

“I fished in Arkansas and Tennessee! I fished on the isles of the sea! I fished in England twice, crossing the Atlantic Ocean four times fishing for the Lord! I’ve been through twenty of these United States and into the Canadas, searching for schools of the Lord’s fish! And I have brought into his net hundreds and thousands, baptizing 813 and confirming 632 with my own hands! Now I say this to show you what the Lord can do with the weak things of the earth if only we’ll let him.”

WILFORD WOODRUFF: GOD’S FISHERMAN

A play by Tim Slover and James Arrington

PROGRAM NOTES

PERHAPS YOU’VE SEEN a picture of Wilford Woodruff: stoic, deep-set eyes, firm jaw, a very sober-looking man. But do we really know him? If we do know Wilford Woodruff, it is usually as the writer of the Manifesto that officially ended the practice of polygamy in the LDS church, or perhaps as the author of the dedicatory prayer for the Salt Lake Temple. His stern old eyes look out from the photographs of the period, and in them flares unswerving commitment to the Lord and his purposes.

But there is a younger Wilford Woodruff with whom most are not acquainted: a man who coupled his commitment with high spirits, boundless enthusiasm, and seemingly endless energy. That is the Wilford Woodruff celebrated in this play. The younger Wilford was first and foremost a missionary. He loved the gospel he discovered at

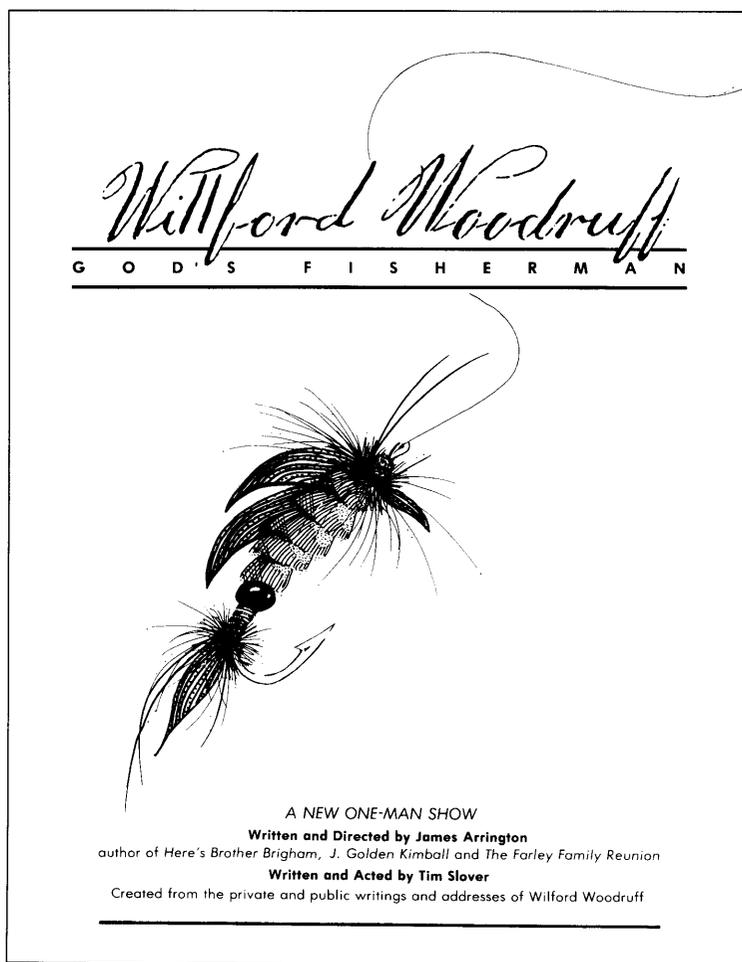
twenty-five, and the eagerness he felt to share it with his

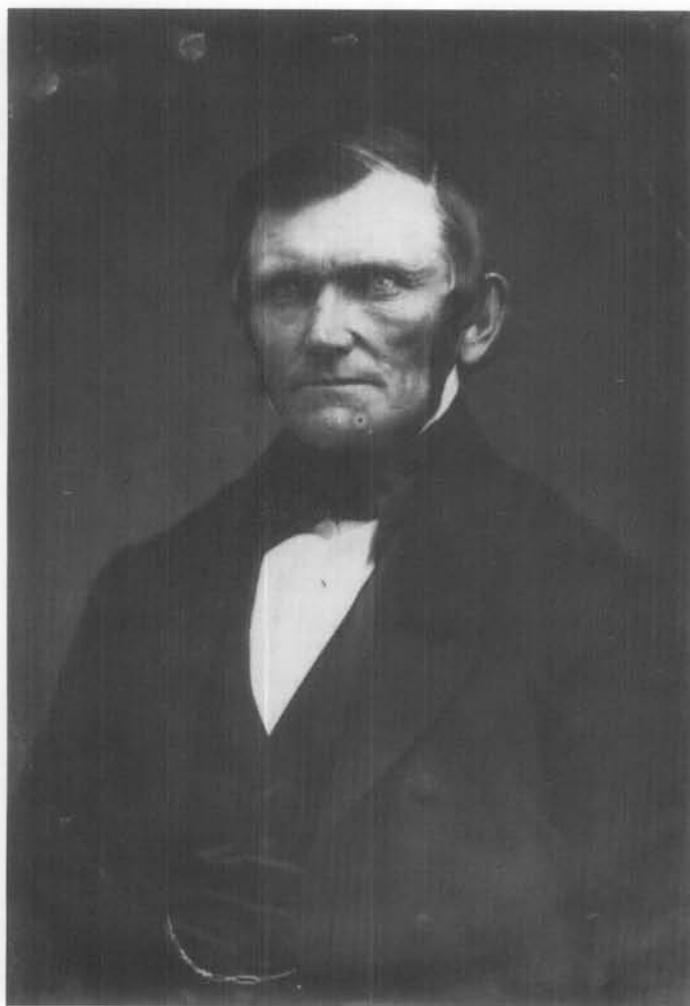
fellowmen resulted in an explosion of baptisms wherever he preached.

Wilford was a proselyting phenomenon, a missionary so successful that even his enemies who listened to him lay out the principles of the gospel were converted. Of all the great missionaries in the Church’s history, Wilford was perhaps the greatest.

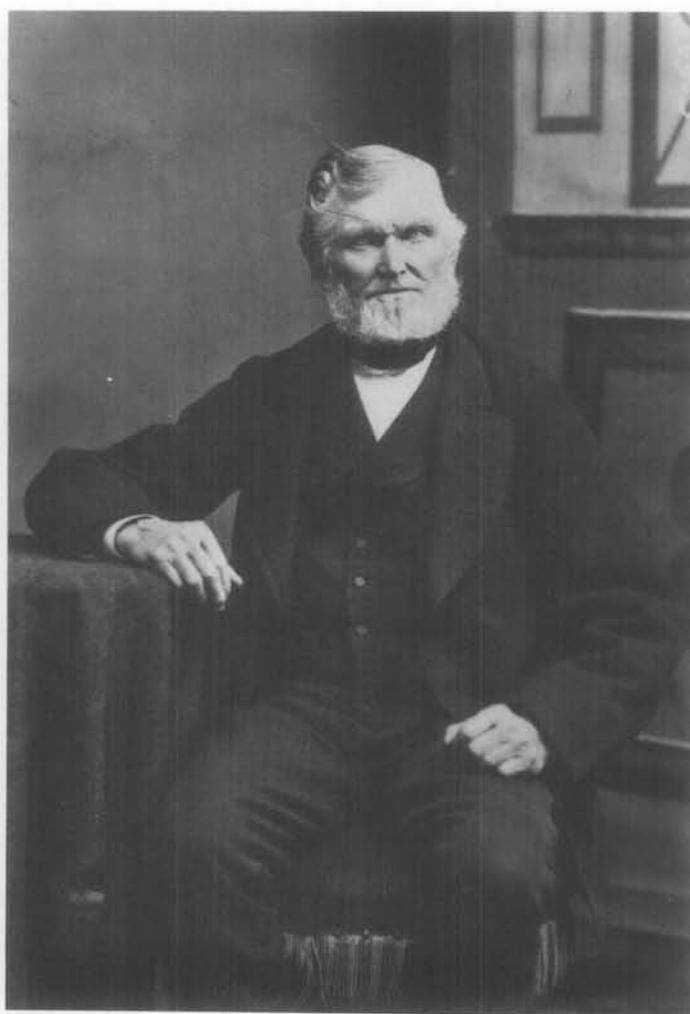
How did he do it? There are glimpses in this one-man play: the unshakable commitment to the gospel and its appointed leaders, especially Joseph Smith, was a hallmark of his entire life. There were also his guilelessness and his humility, his ability to endure hardship, his dry sense of humor. He was told once that his “jokes have more vinegar than molasses in them.” There was also his courage in the face of physical and spiritual dangers, his meticulous attention to details, and his willingness to allow God’s

grace, rather than his own judgment, to form his opinions of others.





Wilford Woodruff, 1853



Wilford Woodruff, 1880s

But two facets of this fascinating man's personality stand out above all the rest. First, he was willing; when a job needed to be done, Wilford was there at the front of the line. Second, he walked with his hand firmly in the grasp of God's hand. So completely integrated were temporal and spiritual affairs to Wilford that he took it as a matter of course that God should tell him from moment to moment what he should do in every aspect of his life. Wilford was not surprised when he was visited by angels or devils. He would have been surprised if they had stayed away.

Every life is a grand play, and Wilford chose to write much of his down. This made the playwrights' work much easier. With rare exceptions, mostly involving connective material, this entire script was pieced together from Wilford Woodruff's own words taken from his writings, diaries, speeches, and family lore. The playwrights thank all those who were instrumental in the research, especially Thomas Alexander, Leonard J. Arrington, Signature Books (whose generous loan of *Wilford Woodruff's Journals* was tremendously helpful), the Mormon History Association, and our long-suffering companions, Mary Slover and Lisa Arrington.

Wilford Woodruff: God's Fisherman was commissioned by the Mormon History Association and premiered 6 July 1987 at its annual meeting at Oxford University in Oxford, England, in celebration of the sesquicentennial of the British Missions. It later appeared on the stage of BYU's Nelke Theatre and in other theatrical venues along the Wasatch Front and in Denver. Tim Slover acted the role of his great-great-grandfather, and James Arrington directed and produced the play.

TIM SLOVER, a faculty member of the theatre and film department at Brigham Young University, is a writer and an actor. His writing credits include the screenplay, *A More Perfect Union*, and the stage play, *The Dream Building*.

JAMES ARRINGTON is a noted playwright, director, producer, and actor. His works include the one-person play, *Here's Brother Brigham*, and *The Farley Family Reunion*.

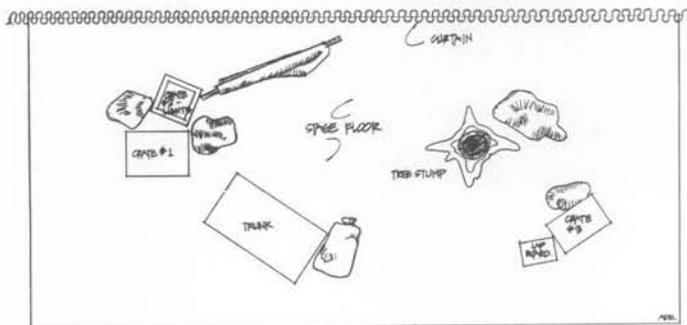
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ACT I



"WILFORD" STAGE FLOORPLAN
SCALE: APPROX. 1/2" = 1'-0"

NOTES
CRATES IN VARIOUS SIZES, FIT
INSIDE ONE ANOTHER; LIGHTS
IN INNERMOST CRATE
BED TENT POLE COLLAPSIBLE
STUMP HOLLOW TO HOLD *BUSH*
W/ RAIN
LAP BEARD WITH FLIP TOP
TO HOLD BEERS

Set design for *God's Fisherman*.

SCENE: 23 July 1847, a secluded area close by a temporary Mormon camp in the Wasatch Mountains, about a day's drive by wagon team from the Salt Lake Valley. It is morning, and the quiet calls of Rocky Mountain birds can be heard, as well as the gurgle of a mountain creek. The stream itself, delineated by rocks and driftwood, "runs" diagonally across the right downstage corner and out into the audience. Scattered across the stage are accoutrements of camp life: a rough three-legged stool; a sawed-off stump to sit or set things upon; a rough trail tripod on which to hang drying clothes; and, most prominent, a very large wooden travelling chest, typical of those in which the Mormon pioneers carried their belongings. During the course of the play, out of this chest will come many things: clothing, harness, fishing tackle, a pot of grease, a cane, etc.

