from self,
Expediency: I see the deliberate animal

In you, that cannot foretell its end,
Hurling itself like a shank of meat
Through any gate. Have you not seen
Your error? But as I think of it, it is no error.
As I speak to you, you wither in the scape
Of my past, and our past.

NANCY: That we must leave, that we must drop
Into the gulf of yesterday.

FORBES: Ford, I become careless of you,
And in that quality see myself again.
I see myself, and for all you have done,
We drop you like a rag in the roadway
Where you tatter and rend under the wheels
Of our going. We shall go and leave
You alone with yourself and the Greys:
Assassins, love one another, for we grow
As we look at you; Joseph is fulfilled;
Your duplicity shines on your black tongue
And wrinkles your words: never have I seen you
So well, who would nip at motes and fail
To see the light running through them.
If the unequivocal fact were the slap of my hand
You could not feel it, nor would your head turn:
You stand there like marble, lustrous and thick,
But dead in your beautifully clotted veins;
In the ignominy of this time you stand as chieftain,
Slick, crabbed, an object for deliberate malediction.

FORD: You are as hard on me as your oppressors on you.

FORBES: Except for this: if what I say is untrue,
It does not matter unless you let it,
For I say these things to you, here,
And not abroad, where you portray yourself
Too vividly. But the Carthage Greys came
With blackened faces, avoiding names and the shame
Of discovery, impersonal, the aegis of officialdom.

FORD: My authority is for all, for the general good; the general good must be considered. Your Joseph Smith was ignorant and coarse, but had natural qualities that fitted him for a little success. He never saw the consequences of his

vices and corruption; he loved money and power. What understanding he had was destroyed by the cravings of his animal nature. But he was not a common impostor. He was meek and arrogant, humble and fearful. Nauvoo is a city of Christians and thieves. I do not understand him! I do not understand him! How could you? Why did you follow him? You are infidels who mock all religions and rogues who believe anything.

FORBES: Your thoughts evaporate as surely as your words.
Look at the people; they die in their hearts
As they see the young die under the bludgeon
You create from the air.

NANCY: (*Coming to Forbes*) Stephen, it is as if I know you for the first time.

ANDERSON: (*Approaching with the mantle of the Prophet*)
I am searching for one whom this mantle fits;
He must be small, for both he and Joseph's ghost
Must wear it.

Governor Ford, take it
As a gift; you are the full man, of rhetoric complete
And the gift of endearing the people of Illinois.

FORD: His mantle? Leave his mantle to his widow.

FORBES: As the prophet strode before the Saints, it billowed
full;

As he stood before them, it was like a testament
That kept him near to God: it ripples with his light,
From gold, and the glass of the earth for seeing.
It is the very veil between him and us as you
Hold it there, John.

ANDERSON: (*Shaking the mantle open and turning it around*)

Here is Joseph, whom you slew
With your neighing assurances:
Tom Ford, shall I place him about you?

FORD: (*In fascination*) His mantle?
It is as if I only vaguely remember him:
He has slipped away; the issue is settled.
What now can be done?

His people stand about in a vaster concourse;

He does not fail.
 What have I done that he does not fail?
 The mantle shines in the morning sun,
 And though he is gone he is not,
 But lives in the newness of a man
 Awakening from the terror of dreams.
 They fall away from him, and I fall away from him:
 In Nauvoo his people gather,
 And the city is not mine though they give it me.
 I am like a stick in the fields,
 A standard around which the sparrows chatter,
 Endlessly chatter of intrigue and fear.
 The vessel of the state is not here,
 But a stick, the extended arm of animal fear.
 I am what I have been; I cannot blot it,
 But it spreads through me, about me;
 I become myself like the morass
 Below my recognition of it.

(Everyone leaves but Nancy and Forbes.)

NANCY: They go, but stay with me a moment, Stephen.
(Affectionately) I was mistaken.

