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To the Saints in England: Impressions of a Mormon Immigrant

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Abstract: The reader will find several items of interest and importance in this tender yet powerful letter: the deep feelings Clayton had for the saints in England, which was probably typical of the Mormon spirit of the times; comments on the hardships of the journey; the determined faith of the Saints; brief comments on the new country and words of advice to prospective emigrants. But perhaps as important as anything else to the Saints in England were Clayton's comments on Joseph Smith, the prophet, whom they had never seen and yet whose words had brought them to a dramatic turning point in their lives. Clayton's immediate attachment to the American prophet and his powerful conviction of the divinity of Joseph Smith's mission is an important central theme in this letter to his friends in Manchester, England.



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We would rejoice to see you in this country, & although your hearts would be pained with the poverty & wretchedness that prevails—you would see many things which would interest you, such as the ancient & curious workmanship of the churches, cathedrals, monuments &c which have stood, some of them a 1000 years or more & are now in a great state of preservation.²⁰

We remember the observation of Bro Joseph, “that we should hardly get over the nation before the Judgments of God would overtake the people,” & we fully believe it & are trying to do what we can to send forth the Gospel. One of our Elders has gone to South Australia, one to the East Indies & we expect one to start for Ham-burgh in Holland this week.—We want council & wisdom, & any thing that is good. Our motto is *go ahead*. Go ahead.—& *ahead* we are determined to go—till we have conquered every foe. So come life or come death we’ll go ahead, but tell us if we are going wrong & we will right it.—

Your Brethren in the Everlasting Lord.

B. Young
W. Richards

TO THE SAINTS IN ENGLAND:
IMPRESSIONS OF A
MORMON IMMIGRANT
(The 10 December 1840 William Clayton
letter from Nauvoo to Manchester)

James B. Allen

It was Tuesday morning, 8 September 1840, that William Clayton and 200 other cheerful Mormon emigrants aboard the good ship *North America* were towed out of Liverpool harbor, bound for the United States. Their good cheer did not last long, as that night a heavy gale gave the ship a “good rocking” and the hapless Mormons, most of whom had never been to sea, were soon more seasick than they had ever thought possible. They were quartered in the steerage compartment, which meant that they had no ventilation, light, or privacy, and all this only added to the stench and fearsomeness of that first dreadful night.

²⁰While Richards had observed England’s historical sites for several years, the experience was a new one for the recently arrived Brigham Young. Only two weeks following his landing at Manchester, in April 1840, he visited Worcester’s cathedral church of Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose origins extended into Saxon times. During the first week of December, several months after writing this letter, Young visited the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, Buckingham Palace, St. Paul’s Church, London Bridge, and the British Museum; see Elden Jay Watson, ed., *The Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801–1844* (Salt Lake City: Smith Secretarial Service, 1968), pp. 72–73 and “Diary of Brigham Young, 1840–44,” 3 to 9 December 1840, Church Library-Archives, Salt Lake City.

This was only the beginning of their troubles. Though they enjoyed some pleasant days, and even did some effective missionary work while crossing the ocean, they were plagued by disagreements with passengers and crew, storms, constant illness, a fire aboard the ship, and death—six children being buried at sea. After arriving in New York harbor they made their way by riverboat, canalboat, and lake steamer to Chicago, Illinois, then overland to the Rock River, and finally by flatboat down the Rock and Mississippi rivers to the Mormon settlement of Nauvoo. They arrived there on Tuesday, 24 November, exactly eleven weeks after their departure from Liverpool. But the spirit of this group of Saints was indomitable. As William Clayton wrote a few days later to his friends in England: “I once could not have believed that it was possible for me to endure the toils I have endured; but to the praise of God be it spoken, all I have endured never hurt or discouraged me, but done me good.”

Clayton had left many close friends in both Penwortham and Manchester, England. His home was in Penwortham, and his missionary labors, completed just before he emigrated, were in Manchester. Neither he nor his friends would be content until he reported to them on his voyage and, most important, on what he found among the Saints in far away America. They, too, after all, were about to emigrate, and his letters could provide the first reliable information from one of their own emigrants about what they could expect. Though a few Saints had migrated earlier, William Clayton’s group was the first emigrant company to be regularly organized by the Council of the Twelve, most of whom were in England in 1840 and who inaugurated the vast Church immigration program there. Had the emigrants arrived safely? Would Clayton advise others to come and, if so, what could they expect from the voyage? Was the New World, and Nauvoo (still called Commerce by some), all they had hoped for? And, perhaps most important of all, had William Clayton met the Prophet and, if so, what manner of man was he?