Entering in a burst of energy from upstage is WILFORD WOODRUFF, dressed practically for pioneering and carrying a very fine English fly-fishing rod and a wooden bucket filled with clothes he has just washed. Wilford is forty, but his busy life has left him no time to feel this much age. He moves with the energy and buoyancy of a man who always has too much to do and enjoys it. He speaks with a trace of the accent of his New England origins.

Wilford walks downstage center and addresses the audience directly. This will be his style of presentation throughout the play except on those occasions when he is dramatizing a remembered scene. In those instances, he will speak to imaginary people as if they were present and sometimes act out their responses.

WILFORD

We've had our lunch and he's dozing now. There's no hurry this afternoon for a change, so I figure if we stay some rods off we can talk, while I use my fly rod and get some dinner.

A few days ago I rigged up this Liverpool fly rod (shows fly rod to audience) for the first time in America. (He carefully sets the rod down in a safe place; then, while speaking, he removes clothes from the bucket and hangs them to dry on the tripod.) I went to a brook where a good many of the Brethren were already baiting their hooks with fresh meat and grasshoppers, but not catching any fish. Well, this being the first time I ever tried the artificial fly in this country, I flung it upon the water, and I watched it with as much interest as Benjamin Franklin did his kite when he tried to draw lightning from the sky. I caught twelve in a few hours, while the rest of the Brethren combined did not catch the sum of three pounds the whole day, proof positive that the artificial fly is now by far the best thing known to fish with. And I have the only one in the company. 'Course, I've been fishing all my life. I was born on the banks of a trout stream on March 1, 1807, and, I believe, began fishing on March the second.

My brother Azmon and I were the most successful bait fishermen in Farmington, Connecticut, as everyone there acknowledged. (He goes to the wooden chest, opens it and takes out a small cane fishing fly container. He opens it and shows the flies to the audience.) But I didn't learn the art of fly fishing until I went to England, and I picked it up from Father Richard Smithies, who is considered that country's greatest fisherman. Now, he showed me how to tie these artificial flies, making them from bird's feathers of various colors with a hook concealed in each, calculated to imitate the flies a fish might find in any given season of the year. You tie one to five flies on the line, you fling it upon the water, the trout takes it instantly as the natural fly and then, FFFFFFFttt. (He gleefully pantomimes pulling trout from a river.)

Oh, I've been doing a lot of fishing the last few days. Having all kinds of luck—good, bad, and indifferent. Fished for half an hour Thursday. I couldn't start a single fish. Then I found an eddy with three or four fish in it. They jumped at the hooks as though there was a bushel of trout in the hole.

Now, yesterday I fished from the back of a horse on account of the heavy brush on both sides of the stream, and I felt as if

I'd have an Indian arrow in my side or a grizzly bear upon my back the whole time, for I was in danger of both. The Lord has said, "Let them have dominion over the fishes of the sea." So I have dominion as often as my labors will allow.

(He closes the fly box thoughtfully. Then he takes his journal from the chest and closes the lid.) Oh, I have thought about your question. It's a curious question; it has caused me to reflect and to look over my journal some. I am considered somewhat enthusiastic on this subject of journalizing. But you know, I have had this spirit upon me ever since I first entered the Church: to write down the affairs of my life, the history of the Church, the sermons of Joseph and others, and it's a good thing, too, because the official historians of the Church have tended to apostatize and take their journals with them.

Well, whenever I have heard a sermon from Joseph or one of these great men, I can't eat, sleep, or drink until I write it down. And I remember it all line for line until it's written. Then the Lord takes it from my mind, you see; that seems to be a gift of God to me. Well, anyway, I have looked over my journals, as I say, and I believe I can answer the question, which was, if I recollect correctly, "How did the son of a Yankee miller wind up here?" In fact, as we're in no particular hurry, I'll give you something like a full answer. *(He walks to the stump, sits, and settles himself to tell a story.)*

Now, the trout stream that I was born on turned the wheels of a flour mill and a sawmill owned by my father, Apheck, and my grandfather, Eldad, for many years. They named me Wilford for no particular reason I can discover. As a boy, I was given to running about mostly and getting into scrapes.

Connecticut was just then emerging from under the influence of the Blue Laws. Do you know about those? They were worked up to make people live by religion. Now under the Blue Laws, no man, child, or boy of any age could do any work from sunset Saturday night until Sunday night. We had to sit very still and say over the Presbyterian catechism and passages

from the Bible. They told us children we were lucky; people were no longer burned at the stake or half drowned in the ducking stool. But I dared no more go out and play on a Sunday than I dared put my hand in the fire. I didn't like church much as a boy.

But I knew my Bible. And I prayed to the Lord many an hour to let me live to see a prophet or an apostle. You know, when I was twenty-five the Lord gave me that privilege. *(He acts*

out the following scene.) Now, I had just been baptized and gone to Kirtland, Ohio, to join Zion's Camp, and I there had my first view of Joseph Smith, the prophet and seer which God raised up in these last days.

Now, this first introduction was not of a kind to satisfy the pre-conceived notion of the sectarian mind as to what a prophet ought to be or how he ought to look, for there he stood, a twenty-seven-year-old man in a very old hat shooting at a mark with a brace of pistols. *(The sound of a gun firing is heard. Wilford responds as if in the scene.)* "Good one."

Well, when he was through, I was introduced. Brother Joseph shook my hand most heartily and he said, "Brother Woodruff, I've

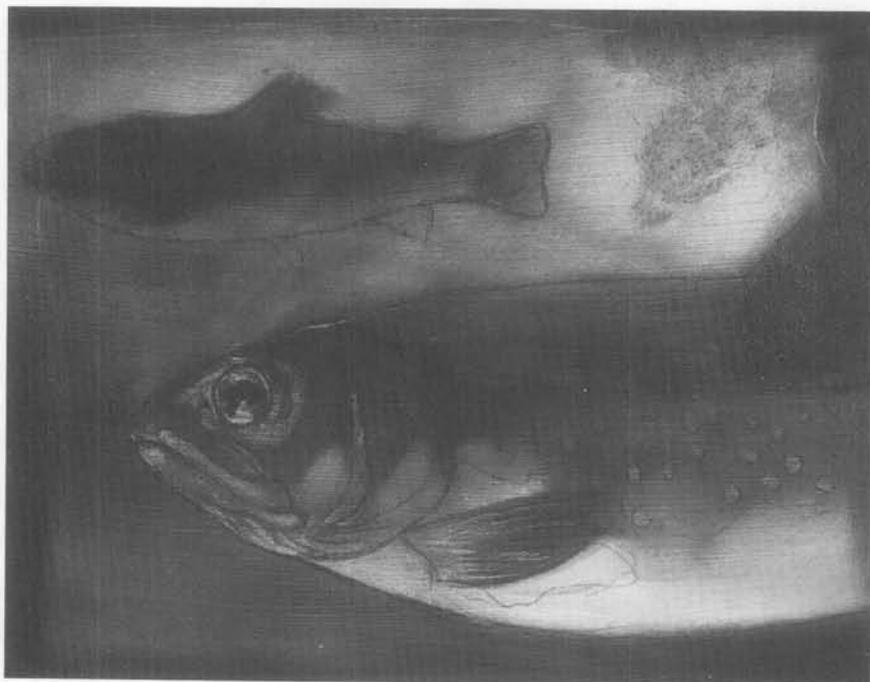
been out shooting at a mark; wanted to see if I could hit anything. Do you have any objection to it?"

"Oh, no," said I, "There's no law against a man shooting at a mark, that I know of."

He remarked that this was the first hour he'd spent in recreation for a long time. And he invited me to make his habitation my home while I tarried in Kirtland. This I eagerly accepted, and I watched him pretty closely to see what I could learn.

Now, shortly after we arrived at his house, Brother Joseph pulled out a wolf skin. He said, "Brother Woodruff, I want you to help me tan this." Well, he was going with us on Zion's Camp, and he wanted this wolf skin for his wagon seat as he had no buffalo robe. So I pulled off my coat, and we stretched that skin across the back of a chair and soon we had it tanned.

The next day I was introduced to Elder Brigham Young,



CHRISTOPHER THORNBLOCK

I dreamed I saw by night a river in which there were many fish. I cast a hook, and I caught some. I saw some larger ones near shore, and I caught them too. After I woke up, I knew there was much baptizing to be done soon somewhere. My dreams of fishing always mean baptizing.

whose hands were full of butcher knives. He gave me one, told me, (*imitating Brigham's New England sternness*) "Go out and put a good handle on it," which I did. Well, the Lord had answered my boyhood prayers, but I had to smile at my first introductions to the prophets of God.

But, getting back to my boyhood. You know, life is a bumpy road, and it's rarely straight. Now, I had thought that I would enjoy the pursuits of youth like my friends did. But I didn't. Oh, for a while I played at different things and games, the playing of cards and such, but if ever I was led to stake anything at the card table, I had the providential good fortune to lose, and this cut off the natural encouragement of engaging in such a vice.

I soon lost all interest in cards, and in the ballroom, and in the company of those who enjoyed such pleasures. (*He pauses, lost in an unhappy memory.*) In fact, so much was this the case, I felt like a speckled bird in the midst of my companions. So I took up a solitary sport, the reading of histories. Well, I didn't want to waste my time reading novels.

Now, when I was twenty years of age I left my father's house never to return, except as a visitor. I went first to run my Aunt Helen Wheeler's flour mill. As I entered upon the stage of life to act for myself and be my own counselor, form my own opinion in the broad open world, my mind was filled with serious reflections. (*Caught up in the memory Wilford walks over to the "island" in the "stream."*) There was an island in the middle of the stream that the mill was on—most beautiful place I ever saw. It was covered with flowers, thickly studded with tall waving pines, with a rapid current of water dashing on the rocks. (*He lies on his back gazing at the sky.*)

I retired to this pleasant retreat many times, both by day and by night to offer up my soul in prayer to the Lord. You see, I wanted to find the right way, the right things to do with my life. I would lie there, and I would think about all of the gold and the wealth of the rich and about the power of presidents, kings, and rulers, and of the innumerable paths through which the giddy world travels in search of pleasure and happiness. But while I was lying there, it would seem to me that the mountains and the hills and the valleys and the sun, the moon, and the stars and all creation were united in the praise of the Lord. (*He stands up, filled with resolve.*) I became convinced that no man could obtain that which would feed his immortal soul except God was his friend and Jesus Christ his advocate. I decided on that island that I would follow God at all costs, no matter what.

But then I didn't know how exactly. Now, I could plainly see by reading the Bible that baptism by immersion was a necessary ordinance, so I asked a Baptist minister to baptize me. (*He acts out his responses to the conversation.*)

"But why won't you baptize me? . . ."

"Well, surely if Christ received the ordinance, then I need to be baptized. . . ."

"No. Respectfully, sir, I cannot join your church. . . ."

"Well, because, as I've said, I find your church does not comply with the early Church of Christ, and so I. . . ."

"Now, wait! Will you, a Baptist minister, have the damnation of a willing but unbaptized soul upon your conscience for-

ever?" (*Turns back to the audience.*) He baptized me. So, when I was twenty-three years of age, I had joined no church, but I was baptized.

Then in the winter of 1833, two missionaries of the Mormon church came by our home in New York. Oh, I was then farming with my brother Azmon and his wife in New York on the eastern border of Lake Ontario. (*Getting sidetracked.*) We continued fishing, of course. One morning we caught five hundred salmon, very few of which were under twenty pounds, while a few weighed forty pounds. Good fishing. (*Returns.*) Well, I'd heard about these Mormons before. I'd read about them in a newspaper article which ridiculed them because they claimed to have new revelation, but I had been favorably impressed.

(*He grows thoughtful again, walks to the stump and sits down.*) And then another thing happened to me in my boyhood which put me on the lookout for new religions. It's kind of a peculiar story. I had known an aged man named Robert Mason who was a kind of a prophet. Anyway, he believed it was the right and privilege of every honest-hearted man and woman to receive light and knowledge and revelation by the prayer of faith. The last time I ever saw him, he told me he had had such a revelation. He said (*imitating Mason's thick New England dialect*): "The voice of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Son of man, thou hast sought me diligently to know the truth concerning my Church and kingdom among men. My Church is not established among men in the generation to which you belong, but in the days of your children, it shall be made manifest with all the gifts and blessings enjoyed by saints of past ages.'" Now, he looked at me very hard as if to discern my soul. And he said, "Wilford, I shall never partake of this fruit in the flesh, but you will, and you will become a conspicuous actor in the new kingdom." Well, those were the last words he ever spoke to me upon the face of the earth. So when I heard about these Mormons, it jogged my memory, you might say.