FORBES: The Twelve are assembled in Nauvoo; our future
 is in their hands. Brother Brigham has changed; I have
 changed since he came from Boston.

NANCY: Let me take your arm.

FORBES: I have become Brigham's man.
 When he spoke of Joseph I saw
 A scimitar of cities against the mountains
 Where we must go, and somehow in him
 I saw Joseph again, the arm of Joseph
 That will bring us there:
 Nancy, a scimitar of cities against the blue mountains,
 And a great city where the temple of the six spires
 Awakens the dawn of our people:
 I saw the diadem of temples in the cities
 And names I have conjured with from that time:
 At the point of the scimitar gleams
 The great temple of the city of angels,
 Along the curve the temple of white stone in the crim-

son hills,
 The temple of the green valleys, Cedar,
 The meadows and lakes of Canaan, Lehi, and Jordan
 To the valley of the great city beside the sea of the
 mountains;
 The temple of Joseph is there and golden Moroni
 In the flame of morning bursting from the eastern
 peaks;
 The singing morning is there and blue-clear night
 When the valley glows and the air is warm
 As the smile of Joseph: the meridian, north,
 And the temples rise in the gleaming scimitar.
 Come west, Nancy, our home is west;
 For that, we could leave Nauvoo;
 For the cities, we could walk a hundred years
 Beside the axeltree and wagon wheel;
 We could forget the old lands behind us
 For the hundred years of prophecy in Brigham Young.

NANCY: How can it be that we would strive
 Beyond the outposts of the cities,
 Leaving all we have known?
 Even now, we have gone from hearth to tent
 To the coverlet of stars for what can be.
 Even Nauvoo is a station, and we walk to and fro,
 Whispering for the love of the land that is not ours.
 I look to you, unfulfilled except in the promise
 Of loving you as if the evening star
 Were the point of a wand that delivers us
 Beyond the listing and dying image of pain:
 Though we should be alone in the western land,
 We are the covenant of our being forever.
 We stand here as we are, as we always shall be
 Beyond Nauvoo and wherever we go in the murmur
 of death.
 Stephen, you are the reach of my love and my hand
 in yours;
 As I look at you, the voice is about us,
 That if we are one, as now, the shields
 Of eternity will keep us one.

FORBES: What we know in ourselves cleaves time,
And now is forever broken in two.

NANCY: Wherever we live, I shall lilt in our love;
How may I keep each image of you?
Each comes from the succulent spring and the water
of air,
Rushing in, immensely strong, and each upon each
Full as the rain of light.
I was held in the gust of glory, held and spun,
Until, dazed in the kingdom,
I found you, whom I could know
Over the headlands of my being.
See the image of you leap like the sea
Upon the cataract of lava washed to sand,
Or like the panther over the canopy of my fear!
I know your vision immensely close
As you keep our imperial love in the sleep of the sun.

ACT III

(Conference of the Church on August 8, 1844. The Quorum of the Twelve are seated on the stage. Brigham Young and Sidney Rigdon are greeting the people as they come and seat themselves. The stage is as follows:

*Quorum of the Twelve
Speaker's Stand*

Congregation

Congregation

The purpose of this arrangement is to make the audience feel as if they are part of the congregation. Brigham begins with some deliberateness and hesitation, then as he becomes firmer the people realize that it is God's will that he lead; the mantle of the Prophet is on him. The light on him intensifies.

The scene opens as Forbes, Anderson, Clayton, and Nancy Dayton come in. There seems to be a happy agreement among them.)

ANDERSON: Then we are agreed.

FORBES AND CLAYTON: Yes. *(They approach Rigdon and Young.)* Good day, Brother Rigdon; good day, Brother Young. *(Rigdon is wearing a long coat.)*

ANDERSON: *(To Young)* Will you speak this afternoon?

YOUNG: Yes, the Lord willing.

ANDERSON: It may rain; there is some shelter under the trees where we can listen to you. Everyone who can has come.