On 29 November, only five days after his arrival at the gathering place of the Saints, Clayton wrote to his friends in Penwortham. Eleven days later he wrote to Manchester. The letters were similar in tone, though each contained different details and the Saints in each town were instructed to transmit their letter to those in the other town. Together these letters constitute a choice description of the experiences and feelings of one of the first Mormon emigrants from England. The letter to Penwortham was published in 1944 in Volume 5 of *Heart Throbs of the West*, pp. 373-380. The letter to Manchester, where Clayton had worked for two

years as a missionary and branch president, has not been published before and is reproduced below. The original is located in the Church Archives in Salt Lake City.

The reader will find several items of interest and importance in this tender yet powerful letter: the deep feelings Clayton had for the Saints in England, which was probably typical of the Mormon spirit of the times; comments on the hardships of the journey; the determined faith of the Saints; brief comments on the new country, and words of advice to prospective emigrants. But perhaps as important as anything else to the Saints in England were Clayton's comments on Joseph Smith, the prophet, whom they had never seen and yet whose words had brought them to a dramatic turning point in their lives. Clayton's immediate attachment to the American prophet and his powerful conviction of the divinity of Joseph Smith's mission is an important central theme in this letter to his friends in Manchester, England.¹

Commerce, Dec 10th /40 [1840]

Beloved brethren and sisters, we are at length arriving at our journey's end, and although we are about 1000 ml.² distant from each other I do not forget you. Many many times have I pondered upon those happy times we spent in each other's company, & often my heart has filled when I have reflected upon those whom I have left behind. There are many names in Manchester which are exceeding dear to me & forever will be. The immense distance which is between us does not even so much as slacken a single cord of love & happy shall I be to see your faces again. I feel as though I had lost something, but I hope I shall not be long before I see you again. It would be a small matter for me, to cross the sea to see you, but I must wait the will of Heaven. I pray that you may all be found faithful & stedfast when the Lord comes. At the time I left you I knew little of the toils and difficulties of travelling neither could I if any one had told me. We have had some hard times, and been exposed to trouble of various kinds. I once could not have believed that it was possible for me to endure the toils I have endured; but to the praise of God be it spoken, all I have endured has never hurt or discouraged me, but done me good. We have sometimes had to change our food entirely & live on food we had not been used to. We have sometimes been almost suffocated with heat in the old ship, sometimes almost froze with cold. We have had to sleep on boards, instead of feathers, and on boxes which was worse. We have

¹For details on Clayton's missionary work in Manchester and his voyage to America, see James B. Allen and Thomas G. Alexander, eds., *Manchester Mormons: The Journal of William Clayton 1840 to 1842* (Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1974).

²Here Clayton undoubtedly meant 10,000 miles.

been crammed together, so that we had scarce room to move about, & 14 of us had to live night and day for several days, in a small cabin (composed of boxes) about 2½ yards long, and 4 feet wide. We have had our clothes wet through with no privilege of drying them or changing them, we have had to sleep on a bed of hay out of doors, in very severe weather, and many such things which you can form no idea of. Yet after all this we have been far more healthy & cheerful than when at home; and we have enjoyed ourselves right well. The Lord has preserved us from sickness, not even so much as suffering us to take cold, and we are now at our journey's end. far more healthy and looking better than when we left England. I can assure you brethren and sisters, that if you will be faithful you have nothing to fear from the journey the Lord will take care of his saints. We had some old people in the company and they are equally as healthy as the young people. We left England about 6 weeks too late, and this was considerably worse for us. It cost more money and was not so pleasant travelling. We remained at New York, a few days and then took steam boat to West Troy, hence by canal boats to Buffalo, about 460 miles from New York. We remained at Buffalo a few days, and we were obliged to be separated. The fare to Chicago was double the amount we expected (on account of its being late in the season) & we were forced to leave some behind. The Lord sent the presiding Elder from Kirtland³ to Buffalo just in time to meet us and he immediately offered to take all who were willing to go to Kirtland. We felt it hard to part yet it was all well for there are as many here as can get into houses this winter. Amongst those who went to Kirtland were Bro. Greene & family, Sister Alice Whiss and Eliza Prince, Matthew Clayton & wife, Jane Harris, Joseph Jackson & wife Saml. Bateman & family. These from Manchester. Bro. Featherstone, Jane Fylds & Martha Shelmerdine from Stockport, Geo Naylor & family James Crompton & wife from Bolton. All the Greenhalghes remained at Buffalo, a little while this being their choice. The brethren & sisters felt much at parting but we expect to see them in spring. We then proceeded to Chicago which is something above 1000 miles from thence we went to Dixonville about 110 miles. At this place we purchased a boat bottom, and after it was ready we floated down Rock river into the Mississippi, and down the latter river to Commerce. We were about 11 days coming from Dixon to Commerce, and it was in this distance we suffered most from the cold. I shall not state the particulars as you will get them from Penwortham. We are pleased with the appearance of the country it is exceeding rich and beautiful. There is plenty of food of many kinds. We have had the privilege of conversing with Joseph Smith Junr. and we are delighted with his company. We have had a privilege of ascertaining in a great measure from whence all the evil reports have arisen and hitherto have every reason to believe him innocent. He is *not* an idiot, but a man of sound judgment, and possessed of abundance of intelligence and whilst you listen to his conversation you receive intelligence which expands your mind and causes your heart to rejoice. He is very fa-