Azmon and I weren't home when the Mormons came, but they informed Azmon's wife they were to preach that evening at the schoolhouse. (*Wilford gets up suddenly, walks briskly back to the chest, as though walking from the fields to his home.*) Well, when I arrived home and she told me, I immediately turned out my horses (*pantomimes shoeing away horses*)—"Hyah!"—and I started for that schoolhouse without waiting for supper. On the way, I prayed that if these men were servants of God, I might know it. (*He pantomimes opening the schoolhouse door.*) But when I arrived at the place of meeting, I found it was packed. (*He spots Azmon in the crowd.*) Azmon was already there, but he hadn't been able to save me a spot. So I crowded my way through the assembly, "Excuse me. . . . Pardon me. . . ." and I seated myself on a writing desk at the very front where I could see and hear everything that took place.

Now, one of the missionaries, whose name was Zera Pulsipher, opened the meeting with a hymn and a prayer. Then he preached to us. The power of God rested mightily upon him. He bore strong testimony of the Prophet Joseph and of the Book of Mormon.

When he finished his discourse, I truly felt that I had just heard the first true gospel sermon of my life. Here was what I

had long been looking for, apostles and prophets, the same as the ancient Church. All of the gifts and blessings Father Mason had spoken of. The Spirit bore witness to me, and, before I knew it, I leaped to my feet. *(He jumps up on the chest and addresses the meeting.)* "Friends and neighbors, I feel to exhort you not to oppose these men, for they are true servants of God! They have preached to us tonight the pure gospel of Jesus Christ! I witness to you that it is true! . . . *(He is suddenly embarrassed by being so demonstrative in public.)* Thank you." *(Steps off the chest.)*

I opened my eyes to see, my ears to hear, my heart to understand, and I commenced my reading of the Book of Mormon. As I did so, the Spirit bore witness to me that it was light out of darkness and truth out of the ground. Two days later, on the thirty-first of December, Azmon and I went forward in baptism. The day was glorious. The sun was shining and. . . *(Wilford, carried away by the happy memory of his baptism, isn't paying attention as he rummages around in his fly box. He accidentally pricks his finger on a hook.)* Oh! Ow!

(Recovering after a moment, he continues with as much dignity as he can muster.) Apparently, I have been numbered among those who are the marked victims of misfortune. When I was three years old, I fell into a cauldron of scalding water. And although I was instantly rescued, I was so badly burned, it was nine months before I was thought to be out of danger. And then, when I was four or five, I was playing with my brothers one evening, contrary to my father's instructions, and I suddenly made a misstep and fell to the bottom of the stairs, breaking one of my arms in the fall. Well, so much for disobedience.

And then, father owned a number of horned cattle, among which was a surly bull. Well, one evening, I was feeding pumpkins to these cattle. This bull left his own and took the pumpkin I had given to a cow which I had called mine. I was incensed at the selfishness of this male beast. I promptly picked up the pumpkin he had left to give to my cow. *(He begins to act the scene out.)* But no sooner had I got it in my arms than this bull came plunging toward me, full of fury. Well now, I ran down the hill as fast as I could, with the bull at my heels. My

father called out, "Throw down the pumpkin!" But forgetting to be obedient, I held on tight. Now as that bull approached me with the fierceness of a tiger, I suddenly made a misstep and fell to the earth. The pumpkin rolled out of my arms, the bull leaped over me, ran his horns into the pumpkin, and tore it to pieces. Undoubtedly, he would've done the same thing to me had I not fallen—

(Interrupting himself as another accident comes to mind.) When

I was nine or ten, early one morning in company with several boys, I went to my father's flour mill, and I went and I got up on the headlock of the carriage, if you know what that is, not anticipating any danger. But before I was aware, my leg was caught between the headlock and the fender post, and broken in two. It was nine hours of severe pain before the bones could—

(Interrupting himself again.) I almost froze to death when I was thirteen. And then, when I was seventeen, I was riding upon a very ill-tempered horse, which, while going down a very steep rocky hill, suddenly leaped off the path and

ran down at full speed amidst the thickest of the rocks. Now, he commenced kicking and he tried to throw me, but I lodged on the very top of his head, grabbed both his ears, and tried to guide him, 'til he plunged into a rock nearly breast-high and fell to the earth. I went over his head, landing squarely upon my feet, fifteen feet in front. Alighting upon my feet was probably the means of saving my life, for if I had struck the ground on any other part of my body, I probably—

(He is really worked up now, somehow wrought up with all his accidents.) One day when I was chopping a tree. . . Well, I think that you receive my meaning.

It has seemed to me at times as though some unseen power were watching my footsteps in search of an opportunity to destroy my life, for I've broken both of my legs, one of them in two places, both arms, my breastbone, and three ribs. I've been scalded, frozen, and drowned. I've been in two water wheels when they were turning under a full head. I've had a score of other hair-breadth escapes. I have not now a lame limb about me, notwithstanding it all. And I've been called upon to endure



CHRISTOPHER THORNOCK

Despite anything I could do,
Phoebe's spirit left her body and she
was dead. I bowed down, and I prayed
for the life of my companion.

the hardest kind of manual labor, exposures, hardships, journeys. I've walked forty and fifty and, on one occasion, sixty miles in a single day. Well, I ascribe my preservation upon the earth to the watchful care of a merciful Providence. But I do have a few scars.

Now, where was I? . . . Oh, yes! Getting baptized! (*Interrupts himself, again*) Oh, while I was preparing to ride to my baptism, my horse suddenly kicked the hat from off of my head. If he had struck two inches lower. . . . (*He shakes his head.*)

Well, when I finally arrived at the place of baptizing, there was a large number of people at the water's edge. There was about three feet of snow on the ground. When we waded into the water, it was mixed with ice. But I didn't feel the cold. When I came up out of that icy water, my soul was filled with joy unspeakable, and I truly felt that I could exclaim with the servant of God that it was better to be a doorkeeper in the House of the Lord than to dwell in tents of wickedness. I knew my life was changed forever.

(*Wilford prepares his rod and flies for fishing. He walks to the banks of the stream and makes an expert cast. Throughout the following account he fishes, casting several times.*) Have you heard of Zion's Camp? I was in Zion's Camp. It was an expedition, led by the Prophet Joseph himself, to go and rescue the Saints who were being persecuted so bad by mobs in Missouri. Now on the Sunday before we left Kirtland, Joseph called a priesthood meeting in a little cabin. He asked a number of us to bear testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which we did. He then arose, and he said, "Brethren, I am very much interested and edified by your testimonies, but I want you to know that you know no more concerning the results of this work and what lies before you as the Elders of Israel than a passel of little children. This work will fill the earth," he said. "It will fill the Rocky Mountains with tens of thousands of Latter-day Saints." (*Casts.*)

Zion's Camp. . . . Oh! It was a great school for us. To be led a thousand miles by a prophet of God through cities, towns, and villages. We pitched our tents at night, we had prayers night and morning. The Prophet told us every day what we should do. We were mostly young men gathered from all parts of the country and strangers to one another, but we got acquainted very soon and had a happy time together. (*Casts.*)

I remember we encountered some rattlesnakes. Some of the brethren were about to kill them. Joseph said, "No, men must become harmless before the brute creation. When men lose their evil dispositions and cease to destroy the animal race, the lion and the lamb can dwell together, and the sucking child can play with the serpent in safety." I wrote that down in my journal. Well, it was just a few nights after this that Solomon Humphries fell asleep on a rattlesnake and wasn't harmed. Now, when others tried to kill it, he said, "You shan't harm him, for he and I had a good nap together."

Heartened by this, I suppose, Martin Harris began to boast that he could handle serpents without fear and was therein bitten and poisoned. Joseph reprimanded him, telling him that if a man were bit accidentally he might ask in faith for the Lord

to heal him, but men should not provoke miracles from the Lord. (*Casts.*)

Well, as we traveled, people stood by to count us, but they could not tell how many we were, because the Lord multiplied us in their eyes. Some said 500, others 1000; we were never more than 200 or so.

We did have some enemies sworn to our destruction. A man named Campbell swore (*imitating the rough Missouri accent*), "The turkey buzzards and eagles will eat my flesh if I don't fix Joe Smith and his armies so their skins won't hold shucks before two days is out." He and eleven of his companions started across the river toward us. Mid-stream they sprang a leak and sank. Seven of the twelve were drowned. (*He casts again, and this time his line snags on a rock in the creek. He tugs on the line, but it is stuck fast.*) Now, Campbell's body lodged on a pile of driftwood and there the eagles, buzzards, ravens, crows, and wild animals ate the flesh from his bones to fulfill his own words. (*He tugs on the line again, but again to no avail.*) Well, I've got to get that fly. That's my only Royal Coachman. (*He removes his boots and socks and wades out into the "stream" to retrieve his valuable fly.*)

Now, the Lord knows best. On a small elevated piece of land between the Little and Big Fishing Rivers, he began to hinder our progress. First, one wagon broke down, then another. (*He has his fly, and wades back to shore. Sitting on the chest he dries his feet and legs. As he puts on his socks, he notices they are different colors.*) Those don't go together, do they? (*He puts his boots on and rolls down his pants.*) As I was saying, first one wagon broke down and then another, 'til we had to stop and make camp.

Well, as we were making preparations for the night, five heavily armed ruffians rode into camp, said two hundred like them were across the river, and we (*imitating the Missourians*) "would see hell before mornin'." But, as they rode out of camp, we looked up, and we beheld a small black cloud rising in the west above our enemies. Soon, the whole heavens gathered blackness. Suddenly, a mighty storm burst forth: wind, rain, oh! The incessant flashes of lightning was such that a man could see to pick up a pin at almost any time during the night. The mandate of vengeance had gone forth from the God of battles, for a mighty hail fell on them, but not on us. Our enemies found holes in their hats to match the bumps on their heads, and otherwise received damage even to the breaking of their rifle stocks and the fleeing of their horses through fear and pain. We suffered no harm except blowing down some of our tents, and getting a little wet. And mark this: if the Lord had not hindered our company, we would have crossed that river into Clay County, and we would have been at the mercy of those mobocrats. As it was, the Fishing River rose forty feet in thirty minutes, we were saved and our enemies confounded.

Well, we finally pitched our tents in Missouri. But me and my accidents. . . . At night once, a rifle was discharged accidentally and the ball passed through four tents with one dozen men in each. No one injured, but the ball passed within a few inches of my breast.

Previous to this time, there had been much disobedience and harsh murmuring. Joseph said as a result of this, there was

a scourge awaiting the company. Very soon the destroying angel visited us. Eight or ten of the Brethren were laid low under the stroke of cholera. Now, Joseph attempted to rebuke it and was therein immediately struck with the sickness himself. We were thus shown that when the Lord sends a judgment, men must not attempt to stay it. Through the night and the next morning, there were fresh attacks. Joseph said if we would now humble ourselves, the scourge would be stayed. And it was from that hour. Not another case.

Well, I don't know what you've heard, but we did not rescue the Saints in Missouri. We did not accomplish the work we'd come a thousand miles to fulfill. We lost some Brethren to cholera. Apparently, we came away unsuccessful. Apostates and unbelievers many times have asked me, "What have you done?" I'll tell you. We gained an experience we could not have gained in any other way. We had the privilege of beholding the face of the prophet of God, of traveling a thousand miles with him, of seeing the workings of the Spirit with him. Now, I went. I did not get shot. Neither did any of the others. But we fulfilled the commandment of God, and had I not gone up with Zion's Camp, I would not be here today.

(Wilford takes from the chest a vest, frock coat, and cravat. As he talks, he puts them on so that, when he is finished dressing, he will be in more formal, but still homespun, preaching clothes.) I knew that the gospel which the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith was true, and it seemed so good and so plain to me I thought even I could make people believe it. I wanted to preach. But I was only a teacher, and I feared to tell the authorities of the Church lest they might think I was seeking for an office. So I went out into the woods where I could be alone, and I knelt down and I prayed to the Lord to open my way. Well, while I was praying, the Spirit of the Lord told me that my request would be granted. So I arose, very happy, and I walked out of the woods into the traveled road and there I met Judge Elias Higby. No sooner had we met than Judge Higby said, "Brother

Wilford, the Lord has revealed to me that it's your privilege to be ordained and go preach the gospel."

"Well," I said, *(as if he did not know)* "I'm willing to do whatever the Lord requires of me."

So I was ordained a priest. I was twenty-seven years old, sent on a mission to Arkansas and Tennessee with Brother Homer Brown. Now, we didn't know much about missionary work, but we did know that the direct road to Arkansas led square through Jackson County, from where the Saints had just been driven. I asked Bishop Partridge if we should go through there. Said he *(casually)*, "Well, if you've got the faith to do it, you can do it. I haven't." Curious remark from a bishop.