YOUNG: I am grateful.

FORBES: But the speaker's stand is in the open, and you have no mantle. *(To Anderson)* I believe you have one, Brother Anderson. President Young will need cover; the people want him protected from the rain.

YOUNG: *(Hardly noticing the mantle that Anderson puts on his shoulders)* Brethren, I have stood in the rain before, but later, if I need it. Thank you. *(He turns, and the mantle billows full as Anderson takes it. Rigdon and he go to the rostrum. When they get there, the audience murmurs, for they have seen the mantle, and gravitate to Brigham. He shakes hands with the Quorum of Twelve as Anderson, Clayton, and Forbes talk among themselves.)*

FORBES: I had to see.

ANDERSON: I believe you, Brother Stephen. It is he. The spirit glistens and stirs. The people stir under his hand; the Twelve seem as one. The people gather together as if for a great journey. An era is done; an era begins. Listen!

NANCY: The meeting begins.

MARKS: Brother Neibaur, will you open with prayer?

NEIBAUR: Blessed the people knowing the shout of Jehovah;
In the light of his countenance they will walk.

How can we, people in sackcloth,

Open our lips before thee?

They have rejected and slain our leaders,

Thine anointed ones.

Our eyes are dim, our hearts heavy,

No place of refuge being left.

Redeem the people that in thee only trusts;

There is none to stand between and inquire;

Thou art our helper,

The refuge of Israel in time of trouble.

O look in righteousness upon thy faithful servants,

Who have laid bare their lives unto death;

Being betrayed by false brethren, and their lives cut
off,

Forbidding their will before thine;

Having sanctified thy great name;

Ready for a sacrifice;—standing in the breach

Tried and proved.

To save the blood of the fathers;

Their children, brothers, and sisters;

Adding theirs unto those who are gone before them;

Sanctifying thy holy and great name upon the earth;

Cover and conceal not their blood.

Give ear unto their cries until thou lookest

And shewest down from heaven—taking vengeance

And avenging their blood—avenging thy people and
thy law,

According to thy promises made

Unto our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Hasten the acceptable and redeeming year;

Remember unto us thy covenants:

All this heaviness has reached us;
Can any one be formed to declare
What has befallen us?
Before thee nothing living is justified by their works.
Help thou, O Father; unto thee
We will lift our souls,
Our hearts in our hands;
We look to heaven,
Lifting our eyes unto the mountains,
From whence cometh our help.
Turn away thine anger,
That we be not spoiled.
O return and leave a blessing behind thee!
In the name of our Lord Jesus, Amen.

MARKS: Brother Rigdon, will you speak? Then Brother Young..

RIGDON: The object of my mission is to visit the saints and offer myself to them as a guardian. I had a vision at Pittsburgh, June 27th. This was presented to my mind not as an open vision, but rather a continuation of the vision mentioned in the Book of Doctrine and Covenants. It was shown to me that this church must be built up to Joseph, and that all the blessings we receive must come through him. I have been ordained a spokesman to Joseph, and I must come to Nauvoo and see that the church is governed in a proper manner. Joseph sustains the same relationship to this church as he has always done. No man can be the successor of Joseph.

The kingdom is to be built up to Jesus Christ through Joseph; there must be revelation still. The martyred Prophet is still the head of this church; every quorum should stand as you stood in your washings and consecrations. I have been consecrated a spokesman to Joseph, and I was commanded to speak for him. The church is not disorganized though our head is gone.

We may have a diversity of feelings on this matter. I have been called to be a spokesman unto Joseph, and I want to build up the Church unto him; and if the people want me to sustain this place, I want it upon the principle

that every individual shall acknowledge it for himself.

I propose to be a guardian to the people; in this I have discharged my duty and done what God has commanded me, and the people can please themselves whether they accept me or not.

