

This is a great thing as I know from personal experience while laboring in Tooele County — The folks join in regards & best wishes for your continued health & prosperity also that of your wife — Time will not permit my writing more — Again thanking you for your good wishes I remain

Your Friend & Bro

H.J. Grant

## THOMAS L. KANE MEETS THE MORMONS

Donald Q. Cannon

Thomas Leiper Kane, a well-born Philadelphia lawyer-diplomat-soldier, first became acquainted with Mormonism at a conference of the Church held in Philadelphia on 13 May 1846. After listening to a discourse by Elder Jesse C. Little, a Scotch-Irish convert from Maine who was presiding over the New England and Middle States Missions, Kane requested an introduction. Within two days of their conversation Colonel Kane told Elder Little that he had decided to accompany the Mormons to California, and asked for a letter of introduction to Brigham Young. He also offered to help President Little solicit aid from the national government, and subsequently joined his Mormon friend in Washington, D.C., where he personally called upon the secretary of state, the secretary of war, and President Polk in behalf of the Mormons. He also furnished Jesse Little a letter of introduction to his friend, George Bancroft, secretary of the Navy and eminent American historian. Little and Bancroft discussed the requisition of a Mormon military force to participate in the war against Mexico.

After completing their negotiations, Kane and Little traveled together to St. Louis, where they parted company, Kane proceeding to Fort Leavenworth and Little to Nauvoo. At Fort Leavenworth Kane delivered messages from Washington to Colonel Kearney concerning the call of a Mormon battalion and then set out alone for the Mormon camp on the Missouri River. The journey from Leavenworth to Council Bluffs included a narrow escape from drowning, a continuing battle with mosquitoes, and a thorough soaking in a Great Plains thunderstorm. As a result of the extreme conditions of this trip, Kane became seriously ill soon after his

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arrival at the Mormon camp. Yet meeting the Mormons made a greater impression on him than his adventurous journey or his illness. In fact, the suffering of the Mormons affected him so much that he gave up a political career to champion their cause. Much of his life from that time on was spent in aiding the Mormons.

Speaking before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania some years later, he recalled the impression the Mormons had made on him:

After a recent unavoidable association with the border inhabitants of Western Missouri and Iowa, and vile scum which our own society, to apply the words of an admirable gentleman and eminent divine, "like the great ocean washes upon its frontier shores," I can scarcely describe the gratification I felt associating again with persons who were almost all of Eastern American origin—persons of refined and cleanly habits and decent language—and observing their peculiar and interesting mode of life—while every day seemed to bring with it its own especial incident, fruitful in the illustration of habits and character.<sup>1</sup>

The following letter was written by Colonel Thomas L. Kane to George Bancroft, secretary of the navy, on the same day Kane arrived at Council Bluffs and met the Mormons, 11 July 1846. In his letter Kane described conditions in the Mormon camp, presented reasons why the Mormons would not be going on to California until the next year, and expressed his desire to remain with and assist them.

Mormon Camp Near Council Bluffs  
July 11, 1846

Dear Sir,

By a steamer of the American Fur Company which is expected hourly to descend the Missouri to St. Louis from this point, I have the honour to return to you the despatches intrusted to my charge.

On arriving upon this frontier, I learned from good authority that the Mormons, although generally supposed to be in the Indian country somewhere between Grand Island and Fort John, had in fact delayed their advance so long in order to receive those members of their sect who had been left in Illinois and whom a continuance of severe persecution drove after them as fugitives deprived of almost all means of support that they had not yet crossed the

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas L. Kane, *The Mormons: A Discourse Delivered Before The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, March 26, 1850* (Philadelphia: King and Baird, Printers, 1850), p. 27.



Missouri, and consequently would scarcely be able to reach the Pacific during the present season. Upon this, I made careful inquiry concerning what means existed of proceeding directly on to California, and, particularly, as to the possibility of my being able to overtake any of the emigrant parties already on their way to that country. I received answers of but one tenour, yet I have preserved in writing the opinions of Colonel Kearney, Chief in Command of the Army of the West now on the Santa Fe trace, and of Mr. William Gilpin of Oregon, well known for his experience of Western life, which I shall have pleasure at any future time in submitting to your inspection. Colonel Kearney writes, "You have expressed to me your great desire to overtake the California emigrants and accompany them on their journey. From the best information I am possessed of, I consider it impossible that you could do so—they have too much the start of you"—and Major Gilpin—"You cannot reach them at any nearer point than Bear R. where the trails diverge and those going to California turn to the South. It is impracticable for you to pursue them by the route of the Platte with a party of less than twelve experienced men, and then only at the hourly risk of being *rubbed out* by the Indians."

A party such as Major Gilpin alludes to whatever its chance of success, though composed of the best materials, could scarcely be organized without a chief to superintend and encourage its movements in times of responsibility. The office of such, circumstances render it improper that I should undertake. Since my arrival in the Mormon Camp, I find my presence with its inhabitants imperatively called for, nor can I expect with a just regard to the main object of my journey, to feel at liberty to leave them for some time to come. Every day, too, renders it more vain for the people to attempt proceeding to California this season, and I have been acquainted confidentially by those in authority, that such has ceased to be *their* intention.

Under view of these facts; as it is unadvisable to organize a party for the express purpose of bearing your despatches, without giving it my presence; as it is improper that I should abandon my present company for this purpose; and, finally, as it is impossible by continuing in the same, that I will reach California in any time within which the delivery of my despatches can be of service to the United States, I have the honour to return them to your Department.

With great respect, I am, Sir, Your most obedient servant.

Thomas L. Kane<sup>2</sup>

Hon. George Bancroft

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas L. Kane to George Bancroft; 11 July 1846, Bancroft Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.