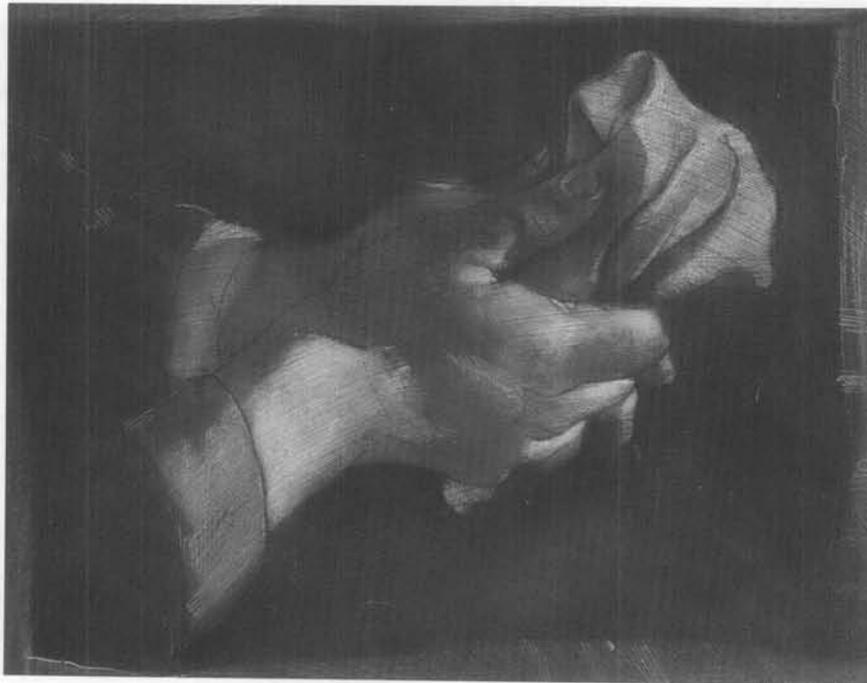
I said, "Well, the Lord has said we must travel without purse or scrip. Shall we do that?"

Said he *(again casually)* "Well, that is the law of the Lord. If you have the faith to do it, you may."

So we packed some Books of Mormon and clothing into valises. We strapped those to our backs, and we made our way by ferry into Jackson County. *(Wilford walks about the stage, on his "journey.")*

Now, there were very few inhabitants in the Southern part of Missouri. One morning we crossed a thirty-mile prairie, level as a house floor, 'til we came to timber at two o'clock. As we approached the timber, a large black bear came out. We were not afraid, for we were on the Lord's errand, and we had not mocked the prophets as had the forty-two wicked children who said to Elijah, "Go up, thou bald head," for which they were torn by bears. Well, the bear approached us. *(He watches the bear carefully.)* He sat down on his haunches and he looked at us. *(A watchful pause, then relieved.)* Then, he ran away and we went on our way rejoicing.

We walked sixty miles that day. We were looked at by a bear by day and chased by wolves by night. *(He collapses onto the stump.)* That was the hardest day's work of my life. *(Wearily he gets up and continues walking.)* But the next morning we arose, walked twelve miles through the rain to the house of a man



CHRISTOPHER THORNSOCK

Joseph took from his pocket a red silk handkerchief, and he gave it to me. He told me to wipe the faces of the children as I administered to them. He also said, "So long as you will keep this handkerchief, it will be a league between you and me." I did as the prophet commanded me. And the children were healed.

named Beeman, who turned out to be one of the mob from Jackson County.

He and his family were just sitting down to breakfast. Well, it was the custom among the Missourians to ask you to eat, even if they intended to cut your throat as soon as you got through. Mr. Beeman asked us to take breakfast, though he knew we were Mormons. (*Wilford pulls up his three-legged stool, sits and pantomimes eating hungrily at a table.*) And then he commenced swearing at us. But there was a large platter of bacon and eggs and plenty of bread on the table, and his swearing did not hinder our eating. The harder he swore, the harder we ate, 'til we got our stomachs full. Then we thanked him very much, and arose from the table. (*He stands.*) Last we heard of him, he was still swearing. Well, I trust the Lord will reward him for our breakfast . . . and for the swearing.

In those days, it was a great treat for a missionary to come across a Mormon. We were hardly in sight of Arkansas when we heard of a Mormon family named Akeman. They'd been in Jackson County during the persecutions. Mr. Akeman had lost his wife there. (*Sadly.*) His five sons, all over six feet tall, had been tied up and whipped on their bare backs with hickory gads. I was eager to meet this Mormon family.

But while we were traveling toward Mr. Akeman's, I had a dream: An angel came to Brother Brown and me and told us we were directed by the Lord to travel in a certain straight path which was pointed out to us. We walked in it a while until we came to the door of a house which was in the middle of a high wall which we could not go around. I opened the door. The room was filled with serpents (*the hissing of serpents is heard and grows louder as Wilford recounts his dream*), and my companion said he would not go in there. I said I would try to get through though they killed me, for the Lord had commanded it. I set one foot in that room; those serpents all coiled up and raised their heads at me. Now there was one serpent much larger than the rest in the very center of the room. It raised its head nearly as high as mine and made a fling at me. At that moment, I knew nothing but the power of God could save me. Just as its fangs were about to close on me, it suddenly fell dead at my feet (*the hissing stops abruptly*), as did all the others. They swelled up, turned black, burst open, took fire, and were consumed before my eyes.

Well, I related my dream to my companion and told him we should see something strange. Now, I've had a great many dreams—I suppose you have too—which amount to nothing. A man eats a hot supper before he retires, or he goes to bed half worried to death, and he gets the nightmares. Chased by a bear, he falls over a precipice. When he strikes the ground, he wakes up. I don't know if the Lord has anything to do with that. Last night, for instance, I dreamed I was making glass houses out of blocks of glass two feet square. (*Chuckling.*) I don't know that the Lord had anything to do with that. (*Serious again.*) But, as has been the case in every age of the earth, whenever a man has the Spirit of God, he can tell from the Lord what's just a plain, ordinary dream and what's one he should listen to. (*Warming to the subject.*) In England, I dreamed I saw by night a river in which there were many fish. I cast a hook, and I caught some.

I saw some larger ones near shore, and I caught them too. After I woke up, I knew there was much baptizing to be done soon somewhere. My dreams of fishing always mean baptizing. Now, later on in London, I had more of these dreams about serpents. I came to understand that snakes in my dream always means the devil is about to oppose me. Oh, I dreamt of vast serpents, both alive and dead in London! Serpents always mean the devil.

Well, Mr. Akeman. . . . We were eager to meet this Mormon family. (*He acts the scene.*) But as we arrived at his house, he received us very coldly. I saw a Book of Mormon on his shelf. I said, "You have a very good book there."

"Yes," he said, "but it is a book that came from the devil!" That opened my eyes. Well, word was sent through all the settlements for twenty miles that there were two Mormon preachers in the place. A mob was soon raised and a warning sent to us to leave immediately or we'd be tarred and feathered, ridden on a rail, and hanged. I soon saw where the serpents were. My companion said he wanted to leave that part of Arkansas. I said no, I'd wait to see my dream fulfilled.

Now, we were staying with an aged gentleman and his wife named Hubble living nearby who had read the Book of Mormon and believed. Three times I was commanded of the Lord to go up and visit Mr. Akeman. Each time I did, he railed at me worse than the time before, when I warned him to repent. But on the last time, the Spirit of God filled me like a rushing of mighty wind: "Go up again and visit Mr. Akeman and again bear testimony to him." I marveled at this. I told Brother Brown. He said I might go if I wished, but he would not. I went.

(*Acting the scene.*) When I arrived at Mr. Akeman's house, I found the door was open and Mr. Akeman was walking the floor.

"Good day, Mr. Akeman. Are you well? . . . Good.

"Mr. Akeman, directed by the Lord, I've come to bear solemn testimony to you of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and of the work of God, and of the danger of opposing this work."

With rage and indignation, he railed against me (*again, the hissing of serpents*), the Church, the leaders, and I felt that house filled with awful darkness and devils. I wanted to flee out of there as Lot did when he went out of Sodom, not looking behind me. But when I turned to leave, it felt like the floor was moving under my feet, and the door seemed a hundred miles away. But I managed to leave that house of blackness. And Mr. Akeman followed me out. A few yards from his house, he suddenly rushed up behind me. (*Wilford freezes in his tracks not daring to look behind him.*) I had no doubt of his intention to kill me. And then, he suddenly fell at my feet, as though he had been struck by a thunderbolt from heaven. (*Hissing stops.*) Now, I did not look behind me (*he walks quickly away*), but continued walking to Mr. Hubble's, meditating on the strange dealing of God with me. Why he had sent me into the midst of such spirits to bear testimony I did not know.

(*The sound of a horse approaching.*) Later on, after we began eating, I heard a horse come up on the full gallop. A man rode up, called out, "Mr. Akeman is dead! Come immediately!" Well,

we found all his sons in the house around his body, a-wailing in an awful manner. He was naturally a large man, but his body was swelled up, his skin looked like it was ready to bust open. He was black as anything I ever saw, black and swelled up. His family, as well as ourselves, thought it was the judgment of God upon him. I preached his funeral sermon.

(*Wilford takes to the "road" again, walking in a wide circle.*) My companion left me for Kirtland, and I took the old military road, with mud and water most of the way for 170 miles. What for? (*Happily.*) To preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, to save this generation.

I arrived in Memphis weary and hungry. I went to the best tavern in the place. I found the owner. (*Acting the scene.*) "Sir, I am a stranger here and I have no money. Could you be so kind as to keep me overnight?"

Well, he looked me up and down; remember, I'd just been through 170 miles of mud. (*Wilford imitates the heavy southern drawl of the tavern owner.*) "What's your business, mister?"

"A preacher of the gospel, sir."

He commenced laughing. "You lookin' mighty ragged 'round the edges for a preacher." He laughed louder. But I didn't blame him. The only ministers he was acquainted with rode fine horses and carriages. They had large salaries. They wore broadcloth. They'd see the whole world sink to perdition before they'd wade through 170 miles of mud to save anybody.

Well, the landlord decided he wanted to have a little fun. He told me he would keep me overnight if I would preach. He wanted to see if I could preach. By this time, I'd gotten a little mischievous and I pleaded with him: "Oh please, no, mister. Please don't set me preachin'." But the more I pled to be excused, the more determined he was that I should preach.

He took my valise; the landlady gave me an excellent supper. (*He sits on the stool and pantomimes eating and watches the "action" around him.*) I sat down in a large hall to eat it. But as I began eating, that room began to be filled with the rich and fashionable of Memphis, dressed in broadcloth and silk, while

my appearance was such as you can imagine.

But when I was through, the table was carried out over the heads of the people. (*He picks up the stool and places it on the top of the chest. Together they make a "pulpit."*) I was placed in one corner of the room with a stand having a Bible, a hymnbook, and a candle on it, hemmed in by one dozen men, with the landlord standing in the midst of them, grinning. There was about five hundred persons gathered on this occasion—not to hear a gospel sermon, of course, but to have a little fun.

(*Coming forward to speak intimately to the theater audience.*) Now, how would you like this position? On your first mission, with no companion and no friend, and to preach to such a hostile congregation. (*With obvious enjoyment*) With me, it was one of the most pleasing hours of my life! (*He returns to the pulpit and resumes the scene.*)

Hymn number 153, "Nearer My God To Thee." (*Reviewing the lyrics.*) "Nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee. E'en though it be a cross that raises me. . . . Ready?" (*He commences singing.*) "Nearer my God, to Thee. Nearer to. . . ." (*He stops singing.*)

Not one soul would sing a note. I said, "I have not the gift of singing, but with the Lord's help, I will both pray and preach."

I kneeled down to pray. (*He does.*) All the men in the front row dropped to their knees in mockery. I prayed to the Lord to give me his Spirit and to show me the hearts of the people. I promised I would deliver whatever he would give me. (*He rises.*) I preached for an hour and a half. The lives of the congregation were opened to the vision of my mind, and I told them of their wicked deeds and of the rewards they would obtain. One by one, all the men in the front row dropped their heads. Three minutes after I was through preaching, I was the only one in the room.

Now the next day, the landlord told me if I ever came that way again, to stop at his place and stay as long as I might choose. It was one of the best sermons of my life. (*He puts the stool back on the floor and walks toward the audience.*)



CHRISTOPHER THORNSOCK

I was nothing special. I was no great preacher like Brother Joseph or Brother Pratt. The only thing I did right was listen to the voice of the Spirit telling me to go south. The people were willing to be baptized by any servant of the Lord.

In the first year of my mission, I traveled 3,120 miles, held 170 meetings, baptized forty-three persons, three of whom were Campbellite preachers, assisted to baptize twenty more, confirmed thirty-five, organized three branches, ordained two teachers and one deacon—and all as a priest. My friends, I had the ministration of angels while holding the office of a priest. I had visions and revelations. I traveled thousands of miles and the Lord protected me, upheld my life. A man should not be ashamed of any portion of the priesthood which he holds. God has no respect for persons in this priesthood any further than they magnify their callings and do their duty.