YOUNG: *Attention all!* This congregation makes me think of the days of King Benjamin, the multitude being so great that all could not hear. I request the brethren not to have any feelings for being convened this afternoon, for it is necessary; we want you all to be still and give attention, that all may hear. Let none complain because of the situation of the congregation; we will do the best we can.

For the first time in my life, for the first time in your lives, for the first time in the kingdom of God in the 19th century, without a Prophet at our head, the Quorum of the Twelve, as Apostles of Jesus Christ unto this generation—Apostles whom God has called by revelation through the Prophet Joseph—come before you to lead the kingdom of God in the last days.

Until now, we have walked by sight and not by faith. We have had the Prophet in our midst. We have walked by sight and without much pleading to the Lord to know whether things were right.

We have had a prophet of the Lord to speak to us, but he has sealed his testimony with his blood, and now, for the first time, we are called to walk by the abiding faith he gave us.

(In the voice of Joseph)

I know your feelings, my people:
We saw him walk from our city, I in my heart
And you in your sight, and he was alone among us.
He gave us his vision, and under his hand I left you
To do as he bid me to do, to preach the testament of
the new world:
But we did not know him as we do now.
I feel his presence and his loneliness:
He would go to Carthage for us, he would die for us,
And we did not want him to stay if he could do more.

"If my brethren do not value my life, neither do I," he
cried.

And he went among his enemies, who wanted him.
Now the light comes in the sky of my vision,
The bird of God alights on the branch of Ephraim,
The ages cry in my marrow:
My heart shakes with the wonder of his knowing, the
voice

Of the milleniums in the crystal of earth;
My hand trembles over them, and they ripple
Like the waters of Jordan and Zion
In the meridian day of the Lord:
I know the Testament and the voice
That runs like the wonder of heaven
Among the groves of Olivet.

*(Anderson comes forward and places the mantle of the
Prophet on Brigham's shoulders.)*

It draws me with it, and abroad as my mission has
been
Speaks His name. Joseph, your hand! Where can you
be?

I feel your ghost, and you have delivered me
Over the veil into the velvet planes
And the white air that shatters into the rivers of stars
We listen to from the pavilions of heaven,
And all is new in the earth,
Where the petals fall like the leaves of another year.
Before me the people feel the breath of your being:
The Saints must leave Nauvoo,
And they weep in the fields for the harvests of grain;
They watch the light flowing from the grove, west-
ward

To the cities of America in the havens of spring.
The Spirit thrives in them,
And I am left open to your people,
And they weep for the mission before us
And the scroll of the covenants you wrote upon:
The dust rises; the seasons disappear;
The people stir like the wings of returning memory

Over the exile of forgotten ages: the bronzed hand
 Breaks the seal, the lance of God
 Springs from the taut bow;
 Rushing, rushing, it rides in the waning afternoon;
 Joseph, the swiftness is upon me;
 The certain hour and the flight of what is to be
 Arrow my days of wondering
 And you are with me in the mission
 You brought me to, that I cannot deny.

(Pause)

Saints of the latter days, come west with the Twelve
 And fulfill the Kingdom of God in Zion.

I ask you: do you want to choose a guardian? Because our Prophet and Patriarch have been taken from us, do you want someone to guard or someone to guide and lead you through this world into the Kingdom of God? All that want someone to be a guardian or a spokesman signify by raising the right hand.

(No votes)

CHORUS: *(Murmuring here and there)*

In the time of strength there are the strong.
 The vessel of God is among us:
 Can we provide what He will give?
 The bounty is in us for future time,
 Though not in our hands.
 For our hands there is the rich earth
 From which our portion comes,
 Not here, but where we make our home.

YOUNG: You seem to say, we want a shepherd to guide and lead us. All that want to draw away a part from the Church after them, let them do it if they can, but they will not prosper.

What do you want? I want to weep and mourn, but all of us should rise up, shake ourselves, and do the will of the Lord. We must discharge those duties God has placed upon us.