When I was released from my mission in the southern states, I hastened home to Kirtland to see the splendid new temple. (*He looks around, awe-struck, as though in the temple.*) I walked into the apartments and the pulpits erected for the priesthoods; I gazed on the veils and the curtains, all bespeaking the grandeur, solemnity, and order that nothing but wisdom from God could invent. In the upper room were displayed four Egyptian mummies and the Book of Abraham, written by his own hand. It was a more important scene than any kings ever knew or princes saw in this generation.

(*Now no longer in the temple.*) This was a time of great study in Kirtland, in what we called the School of the Prophets. I commenced boarding for eight dollars a week, purchased a Latin grammar of brother Parley Pratt, and commenced my study under the instruction of Professor Haws.

And then on January twenty-ninth, I was first introduced to Miss Phoebe Carter. (*Wilford strikes a formal, poetry-reading pose and recites, rather stiffly.*)

If love's epistles tender lines impart,
And angels are sent to sound your heart,
Soon from my words you'll learn, if read with care,
What my fond passion is, and how sincere.
No discords, broils, nor strifes I'll make,
But study constant all best ways to make
You happy and be only mine,
The only one I love, my valentine.

(*He is pleased, if a trifle embarrassed.*) A poem I penned for her that Valentine's Day.

Well, marriage being an institution of God and honorable to all, I accordingly joined hands with Miss Phoebe Whitmore Carter in April of 1837. On our wedding day, the sun in the east arose to gladden the earth and to spread o'er nature his pleasing beam, to welcome the return of delightful spring, that dreary winter might be forgot. "Vera amicitia est sempeterna." Latin. (*Pleased with himself.*) "True friendship is eternal."

Now, not entirely according to my wishes, at this time I felt inspired by the Spirit of God to take a mission to the Fox Islands, situated off the coast of the state of Maine, a country I knew nothing about. I made my feelings known to the authorities. They advised me to go. (*Somewhat reluctantly.*) So I started, just one month and one day after my wedding, in company with Elder Jonathan Hale. Meanwhile, Phoebe was to follow later and stay with her parents in Maine.

Just before we crossed over to the Fox Islands, Phoebe and I stayed at her parents' house, the first I'd ever met them. We

were very kindly received. (*Wilford sets the stool on top of the chest and sits on it, as though seated in a row-boat. He pantomimes rowing with two oars.*) And one morning, I went out fishing on the sea, with Fabian and Ezra Carter, my brothers-in-law. And we saw four whales, it being the first time in my life I had ever seen the kind of fish which is said to have swallowed Jonah.

Now, the people of the Fox Islands get most of their living by fishing. Great quantities of fish in almost endless variety inhabit their coves and harbors: whales and black fish, sharks, brown sharks, pilot fish, horse mackerel, sturgeon, salmon, halibut, cod, pollack, hake, skate, shrimp, squid, cusk, blue-back, scallop, dog-fish, mutton-fish, lumpfish, five-fingers, monkfish, sunfish, swordfish, thrasher, catfish, eyefish, cunner, and ling, also eels, clams, lobster, mussels, periwinkle, and seals. (*Wilford has not meant to recite the long list, but he simply thought of more and more creatures as he went along. He thinks nothing of it. He climbs off the stool and places it back on the floor.*)

Well, when Elder Hale and I arrived in the Fox Islands, we went to the island church house. We found a meeting was in session. A deacon met us at the door (*Wilford acts out the scene*):

"Go and tell your pastor there are two servants of God at the door. They have a message to deliver to the people and wish the privilege of doing so."

The Baptist minister, Mr. Newton, indicated for us to come to the pulpit.

(*He makes his way to the pulpit.*) "Excuse me. . . . Pardon me. . . . (*He whispers something to the "minister."*) My friends, we greet you in the name of the Lord. We've come a thousand miles to bring you a message important to your salvation. With the kind indulgence and permission of your fine pastor, we will speak to you here at five o'clock . . . (*looking to the minister for approval*). Five o'clock? . . . Five o'clock this evening."

Mr. Newton invited us home, and on the way, I asked him if there were any school houses upon the island, and if so, if they were free to preach in. There were, and they were. In the first thirteen days of our sojourn upon the Fox Islands, we preached seventeen discourses.

I left a Doctrine and Covenants with Mr. Newton, and the Spirit of God bore testimony to him of its truthfulness, but he pondered it for days (*pacing as though he were Newton*), walking his room until after midnight, trying to decide whether to receive it or reject it. (*Stops abruptly.*) Now, he had two choices: he could receive it and lose his good name and honor among men, or he could reject it and be damned. He chose the latter. But we commenced baptizing his flock.

Now, some of the leading apostates in Kirtland had tried to discourage Elder Hale from going on this mission, telling him he'd never baptize anyone and had better remain at home. So when a Captain Eames offered himself for baptism, I asked Elder Hale to baptize him and prove those men to be false prophets, which he did. To my knowledge, that was the first baptism performed by proper authority upon the isles of the sea in this dispensation.

Well, Mr. Newton: He now commenced a war against us. He sent over to the South Island for a Reverend Douglas, a Methodist minister with whom he'd been at variance for years, to

come over and help him put down Mormonism. They held a long meeting, which I attended. Mr. Douglas railed against the Prophet Joseph and against the Book of Mormon, and (*acting this out*) taking that book in his hand with outstretched arm, he proclaimed, (*imitating Douglas's pompous bass voice*) "I fear none of the judgments of God which might come upon me for rejecting this book as the word of God."

That seemed like a dangerous statement for anyone, let alone a preacher of the Lord, to make. I noted it down in my journal. At the end of his speech, I arose:

(*Wilford preaches to a "large congregation."*)

"My friends. I can see Mr. Douglas up here very plainly, which is more than he can say for Joseph Smith, whom he's never seen, nor heard, nor has the slightest acquaintance with. While all men are entitled to their own opinions, even if they are uninformed and scurrilous ones, I'm sure we'd all rather hear the truth about Joseph Smith than fish stories from one who doesn't know him. It grieves me that Mr. Douglas has misquoted much scripture and attempted to mislead you about the Latter-day Saints, so let me ask

your kind permission to come back here at ten o'clock on Sunday—as well as Mr. Douglas—at which time I will correct these false notions."

(*He steps out of the scene.*) I did, and we continued to baptize. We baptized every person that had an interest in that Baptist meetinghouse. Then, we followed Mr. Douglas home to South Island, preached the gospel to the members of his congregation, and baptized nearly all of them. In order to save his case, Mr. Newton went across to the mainland, brought over several ministers, they held a protracted meeting, but all to no avail. We continued to baptize.

Now it must be said that Mr. Newton chose badly when he decided to obey the law of man rather than the law of God, (*reluctantly*) for he was subsequently sent up to the Thomaston Penitentiary for committing an outrage against his daughter. I merely mention this to show how the minds of some men receive the tidings of the gospel.

Notices were posted up, warning us to leave town, but we thought it better to obey God than man. Therefore, we did not go. It is better to fall in the defense of truth than to disobey the words of God and go to hell. I have never committed a sin in this church and kingdom but what it hasn't cost me one thousand times more than it was worth.

Owing to this bad feeling, some who opposed us went down to the harbor and they got a swivel cannon and some small

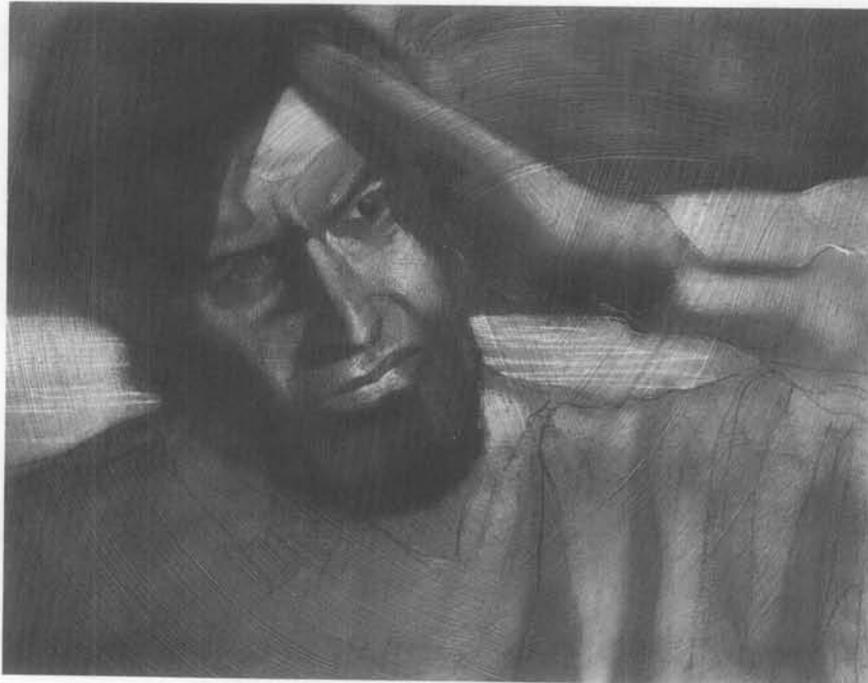
arms, and they planted the cannon very near the schoolhouse. And while I was speaking, they commenced firing the cannon and guns. (*Loud cannon blasts are heard, forcing Wilford to raise his voice.*) Well, I continued speaking as loud as I could for as long as I could, but my voice was drowned out by the report of musketry. So I stopped trying to preach. I told the people our garments were clear of the blood of the inhabitants of that island. I asked if anyone wished to embrace the gospel. Amidst the ordnance fire, many people said yes, and this was the music to which we held another baptism. (*Cannon fire ceases.*)

Elder Hale and I were very glad for our success. We thought

that our mission to the isles of the sea was like the sixteenth chapter of Jeremiah: "Behold, I shall send for many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them. And afterwards I shall send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and from every hill and from out of the holes of the rocks, for mine eyes are upon all their ways."

(*Obviously delighted.*) Oh, in the midst of this, I learned that my firstborn child, a daughter, was born at Father Carter's house on the mainland. We named her Sarah Emma.

(*Troubled by memory.*) And then I received a letter from Thomas Marsh, who was then president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, informing me that the Prophet Joseph had had a revelation about who were to fill the places of those of the Twelve who had fallen. (*Interrupting his account to speak with sternness to the audience.*) Oh, yes, some had fallen. After having the ministrations of angels and seeing the power of God manifested, some of these apostles said, "We have served God long



CHRISTOPHER THORNTON

I once baptized five persons in the midst of a shower of stones flung at me by the mob. One of the stones hit me in the top of my head, but the Lord kept me from falling, and I continued 'til I concluded my baptizing.

enough. Now we're going to serve ourselves." They took a stand against the prophet which God raised up. And what was the result? Their power fell like lightning from the heavens. In his letter, President Marsh said, "Know then, Brother Woodruff, that you are called to fill the place of one of the Twelve Apostles, and that you are to come speedily to Far West, there to take leave of the Saints and depart for other climes across the mighty deep." The substance of this letter had been made known to me some weeks before, but I had not named it to any man.

While upon the Fox Islands, Elder Hale and I baptized nearly one hundred persons. We had a great desire to take as many as we could get to Zion. (*As he remembers, a tone of concern creeps into his voice.*) But the Saints waited in Maine until very late in the season, when cold weather and fall rains encircled us. It was the greatest trial Phoebe was ever called upon to pass through: to travel two thousand miles late in the year through mud and rain and snow with a babe of two months in the first stages of the whooping cough. But Phoebe possessed too much firmness and faith and confidence in God to put her hand to the plow and then look back.

A few days after we began, Phoebe was struck with a severe headache. She grew more and more distressed until her headache turned into brain fever. I felt helpless. She continued to fail, coming very near death. (*As though answering an unspoken question.*) I laid my hands on her. I gave her a blessing. She revived somewhat and slept some during the night, but the next day she was very low and seemed to be sinking quickly. That evening, despite anything I could do, her spirit left her body and she was dead. I bowed down, and I prayed for the life of my companion.

While I was praying, Phoebe said that her spirit looked at her body lying upon the bed, at me, and upon her babe. In the midst of this scene, two messengers came into the room and told her that she might have her choice. She might go to rest in the spirit world, or, upon condition that she felt she could stand by her husband in all the cares and afflictions he'd be called upon to pass through for the gospel's sake, she might remain. She looked at the situation of her husband and child. She said, "Yes. I will do it."

Suddenly, the power of God rested upon me, and for the first time during her illness, faith filled my soul, though she lay before me dead. In the name of the Lord, I anointed her. I rebuked the power of Death and the Destroyer. Her spirit entered her body, and she was made whole. (*Emotionally.*) And I rejoiced, for what I would have done without her, I . . . I don't know.

(*Regaining his composure.*) Well, the Lord had called me to go preach the gospel in foreign climes. Guess where that was? England! But before we left in 1839, we were under the necessity of settling our families. Now, we chose a place called Commerce, afterwards named Nauvoo. I settled my family, along with Brother Brigham's, in an old army barracks in Montrose, just across the river from Commerce. It was a very sickly time—the Saints driven out of Missouri—(*Wilford suddenly has a sharp pang of memory, which causes him to stop his narrative. Then angrily.*) And I will not speak here of Haun's Mill

and of the blood of the Saints which still stains the hands of the enemies of God.

(*Regaining his composure.*) Well, they were now flocking into Commerce, you see. They were living in tents and wagons, on the ground. Many were very sick from exposure. Brother Joseph and Sister Emma had given up their home to the sick and had pitched a tent in their dooryard to stay in. He waited on the ailing until he was worn out and nearly sick himself.

One morning, Brother Joseph, in company with Sidney Rigdon and several of the twelve apostles, came by my home in Montrose. As they passed by my door, Brother Joseph said, "Brother Woodruff, follow me." That is all he or anyone else said until we got to Brother Fordham's house. (*He acts out entering Fordham's house.*) Now Elijah Fordham had been dying for one hour. Everyone expected each moment to be his last. Well, Brother Joseph walked up to Brother Fordham and took him by the right hand. (*Indicating Fordham.*) His eyes were glazed. He was speechless and unconscious. But I felt the Spirit of God overpowering his prophet. Joseph looked into the dying man's face. (*Wilford plays the roles of Joseph Smith and Elijah Fordham.*) He said, "Brother Fordham, do you not know me?" There was no answer. "Elijah, do you not know me?"

In a very low whisper, "Yes."

"Do you not have the faith to be healed?"

This time the answer was a little plainer. "I'm afraid you've come too late. If you'd come a little sooner, I think I might have been."

Now he had the appearance of a man awakening from sleep. It was the sleep of death. Then Joseph said, "Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ?"

"I do, Brother Joseph."

Then the prophet spoke in a loud voice, with the majesty of Jehovah: "Elijah, I command you in the name of Jesus of Nazareth to arise and be made whole."

The house seemed to shake on its foundation. Joseph's voice was not like the voice of a man's. It was like the voice of God's. Elijah Fordham leaped from his bed. A healthy color came into his face, and life was manifested in every act. His feet had been done up in Indian meal poultices. He kicked these off, scattering the contents, and called for his clothes. He asked for a bowl of bread and milk, and he ate it. Then he clapped his hat onto his head and followed us into the street to visit others who were sick. (*Wilford "leaves" the house.*)

And this was not all. A man of the world, hearing of this miracle, came up to Brother Joseph, asked him to heal his twin children about five months old, who were lying nigh unto death some two miles from Montrose. The Prophet said he could not go, and then after a long pause, he turned to me. He said, "Brother Woodruff, you go with this man and heal his children."

Well, the prophet had arisen that morning, called upon the Lord, and healed all on both sides of the river in great power. (*Incredulously.*) And now he turned to me?! He took from his pocket a red silk handkerchief, and he gave it to me. He told me to wipe the faces of the children as I administered to them. He also said, "So long as you will keep this handkerchief, it will

ACT II

be a league between you and me." Well, I went with the man. I did as the prophet commanded me. (Wilford reverently removes the red handkerchief from an inner coat pocket. Handling the handkerchief triggers the strong emotions welling up inside him. He remains so, clutching the handkerchief, through the farewell to his wife.) And the children were healed.

(He will continue to clutch the handkerchief, and it will be difficult for him to speak through the farewell to Phoebe.) When it came time for me to leave for England, both Phoebe and I were sick. I laid my hands on her and I gave her a blessing. (He sits on the chest with Phoebe "lying" next to him.) "Phoebe, farewell. Be of good cheer. Remember me in your prayers, especially as the sun sets in the western horizon. I shall see thy face again in the flesh. I am gone to obey the command of Jesus Christ." I left her, almost without food or the necessaries of life. But she parted from me with the firmness that becomes a Latter-day Saint, knowing the responsibility of her companion.

I made my way to New York to await the other brethren who were to sail for England, and it was there that I had a peculiar dream. I saw Phoebe, and notwithstanding we rejoiced at having an interview with one another, still our embraces were mixed with sorrow, for after conversing a while I asked her where Sarah Emma was, our only child. She said, weeping and kissing me, "She's dead." We sorrowed a while and I awoke. Was this dream true? I wondered. I didn't know. But sometimes this gift of . . . of dreams. . . . (His emotions do not allow him to continue. He stands fighting for composure.)

. . . Well, I best look to Brother Brigham. Often he won't call out. I hate for him to suffer alone. I'll return presently. (He walks quickly offstage.)

INTERMISSION



Tim Slover as Wilford Woodruff.

(Toward the end of the intermission, Wilford walks onstage unceremoniously and begins taking down the clothes that have been drying on the tripod. He folds them and puts them away in the wooden chest. He happens to glance at the stream and apparently sees a trout jump. He leaps to his feet and rushes over to the "stream," addressing the audience as the house lights fade.)

WILFORD

Did you see that one?! That one must have been three pounds. . . . Maybe four. . . . Maybe eight! These streams contain the finest trout I've ever encountered. (He hurries back to the chest and rummages around in his fly box for just the right fly.) I just—I need the proper fly. Now let's see . . . we have had the Royal Coachman, so now perhaps the Captain. Or the Golden-Eared Herring! (In his excitement, Wilford lets go of the lid of the chest while he is rummaging around in it, looking for the right fly. It bangs him on the head.) Uh, ooh. (He feels the bump rapidly rising on his head.) That'll be a fair one. That one might have changed my personality.

Oh, it's true. One evening with the Twelve, I visited the celebrated phrenologist, O. S. Fowler of Boston. Now, he examines heads with his fingers, and by the hills and valleys, lumps and facades thereof, determines the capacities of the owners. (Wilford carefully opens the chest, removes a paper, carefully closes the lid, and reads the paper aloud.) Now, he said, "W. Woodruff is a man of great action, both physical and mental, does up things in a hurry, steamboat speed, goes in for the largest liberty of the mass, is a Democrat of the old school, difficulties only stimulate to increase action, highly social, fond of family and friends, tells the plain, unvarnished facts, his jokes have more vinegar than molasses in them, recollects and explains facts well, has good talking talents." I sent a copy of my phrenological chart and character to Phoebe. These large cities offer much that is new and scientific and ennobling.

Now, then, my mission to England. (As he speaks Wilford takes a fine frock coat, vest, and cravat from the chest and dresses himself in more formal preaching attire than he did for his previous missions.) Another mission. What position can a man occupy on the face of the whole earth that is more high, godlike, and noble than to be a messenger of salvation to the human family? Yet God has always chosen the weak things of the earth to do his work. Joseph Smith was but a common plow boy. Who was Brigham Young? A painter and a glazier, a humble man. Yet the Lord chose him. And Wilford Woodruff was a miller and a farmer and a some-time fisherman. That's about the highest ambition he's achieved so far as this world is concerned. Well, that's about the way the Lord has chosen these men. Now why did he not choose learned and great men? He could not handle them. The Lord has always chosen the weak things of the earth.

You know, the English are an unusual people. They are so certain that they're superior to the other peoples of the earth, sometimes they go out of their way not to prove it. For instance, while we were on the ship going over, I overheard one of the passengers boast of the accommodations in England being superior to those of America. So it was with high hopes

that we took lodgings when we arrived in Liverpool, at a place called the Birmingham Arms, and may the Lord henceforth deliver me from such a place.

I arose in the morning and took . . . breakfast, shall I say? Well, I ate, it is true, but I used a piece of bread for my plate and my fingers for a knife and fork. I was charged high for it, at that. I must confess, I couldn't help but smile as I ate my bread. "Why if these are the superior English accommodations," I thought, "I don't want to know what those of the next country will be." Later we learned that this was not a proper sample of English customs, but we were strangers and we had the misfortune to be led to such a place.

We left Liverpool, and we made our way by railroad cars to the city of Preston, where the largest congregations of the English Saints are. The Saints all over England have great confidence in God and his servants and warm hearts, but, oh, the poverty of that country! The poor are in as great a bondage as the children of Israel were in Egypt. *(As he warms to his subject of the disparity between rich and poor, he becomes increasingly incredulous and saddened.)* One morning in Manchester, I saw three thousand souls flung out of employment at the factory. They stood about in corners in groups, clacking their wooden shoes, counseling what to do. Thousands were nearly in a state of utter starvation. In London, it was worse. It gave me pains while traveling through the streets on cold mornings to see poor women, and especially little children, freezing almost to death, with no food or fuel, but little clothing, begging for a morsel to eat. I suppose the most alarming single case I witnessed was that of Thomas Skelsey, fifteen years of age. He was quite noted for following the coaches or omnibuses, on foot. He would keep pace with them the whole distance, running forty miles in six hours. Now, he was known to travel through and return in one day, making eighty miles in twelve hours. When he grew weary, he'd catch hold of a strap on the hind end of the coach, but he'd run on as usual. He was a poor boy, and his only object for this singular behavior was to get his living by receiving what money the passengers thought fit to give him—about one shilling per day. He did this running with bare feet on macadamized roads.

Yet the mansion of George Granville, Duke of Sutherland, has 365 windows in it and sits on a park ten miles square, decorated with many splendid monuments and fountains. He has two other parks of equal or greater value, and as to his total wealth, he nor no man knoweth. But as Jesus said concerning the stones of the temple, it will in like manner be with the pride and monuments of this generation. They will speedily be laid low in the dust together. *(He shakes his head and forces himself to move on to a happier recollection.)*

I went to labor in the Staffordshire Potteries, and, oh, I had some wonderful experiences there! I got in the habit of walking from one town to the other, no great distances—eight or ten miles a day—preaching. Now, the first night that I taught, I had the spirit of preaching. The power of God rested upon me. Three people was baptized. I confirmed ten others, and I laid my hands on three that were sick. A worthy sister wished to wash my feet later that evening. I gave her the opportunity, and

she did so. Oh, to labor among such humble and good people! There was much to do. Every day was a challenge.

On my birthday, March 1, 1840, I was thirty-three years of age. Now, it was a Sunday, and I preached twice to two large congregations of the Saints and strangers. But while I was preaching and we were singing a hymn, the Spirit of God told me, plain as plain, "This is the last time you will hold a meeting with these people for many days." Well, I was astonished. I felt like my work was just beginning there. But in the next meeting, I told the people what the Lord had told me, and then I went out and prayed and tried to get a clarification from the Lord, which sometimes he'll give you, you see, if you pray and ask him. And again, I felt just as plain as plain, that I was to go to the south, that the Lord had a great work for me to do there and that many people was waiting for his word.

So I packed my bags, and the next day I left. *(He "journeys" to another part of the stage.)* Now, I took with me a Brother William Benbow who had joined the Church in Staffordshire and who had a brother named John who lived in the south in a county called Herefordshire. John was a farmer, and he had a large house, a mansion really, called Hill Farm. He lived there with his wife, Jane Benbow, and they had no children. *(Happy at the reminiscence.)* Jane. . . . Some of you may not know that Jane Benbow gave her dowry to Brother Brigham to get the Book of Mormon published in England.

Oh, and now I have to tell you because it becomes important as you'll see in a minute: This was the first time, the very first time, that a missionary of the Latter-day Saints had ever visited that county. John and Jane received me with glad hearts. We conversed until two in the morning. They rejoiced greatly with the news of the gospel which I brought to them, and I rejoiced greatly at the news Brother John gave me, which was that there was a large congregation of men and women, six hundred in number, who had taken upon themselves the name of United Brethren. They had forty-five preachers, and two chapels, and several houses licensed for preaching. These United Brethren had become dissatisfied with the Wesleyan Methodists, which they used to be, you see, and they'd broken away from them, and they were calling upon the Lord continually for greater light and knowledge.

Well, can you see why the Lord would send me to the south? Well, I could. When I finally got to bed after conversing with the Benbows, I dreamed of fishing. *(He smiles.)* A great deal of fishing.

Now, John had in his house a large hall to preach in. And he sent word throughout the neighborhood that an American missionary was to preach there that evening. Now remember, this was only my second day in Herefordshire. *(Wilford again places the stool on top of the chest to serve as a pulpit.)* So that evening several of his neighbors came in, including several of these United Brethren, and I preached my first gospel sermon there. I also preached there the following evening, and six people was baptized: the Benbows and four preachers of those United Brethren. So that was my third day.

I spent most of my fourth day clearing out a pool of water and preparing it for baptizing. I had a feeling that I'd need it.

(*He stands behind his pulpit.*) Now, the next day was Sunday, and I preached three different times at three different places to about one thousand people altogether. This was fine with me, of course, to preach to so many people, but there were one or two in the neighborhood who felt a little differently. What I mean by that is the local parish church was attended that Sunday by only fifteen persons.

So when I arose that evening to preach at Brother Benbow's, a man entered the doorway, informed me that he was a constable, and that he had a warrant to arrest me. (*Wilford dramatizes the scene, imitating the Midlands dialect of the constable.*)

"For what charge?" I asked him.