I now wish to speak of the organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If the Church is organized, and you want to know how it is organized, I will

tell you.

What do the people want? I feel as though I want to weep and mourn for thirty days, at least, then rise up, shake myself, and tell the people what the Lord wants of them; although my heart is too full of mourning to launch forth into the organization of the Church, I feel compelled this day to step forth in the discharge of those duties God has placed upon me.

Here is President Rigdon, who was counselor to Joseph. I ask, where are Joseph and Hyrum? They are gone beyond the veil; and if Elder Rigdon wants to act as his counselor, he must go beyond the veil where he is.

There has been much said about President Rigdon being President of the Church, and leading the people, being the head, and so forth. Brother Rigdon has come many miles to tell you what he wants to do for you. If the people want President Rigdon to lead them, they may have him; but I say unto you that the Quorum of the Twelve have the keys of the kingdom of God in all the world.

RIGDON: (*Interrupting*) Where will the Twelve take you?

You will leave Adam-ondi-ahman, and home;

You will scatter over the land,

And forget the vision and gathering of Israel.

But let me confide in you:

Toward the end, Joseph fell from grace,

But who can blame him?

He grew anxious about life;

He married secretly, desperately;

He talked fearfully of the West.

I knew him once, when the waters flowed evenly,

Blue in the grace of heaven;

But then I could not know him:

The distant cry of tomorrow,

Away from Nauvoo,

The wheeling wings

Above the barren land

Of your future without me.

In the last extremity,

Joseph lost the humming vision

And gave it to me.
 I am the guardian
 Until his spirit rises again.
 You are lost in the Twelve;
 The tests will overwhelm you.
 Know my voice;
 I am the staff of God;
 Rest in me.

YOUNG: (*To the congregation*) Joseph knew the freedom of
 God,

The new keys to the gates of knowing,
 And the provision of the great Zion of the mountains,
 Where natural truth and the word of God
 Shall be indistinguishable from each other.
 The effort is mine and yours,
 The work and glory of Him
 Who struck Sinai with the stone law
 That grew into love.

RIGDON: We have all we can do;
 The canon is full;
 You will fail.

YOUNG: (*Still to the congregation*) We shall fail as Adam
 failed;

We are not pure as Eden,
 Where palms and the fern might hid our innocence,
 But with the keys we have we shall try every door.
 What may meet us, the sunburst gold,
 The forest green, the ivory legends of St. Paul,
 The sackcloth of Amos, Hosea, the wonder of love,
 Or the bright clouds of the millennium,
 We do not care, for these we address
 With openness, as the spirit is open.

RIGDON: Think of the desert skull;
 It is yours, where the prairie
 Widens into the desolation of Coriantumr.

YOUNG: Brother Rigdon, the Prophet charged you to set
 your house in order;
 He did not mean for you to pull the blinds
 And light a candle in the darkness.

RIGDON: Let us arrange the truth in the convenience
Of him who bequeathed it.
He was the spirit of rest;
The age of the hero is gone.
Do you suppose the wilderness is yours?

YOUNG: The western wilderness is ours,
And may it always be,
Though we return from it
And find the old lands again,
From which our people came.
Israel is the hand reaching through fire
And finding the gate of Eden.

RIGDON: (*In a half-light to the congregation*)
Will you follow him, who gives you fire?

YOUNG: The fire is the Ghost, our minister to Him:
We do not fear.

RIGDON: To the fear of your graves . . .

YOUNG: From which we shall rise and live;
We wait not alone for what must come;
The day is ours.
The Church is the rod of our will
To rise as the Spirit moves us to rise
Like the breath of morning over Zion.
Who can guess what may be before God comes again?
He is not so far from us
That we cannot resemble Him where the fires gleam
Like islands on the sea:
In our hands and as the Spirit rules,
We shall make the world and ourselves
The just inheritors of what shall come.

RIGDON: As you will; I shall have nothing of it.

YOUNG: You have drawn away.
Stay with us, Brother Rigdon,
Whatever the struggle.

RIGDON: Kirtland is mine;
The visions will come again,
Though Joseph is gone.

(*He leaves, slowly.*)

YOUNG: The Twelve are appointed by the finger of God.

Here is Brigham, have his knees ever faltered? Have his lips ever quivered? Here is Heber and the rest of the Twelve, an independent body who have the keys of the priesthood—the keys of the kingdom of God to deliver to all the world: this is true, so help me God. They stand next to Joseph, and are as the First Presidency of the Church.

I do not know whether my enemies will take my life or not, and I do not care, for I want to be with the man I love.

You cannot fill the office of the prophet, seer, and revelator: God must do this. You are like children without a father and sheep without a shepherd. You must not appoint any man at our head; if you should, the Twelve must ordain him. You cannot appoint a man at our head; but if you do want any other man or men to lead you, take them and we will go our way to build up the kingdom in all the world.

Does this Church want it as God organized it? Or do you want to clip the power of the priesthood, and let those who have the keys of the priesthood go and build up the kingdom in all the world, wherever the people will hear them?

If there is a spokesman, if he is a king and priest, let him go and build up a kingdom unto himself; that is his right and it is the right of many here, but the Twelve are at the head of it.

I will ask, who has stood next to Joseph and Hyrum? I have, and I will stand next to him. We have a head, and that head is the Apostleship, the spirit and power of Joseph, and we can now begin to see the necessity of that Apostleship.

Brother Rigdon was at his side—not above. No man has a right to counsel the Twelve but Joseph Smith. Think of these things. You can not appoint a prophet; but if you let the Twelve remain and act in their place, the keys of the kingdom are with them and they can manage the affairs of the Church and direct all things aright.

Now, all this does not lessen the character of Presi-

dent Rigdon; let him magnify his calling, and Joseph will want him beyond the veil—let him be careful what he does, lest that thread which binds us together is cut asunder.

I do not ask you to take my counsel or advice alone, but every one of you act for yourselves; but if Brother Rigdon is the person you want to lead you, vote for him, but not unless you intend to follow him and support him as you did Joseph. Do not say so without you mean to take his counsel hereafter.

And I would say the same for the Twelve, don't make a covenant to support them unless you intend to abide by their counsel; and if they do not counsel you as you please, don't turn around and oppose them.

I want every man, before he enters into a covenant, to know what he is going to do; but we want to know if this people will support the priesthood in the name of Israel's God. If you say you will, do so.

We want men appointed to take charge of the business that did lay on the shoulders of Joseph. Let me say to you that this kingdom will spread more than ever.

I will ask you as quorums, do you want Brother Rigdon to stand forward as your leader, your guide, your spokesman? President Rigdon wanted me to bring up the other question first, and that is does the Church want, and is it their only desire, to sustain the Twelve as the First Presidency of this people?

Here are the Apostles, the *Bible*, the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*—they are written on the tablet of my heart. If the Church wants the Twelve to stand as the head, the First Presidency of the Church, and at the head of this kingdom in all the world, stand next to Joseph, walk up into their calling and hold the keys of this kingdom, every man, every woman, every quorum is now put in order, and you are now the sole controllers of it.

All that are in favor of this, in all the congregation of the Saints, manifest it by holding up the right hand. (*There is a universal vote.*)

CHORUS: We know the Twelve, whom the Lord has given:
 They shake us free from our enemies.
 Westward from Europe we gather,
 And gather still; we are brought from the world,
 From Israel and Ephraim, who have wandered
 For the keys and the standard of God.
 In whom we can believe Joseph stands again,
 And about him we gather:
 Our children speak from future time
 That we are one: and they of the voice of rivers
 Are great and tall in the day of their being,
 When the stakes of Zion are firm in our name.
 Praise be unto Him when our children are strong,
 When their eyes flame the blue and gold
 Of our new land and their calm hands
 Build our Zion: we follow the Twelve.