"For preaching to the people."

"Well, who sent up the complaint?"

"The rector of the church. Now if you'll be so kind. . . ."

"Well, preaching's hardly against the law, as the rector will attest, and I as well as the rector have a license to preach. So, if you will kindly take a seat (*ushering him to a seat beside the pulpit*), I will wait upon you after the meeting.

(*Wilford turns to preach to his "congregation."*) "My friends, what is the gospel as taught by Jesus himself? The very first principle is faith in the Messiah. That's the first principle taught to man. Now, the second principle is repentance, and what is that? The forsaking of sin. The man who repents, if he's a swearer, he swears no more. If he's a thief, he steals no more. He turns away from all his sins and commits them no more. Now, it is not repentance to say, 'I repent today,' and then steal tomorrow.

"Now, the third principle is baptism. That is what Jesus and the Apostles taught. Says one, 'Baptism is not essential for salvation.' Well, Jesus not only taught it, but rendered obedience himself to the principle"—and so on for about an hour

and a quarter, with the constable sitting right beside me the whole time.

Well, the power of God rested upon me, the Spirit filled the room, and the people were convinced. When I closed the meeting and opened the door for baptizing, seven people offered themselves. Four were more United Brethren preachers. One was the constable (*taking the role of the constable*): "I'd like to be baptized, Mr. Woodruff, if it's no trouble."

"Oh, no trouble," I said. "No trouble."

He then went back to the rector, still wet for all I know, and told him if he wanted Mr. Woodruff taken for preaching, he must go himself. (*Speaking as the constable.*) "For I heard him preach the only true gospel sermon I ever listened to in me life."

Well, the rector didn't know what to make of this. I suppose he thought there must be some mistake. So he sent two spies from the Church of England—they were clerks—to come to our meeting and find out what we preached. So the next day, my sixth day in Herefordshire, two Church of England clerks came along to our meeting. And they listened. They listened and listened to the true gospel. They weighed the matter in their hearts. Then they asked to be baptized.

The rector grew alarmed at this and did not venture to send anybody else. Well, that was my first week in Herefordshire, or my first six days anyway. On the seventh day I rested.

Now as you can probably imagine, the rectors and ministers of South England were somewhat put out by my activities in their region. They got up a convention, and they sent a petition to the Archbishop of Canterbury asking Parliament to pass a law prohibiting these Mormons from preaching in Great Britain. But the archbishop knew the laws of England. He knew that under the British flag, all religions were tolerated. So he



CHRISTOPHER THORNTON

When I awoke a personage appeared to me
which I took to be the Prince of Darkness.
He made war with me, and he caught me around
the throat, choked me nearly to death, wounded
me a number of places in the head. Now,
I also wounded him in the forehead. Just as he was
about to overcome me, I prayed to the Father
in the name of Jesus, and I then had power
over him. If the devil isn't following you,
you must not be steering the right course.

sent word to those rectors that (*miming writing a letter in a florid hand and imitating the archbishop's cultured tones*) "If they had the worth of souls at heart, as much as they valued ground where hares, foxes, and hounds ran, they would not lose so many of their flock." (*He signs the letter with a flourish.*)

Now I want you to know, I was nothing special. I was no great preacher like Brother Joseph or Brother Pratt. No. The only thing I did right was listen to the voice of the Spirit telling me to go south. The people of Herefordshire were waiting for the word of God. They were willing to be baptized by any servant of the Lord.

On one occasion when I was away from my baptizing pool, I preached to a large congregation, and twenty people desired to be baptized. But as there was no water convenient, most concluded to omit it for another day. Five, however, would not take no for an answer. We searched for water all night. At 2:00 AM, we finally found a stream, and I baptized those faithful souls. (*Wilford acts out helping the converts down to the water.*) But we had to let them down perpendicular eight feet by the water 'til they touched the bank by the water—and one, an aged woman who had followed us the whole distance, leaning upon her staves. So that just shows you how desirous for the gospel the people were.

Now, I did have some opposition. On one occasion when my baptizing pool was surrounded by a desperate mob of the baser sort (*sounds of shouting and taunting are heard*), I went down into the water and commenced baptizing. The rabble threw a dog into the water. But neither I nor the dog took any harm from the incident.

I once baptized five persons in the midst of a shower of stones flung at me by the mob. One of the stones hit me in the top of my head, nearly knocked me into the water. But the Lord kept me from falling, and I continued 'til I concluded my baptizing, and my mind was stayed on God. (*Mob sounds stop.*)

(*Wilford walks toward the audience and delivers the following simply, matter-of-factly.*) In the first thirty days of my mission to Herefordshire, I baptized forty-five preachers and one hundred sixty members of those United Brethren. This put into the hands of the Church one chapel and forty-five preaching houses. In eight months, through the blessings of the Lord, over eighteen hundred souls was baptized, including two hundred preachers and all six hundred of those United Brethren, except one person who for all I know was afraid of water. Now, that is the largest number of persons baptized in the shortest space of time in the seventeen years this Church has been organized.

(*Turns as if finished, then looks back to the audience with a second thought.*) Oh, and while I was in Herefordshire, I learned to my great satisfaction that my firstborn son, Wilford Woodruff Jr., was born on March the twenty-second. So glory hallelujah, the work of God rolls on!

(*In his excitement he remembers a letter from Phoebe.*) And then I got the letter from Phoebe: (*Tenderly and with difficulty*) "My dear Wilford, what will be your feelings when I tell you that yesterday I was called upon to witness the departure of our little Sarah Emma from this world? I thought I could not live

without her, especially in the absence of my companion, but she has gone. The Lord hath taken her home to Himself for some wise purpose. It is a great trial to me, but I can see and feel that He will take much better care of her than I can for a little while, until I shall go and meet her. I think it likely her spirit hath visited you before this time."

So I had one son born and my sweet Sarah Emma die while I labored for the Lord in England. It is hard still living without her. (*Wilford takes a few moments to regain his composure.*)

Late in the year, I left Herefordshire. I started on my mission to London in company with Apostles Heber C. Kimball and George A. Smith. When I took the parting hand from Elder John Benbow, he put fifteen pounds in it to help me on my way. (*The urban sounds of Victorian London are heard: horses, carriages, hawkers, etc.*) We were the first missionaries to ever walk the streets of London, and I sent a letter to Phoebe and I told her so. But there was so much continual passing of horses and drays and singing and hello-ing at all hours of the night, I couldn't sleep. You see, London is the largest, most noted and populous and splendid city upon the face of the whole earth, even a city containing a million and a half of human beings, and such splendid and grand scenery was flung before my eyes as I never before beheld. (*Sounds fade out.*)

One day, we visited Westminster Abbey, and we saw all of the tombs and monuments of the kings and the queens and the lords and noted men. We saw the chair in which Queen Victoria and all the kings and queens for eight hundred years were crowned. And we sat in it!

But speaking of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, I saw her for myself in company with Heber C. Kimball when she rode to the opening of Parliament. Now, it was judged there was from three to four hundred thousand persons gathered on the occasion. But notwithstanding this immense body of people, we had the good fortune, through the favor of one of the Queen's horse lifeguards, to get a spot in the very front so we could see and hear everything.

Now, the whole train passed within ten feet of us, so that we had a fair and perfect view of the Queen and of Prince Albert. Her Majesty is small in stature, very plain in features and in dress. But she wore a necklace of brilliance such that . . . (*incredulous and unable to describe it*). Well, Prince Albert's quite a handsome man. They all passed, and they bowed to us as they passed by, and we returned the compliment. (*He bows.*) It was the grandest, earthly scenery I ever beheld.

Another day we visited the British Museum, which is open to the free inspection of the public and is the greatest collection in the world. I learned from the *Ancient Book of Heraldry* that one of my ancestors was Lord Mayor of London in 1579. Oh, we went to St. Paul's Church and the National Gallery, the Tower of London. And we saw a comic performance of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. And then one day we called in at a Jewish synagogue. Now, they all worship with their hats on.

But London offers a visitor stranger sights than that. One day I returned home by way of the Smithfield Market at the time of the Fair. I never saw such a scenery before. (*The sounds*

of the Fair are heard growing steadily louder, so that in the end, Wilford must shout to be heard above the din. He walks around examining the "exhibits.") In fact, it would be a difficult task for a historian to describe the particulars of twenty acres of ground covered over with sheep and cattle and caravans, wild beasts such as lions and tigers and wolves and bears and sheep and elephants and horned horses and wild boars and serpents—every description of animal, beast, and reptile exhibited in Europe.

Men, women, and children were there of every grade and rank, and prostitutes, and merchandise of every name and nature, such as oysters and clams and fish, cakes, soda, beer, crockery, umbrellas, toys, clothes of all kinds, old and new, and peaches, pears, and apples, and all of these connected with large bands of music and almost anything else anybody ever saw. A giant woman was exhibited, seven feet tall, and a sheep weighing six hundred pounds, and a live serpent fifteen feet long, which a woman wrapped around her bare neck and bosom to show her courage. Should a Missourian from the western wiles

of America, whose knowledge extends only to his corn crib, hog pen, and gun, behold such a scene, he'd think he was in another world! (*Sounds cut off suddenly.*) What effect it would have upon him I know not, but one thing is certain: any man who values peace, retirement, and virtue could not long dwell in such a sink of confusion and iniquity.

London! London! It's full of everything but righteousness. And it's the hardest place for establishing the gospel I ever visited. Still, we spared no pains in searching diligently for the honest in heart and the meek of the earth, and we did baptize a few. But you know, the devil was unhappy even with that small success.

I retired one evening and I slept until twelve o'clock, when I awoke. I was meditating on warning the people of London, when a personage appeared to me which I took to be the Prince of Darkness. (*Hissing of snakes is heard.*) He made war with me, and he attempted to take my life. He caught me around the throat, choked me nearly to death, wounded me a number of places in the head. Now, I also wounded him in the forehead.

Just as he was about to overcome me, I prayed to the Father in the name of Jesus, and I then had power over him and he departed, though I was much wounded. (*Hissing ceases.*) Three personages dressed in white came to me and prayed with me, and I was immediately healed from all of my troubles.

If the devil is discouraged, I don't know it. But if he isn't following you, you must not be steering the right course. There never was a servant of God in any age of the earth but what the

devil was continually at his elbow. But he fools himself, for all of this opposition serves only to hasten the fulfillment of God's purposes.

In the middle of January, Elder Kimball received a letter from Elder Young asking us to be ready early in April to set sail for home. So we left London in the care of Brother Lorenzo Snow, having baptized thirty-eight persons. It was a small number, I know, but we did not despise the day of small things.

I soon found myself back in my beloved Herefordshire presiding over a conference of the Saints. Now, my mind had been much impressed with the necessity of urging the

gathering of the Saints to Zion, and I preached on that theme. Then we closed the meeting.

Well, no sooner was the final amen pronounced than the Saints flocked about me by scores at a time. Most were very poor; they saw no door open for gathering to Zion. Hands were presented on all sides, and a thousand questions asked me in the term of an hour or more. (*Voices petitioning Wilford to help them are heard, one plaintive voice overlapping another. Individual voices are heard: "How much longer must I preach in England before you let me go to America?" "Won't you go home and take some tea with me?" "My head is in great pain. Won't you heal me?" "I want you to consecrate these bottles of oil before you go." "Goodbye." "God bless you, Brother Woodruff." "Brother Woodruff, may I go to America with you? . . ." Wilford is bewildered and saddened. Sounds fade.*) I needed the wisdom of Solomon to be a counselor in the midst of such a scene. Nearly fifty of the Saints asked me to take them to Zion. I hardly had the means to take myself. It troubled me a great deal that I could not be of more assistance.



CHRISTOPHER THORNOCK

We shut ourselves into a bedroom. I took the bed; Brother Brigham took a large chair. I there veiled my face and gave vent to my grief and mourning for the death of the prophet of God.

Just before I left England, I attended a general conference of the Church in Manchester where nine of the Twelve Apostles was present. A very richly ornamented cake was exhibited and blessed and distributed to the congregation, which consisted of about seven hundred persons, with a large fragment left for some not present. (*Wilford perceives the audience may not believe him.*) It was a large cake!

Now, as the cake was being passed, Brother Parley Pratt composed a poem:

When in far distant regions,
as strangers we roam,
Far away from our families,
our countries, and home,
When sinking in sorrow,
fresh courage we'll take,
As we think on our friends,
and remember the cake.

(*With complete sincerity.*) He's quite a poet, is Brother Parley.

And then we were gone. (*Sounds of wind and gulls.*) And more than a month at sea, sailing, sailing with two hundred of the Saints on board. And then at last, I was permitted to embrace my wife again and to hold in my arms my firstborn son, Wilford Woodruff Jr., whom I'd never seen before. But being with Phoebe once again, I felt the loss of Sarah Emma very keenly. (*Coming forward to address the audience more directly.*) But I feel to say about my time in England that the Lord gave me the desires of my heart, blessed me far beyond my expectations, for I was privileged to baptize many of the Lord's children. And I feel the great joy today of seeing them continue to keep the faith. This is the reward for working in the Lord's kingdom.