YOUNG: If there are any of the contrary mind, every man and every woman who does not want the Twelve to pre-side, lift up your hands in like manner. (*No hands up*) This supersedes the other question, and trying it by quor-ums.

We feel as though we could take Brother Rigdon in our bosom along with us; we want such men as Brother Rigdon. He was sent away by Brother Joseph to build up a kingdom; let him keep the instructions and calling; let him raise up a mighty kingdom in Pittsburgh, and we will lift up his hands to Almighty God.

You did not know whom you had amongst you. Joseph so loved his people that he gave his life for them; Hyrum loved his brother and this people unto death. Joseph and Hyrum have given their lives for the Church. But very few knew Joseph's character; he loved you unto death—you did not know it until after his death: he has now sealed his testimony with his blood.

There is much to be done. You have men among you who sleep with one eye open. The foundation is laid by our Prophet, and we will build thereon; no other founda-tion can be laid but that which is laid, and we will have our endowment, if the Lord will.

I say these things in the name of Jesus, Amen.

CLAYTON: When we see the valley, our home, we shall
cry, "Hosanna! Hosanna!"

It will open before us as the sky opens when we look
to God:

The winds of the prairie, the dry lands; the oxen
Under the storm of freedom, the lash; the wheels
west;

And the Saints shall come home. They shall cross the
divide

To the pines of the mountains, the bright canyons,
The snow, the running voice of the torrents,
The falls and the granite hills: I see the Saints
Come home, silent with the wonder of God that He
should bring

Them home; the line of wagons among the great
cliffs

Of the West: they hang there in our vision, green and
grey,

The shale and rock, in the long haze of afternoon,
The spray of the mountain streams swirling in the
canyons.

Then suddenly the high rock falls away in our going,
And the valley opens like the earth that Adam saw,
The golden valley, and I shall say to the Saints, come,
As Brigham can say, come, we cannot fail: the valley
Sweeps up in the west to another land, Oregon,
California, but here is the land of Joseph,
Our land, and Brigham shall bring us home.

The past crusts over, and we forget our origins:
Whence we come is a mission from home
And home where we scan the mountain world:
This is the place where we come, where the spirit
Opens, and we live in the forever of knowing
That Joseph would have it so.

(Everyone leaves but Clayton.)

Jehovah, you are bound by us, for we, naive
And in your image, are they whom you made.
You invest the air above us yet would range abroad
And spoil heaven for our joy. We stand with you

Against the vacuum and fires of space,
And you, our elder hand, gather them in,
The fisherman. You make us of yourself
Grown strong, and we, though fainting,
Are drawn up, shaken by your grace.
You are the resurrection whose craft is power,
Whose reason is love, the recessional wonder.
But the binding of light! The rose of that conception
Impends like the blue power of stars in your vision,
Spiralling forever away. Yet you stand here
For us, savior.
Jehovah, I shall go to the door and begin.
Here is the ritual of our devotion;
I walk out to the spring, where my horse
Bends and drinks from the sky it sees there.
I shall ride the roads of the earth,
Jostling my mettle till it is known
And I gather it as I do these reins.
This you give me as I mount:
Eli, eli, lama sabachthani,
And I go into the white glade where spring comes
In the fervor of love.

*(He leaves. The stage is empty, but the light over the
speaker's stand remains bright.)*

THE VOICE OF JOSEPH:

Among these trees and in the slanting rays
I feel a breath that stirs the restless shade;
Vision of my prayer, O sunstream,
Light of morning, light of spring, flooding
Through the glade, soundless, white and clear,
Enfolding air, enfolding slade, prism of the day,
Glowing stream, resplendent, shining glory
Of the world, eternal light,
Holiness and glory unto Him,
Eternal glory, glory of the Lord!