Well, I hurried my wife and my son and myself, with our eight hundred pounds of baggage, to Nauvoo. It seems to be my lot thus far in life is to be hurried and crowded along as though I had but few moments to live.

While I was traveling, I seemed to have got some cankers in my mouth, the pain of which I killed by chewing a piece of tobacco. (*A bit defensively.*) Oh, now, this may seem like breaking the Word of Wisdom, but the Twelve had recently had a meeting on this subject, and Brother Brigham had said, "Do I break the Word of Wisdom if I go home now and drink a cup of tea?" Well, all had concluded that it was best to deal with such matters according to the wisdom which God gave, that an enforced abstinence was not making us free but was putting us in bondage with a yoke upon our necks. (*Even more defensively.*) Now, at this time, I did not wish to have the yoke of cankers in my mouth upon my neck, so I chewed a piece of tobacco. Not that I recommend it as a general rule. The Lord has said that tobacco is for the healing of bruises and for cattle, and that is exactly how it tastes upon the palate. (*Wilford removes his preaching attire and puts them in the chest. He puts on a simple leather vest over his open shirt.*)

It gave me peculiar feelings to once more enter the city of Nauvoo. When I had left, there were not more than a dozen houses. Now there were several hundred. Because I had spent about four-fifths of the duration of my membership in the

Lord's kingdom away from home, I had not now a house to put my wife and son in. So, I purchased one for eighty-five dollars. (*Admitting his extravagance.*) Expensive, I know. And it needed a great deal of labor. But, on October 19, 1841, Phoebe and I moved in. And even though I was sick, I rejoiced at having an opportunity to spend a night with my family under my own roof, it being the first time I'd ever enjoyed such a privilege.

Well, I wasn't a missionary any longer, at least not for a season. So, I built up my house and I started my farm. That farm. . . . (*He shakes his head ruefully at the memory.*) It was a five-acre lot of prairie, and I had to fence and plant it. I went out there one morning in company with several of the brethren who had agreed to help me, and well, we hadn't gone very far before we broke down the reach of our wagon and all went into a pile together. The wheel went on my arm and bruised it considerably.

(*And he's off again, warming to the subject of his accidents.*) Now, that same day, just before I went home, I went in to Brother Cheney's house to get a drink of water, and his dog bit me through the calf of my leg, very bad. Made me very lame, and I was confined to my bed for several days. Well, I informed Brother Cheney that I would not be satisfied unless he would kill his dog, as he was dangerous and had bitten several persons. He was an ugly dog.

But, oh, it was wonderful. To be with the Twelve again, with my family, in the midst of peace and love in the city of the Saints, and to hear the words of Joseph the Seer once again. He preached more and finer sermons in Nauvoo than anybody ever heard before. (*He becomes carried away with his personal admiration for Joseph.*) There was not a greater man than Joseph standing in this generation. The gentiles looked upon him, and he was to them like a bed of gold concealed from their view. They knew not his spirit nor his calling, his philanthropy nor his virtue nor his wisdom. To me, he was like a fountain of living water, from whose mouth streams of eternal wisdom flowed. His mind, like Enoch's, swelled wide as eternity. Joseph Smith!

(*During the following reminiscences, Wilford takes out some carriage reins, a tin of grease, and a chamois cloth. He greases the reins while he talks.*) Next, I became a printer. The Quorum appointed John Taylor and me to become the publishers of the Church publications. Well, Brother Taylor did the publishing, actually. I took care of the business affairs. Now, the Lord was blessing Joseph at this time with the power to translate through the Urim and Thummim—which, by the way, he showed me—ancient hieroglyphics, as old as Abraham, four thousand years old or older. I myself had the privilege of assisting to set the type on the Book of Abraham, and I felt my mind touching the ancient past and the patriarchs.

Joseph spent the last winter of his life with the Twelve Apostles, teaching us. Oh, it wasn't merely a few hours. It was day after day, week after week, month after month, teaching us the things of the kingdom. He'd say, "I want you to tell me your views and feelings" on this, that, or the other, and we'd tell him our feelings, and as a general thing our views were alike.

But I remember once, one of the apostles brought before

him a very peculiar kind of a system. He said, "Brother Joseph, it's like this. God and man, and. . . ." Now, let's see. . . . Oh. "The heavens and the earth, and. . . ." Well, I can't remember it all right now, but Brother Joseph listened very patiently. And when this brother got through, he said, "Well, Brother Joseph, what do you think of that?"

"Why," said Joseph, "that is a beautiful system, and I have only one fault in the world to find about it."

"Oh! And what is that?"

"It isn't true."

Joseph said there has been great difficulty getting anything into the heads of this generation: "It has been like splitting hemlock knots using a corn-dodger for a wedge and a pumpkin for a beetle." I guess we in the Twelve weren't much of an exception.

Oh, which of us really understood Joseph? I didn't. He said things, and now I understand them. But then. . . . For instance, he said, "God Almighty is my shield, and what can man do if God is my friend? I shall not be sacrificed until my time comes. Then I shall be offered freely."

Speaking of the female Relief Society about their right to lay on hands for the healing of the sick, he said, "I'm very glad to have this opportunity to speak with you. The Church will not have my counsel for long, and the world will not be troubled with me a great while, for the Lord has appointed me elsewhere." I didn't understand what he meant by that. We all thought. . . .

(He puts off speaking of the inevitable for a moment.) Early in 1844, Joseph was urged to seek the nomination for the office of president of the United States. And he sent me on another mission—to aid in the campaign. He sent all of the Twelve except Willard Richards. John Taylor was later required to remain behind to continue publishing the Church publications. I could've done that. But Joseph said, "Brother Woodruff, I want you to go, and if you do not go, you will die." Those words rested mightily upon me. I've since thought how truly they would have been verified had I remained.

(He sets down the reins and grease and stands, dramatizing the

scene.) I took the parting hand with Joseph and Hyrum at their own dwellings. Brother Joseph took me by the hand. He said, "Well, Brother Woodruff, you're about to leave on your mission."

I said, "Yes."

Then he looked me steadfastly in the eye, without speaking a word, for a long time. Oh, oh, what a look he gave me. He knew what I did not. At last he spoke, and it was in a mournful

voice: "God be with you, Brother Woodruff. Go in peace." That was the last time I ever saw his face or heard his voice in the flesh.

Some months later, Brother Brigham and I were seated at a railway station in Boston when, at quarter past six in the evening, we both suddenly felt very sorrowful in our hearts and burdened in our spirits, not knowing the cause. All of the Twelve, wherever they were on that day and hour, felt sorrowful and burdened in their spirits without knowing why.

A few weeks later, I went up to Maine to visit my brothers-in-law, and I happened to see a copy of the *Boston Herald*, and I saw the article. "Joseph Smith, his brother Hyrum

Smith, dead—shot in Carthage Jail by a company of two hundred men, American citizens, painted like Indians." (*Shocked.*) Well, was the article true? Could I believe it? After all, newspapers had spread vicious calumnies and slanders about the Church. I went back to Boston, and I there received letters from friends finally confirming the article.

Now, Brother Brigham. . . . I met him at a railway station. Together we walked to the house of a sister in town. I had not shed a tear since I'd heard of the death of the Prophet. My whole soul was nerved up like steel. But when we got to that sister's house, we shut ourselves into a bedroom. I took the bed; Brother Brigham took a large chair. I there veiled my face and gave vent to my grief and mourning for the death of the prophet of God.

(Revealing a hint of the resentment he feels about Joseph having been murdered.) I used to have peculiar feelings about Joseph's death. He had to walk in deep water. He had to row upstream



CHRISTOPHER THORSOCK

I've seen more and done more and been
more places than I ever could have dreamed of.
The Lord, he just lifts you out of your
old life, and sets you to doing things
you never dreamed of.

all the days of his life. If Joseph could have had his desire, he would have pioneered the way to these Rocky Mountains. *(The resentment turns to grief.)* But he knew what he was doing. In fact, he knew far more than he dared tell. He used to say, "Brethren, you do not know me. You do not know who I am." Now he's gone. . . .

When the Twelve came together in Boston, Brother Brigham arose. He said, "Brethren, be of good cheer. When God calls a man to do a work, all the devils in hell can't kill him 'til he gets through. So with Joseph. Joseph has prepared the way in all things and left the keys of the kingdom on the earth. The keys are right here in this Church. Joseph has gone on, but the burden now rests upon our shoulders, and it's up to us to bear it off." And of course he was right. Joseph had left the keys of the kingdom with the Twelve. The mantle of the prophet now fell on Brigham Young.

(Wilford moves to the chest and reverently removes a beautiful oak cane from it.) Now after Joseph's death, I visited Sister Emma, and she gave me a length of oak from the Prophet's coffin. I then visited Sister Mary Smith, Hyrum's widow, and she gave me some hair from the heads of Joseph and Hyrum and their brothers, Samuel and Don Carlos. I afterwards obtained some hair from those in the Twelve Apostles. I have since fashioned this staff from the coffin oak and placed the hairs in the knob of my staff as a relic to those noble men, master spirits of the nineteenth century. *(He manages to speak through the tears that suddenly come.)* It is my most prized possession, and I will hand it down to my posterity when the time comes.

(He composes himself.) Well, how did I wind up on the banks of this Rocky Mountain stream? I fished my way here. Sixty-two thousand, nine hundred and forty-eight miles I've traveled in thirteen years, all on fishing trips. *(He raises the cane high in the air, in what appears almost to be a ritual.)* "Art thou not from everlasting to everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? O Lord, Thou makest men as the fishes of the sea. They take them all up with their angle. They catch them in their net. They gather them in their drag. Therefore, they rejoice and are glad." Habakkuk. *(He uses the cane to point toward the locations of the many places he has preached.)* I fished in Arkansas and Tennessee! I fished on the isles of the sea! I fished in England twice, crossing the Atlantic Ocean four times, fishing for the Lord! I've been through twenty of these United States and into the Canadas, searching for schools of the Lord's fish! And I have brought into his net hundreds and thousands, baptizing 813 and confirming 632 with my own hands! *(He brings the cane down holding it simply in two hands.)* Now I say this not to boast of myself—for who can boast of accomplishments not his own but the Lord's—but to show you what the Lord can do with the weak things of the earth if only we'll let him.

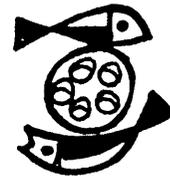
(Though we cannot, he hears the sound of someone calling from offstage.) What's that, Brother Brigham? . . . Oh, oh surely, there's cold water a plenty. *(To the audience.)* He hasn't been well these twelve days. The mountain fever—had it since July the twelfth. Well, a number of us had contracted it, including me. But I soon recovered. So will President Young, I expect.

Well, that's my story, so far. I've seen more and done more

and been more places than I ever could have dreamed of when I was a boy casting my line in the pools and streams of Connecticut. You see, the Lord, he just lifts you out of your old life, like a fish on a line, and sets you to doing things you never dreamed of. Why once. . . . *(He thinks better of it.)* Well, I suppose you've heard enough stories for one day. *(He places the cane reverently on the chest and grabs the wooden bucket. He goes to the "stream," swishes the bucket clean, and retrieves cold water for Brother Brigham.)*

This morning we left the east canyon. We traveled west about twenty miles through a thick grove of aspen. The forward company cleared the road for us, but, well, we had to dodge stumps the whole way, and we smashed an oxcart. Anyway, just ten more miles to go, and we'll travel that tomorrow on the twenty-fourth. Ten more miles and we'll be in the valley of the Great Salt Lake.

What the Lord has in store for me in that valley, I do not know. Surely a whole new aspect of my life will begin when I stand and behold the Land of Promise reserved by God as a resting place for his Saints. The advance camps say that it is destitute of timber, but that it's the greatest grazing country in the world. *(He picks up his fly rod.)* And there are several fine streams of fresh water cutting through that valley, well supplied with fish. *(Addresses Brigham as he leaves the stage)* I'm coming, Brother Brigham! *(Wilford carries the bucket and his fly rod offstage. The lights dim leaving one light on the chest with the oak cane. Fade to black.)* 



PSALM

I am a far cry from heaven.
I am a shout from the end of the earth.
I am a whisper from the judgment bar of God.

Lord, I have waited a long time for Thee,
and in my waiting
I have languished and slumped at my post:
my fasting has hungered, my prayers gone begging,
my meditations slept at the foot of my bed.

Oh Lord, ignite the fire within me.

Let me blaze through the days
and beacon the night
And when my light is spent
I shall not have waited for Thee in vain.

ROGER D. MAGNESON