³This was Hiram Kellog, who was an old friend of Theodore Turley. Turley was the elder in charge of this group of immigrating Saints.

miliar, and delights to instruct the poor saints. I can converse with him just as easy as I can with you, and with regard to being willing to communicate instruction he says "I receive it freely and I will give it freely". He is willing to answer any question I have put to him and is pleased when we ask him questions. He seems exceeding well versed in the scriptures, and whilst conversing upon any subject such light and beauty is revealed I never saw before. If I had come from England purposely to converse with him a few days I should have considered myself well paid for my trouble. He is no friend to iniquity but cuts at it wherever he sees it, & it is in vain to attempt to cloke it before him. He has a great measure of the spirit of God, and by this means he is preserved from imposition. He says "I am a man of like passions with yourselves," but truly I wish I was such a man. His wife seems an excellent woman. Bro. Kimball's wife is well, but his children have been sick the youngest especially. They are pretty comfortable at present. Bro. Turley's family are well. Also Bro. Clarke's. I was with Sister Young on Sunday evening. She and family are well. There has been much sickness here a little while ago, but there is little now. There has been a great influx of saints this year. Commerce (or rather Nauvoo, is a large city. The houses are built of wood, and each house has an acre of land to it. There is space left for streets apparently from 10 to 15 yds wide. There are houses belonging to the saints for several miles round. There are a great many saints, who are in general poor on account of being driven. There are some who are not good saints and some very good ones. Joseph says, that when he is out preaching he always tells the people not to come here for examples, but to set them and to copy from the Saviour, who is our pattern. It is not until corn is gathered into the barn that thrashing and sorting commences. If I were in England I would raise my voice and testify that Joseph is a man of God, and a prophet, that the book of Mormon is true, and this is the work of God, which will roll forth unto the ends of the earth and gather together all the good there is in the earth. Brethren and Sisters rejoice for the Lord is God and will deliver his saints. Stand firm by the truth like men and women, and be not afraid to come to this land, but dont for a moment suppose that all will be peace & ease when you get here. These are days of tribulation, and we must endure our portion. I dont know yet whether I shall come to England next spring, but this is as the Lord will.⁴ I want you to send me word particular who are coming next spring, and how the work is rolling on. I long to be in the vineyard but I want to labour in England. There are a great many whom I should like to mention but I cannot lest it should hurt some for I do love all the saints and want to do them good. I do hope that the Lord will reward Mother Hardman and all that family for the kindness they have shown me. There are others whose names are precious to me, & I would give a great deal to see them. If you see bro. Jos. Fielding tell him that I have been with both his sisters several times. They are both well and their families. I have got very intimate with

⁴Clayton longed to return to England and complete the mission that was interrupted when he was instructed by the apostles to emigrate. He finally returned late in 1852, though certain unfortunate circumstances kept him from remaining more than a few months.

his youngest sister & her husband, she is a lovely woman and so is Sister Clarke. But I can feel a stronger attachment to those I have left behind than any I have yet found. Give my love to all the saints. They have my love and my prayers. I could rather weep than write about them. May the Lord preserve you all so that none may be lost. Bro. John Moon^s sends his love to all the saints. They are not yet arrived here. They are about 7 or 800 miles from here. They expect to be here in spring. They have been 6 months on the way and have suffered a great deal. Sister Poole and children are well. She wrote this week. One thing let me say. It would be well for all who come to bring their working tools with them. Iron work, clothing, Pots are dear in this Country, but you will hear more of this from the other letter. May the Lord bless my dear brethren and sisters and children and permit me to see them soon in the flesh for I long to see them. Be faithful dear brethren and sisters and stand firm by each other. I remain, Yours as ever

Wm. Clayton.

Copied Jan 26th 1840 By Wm. Hardman No 4. Halliwell St. Manchester in compliance with the request of Elder Clayton as contained in a post-script of the above letter. And from several passages in this letter I can but infer that there is a letter at Preston or Penworthen which we are to see, if so, and you have got it, I can assure you we shall feel extremely grateful if you will favour the saints in Manchester with a copy of it. May the Lord bless you all with unity and love and save you into his celestial kingdom is the prayer of your brother in the

New & Everlasting Covenant
Wm. Hardman

^sJohn Moon was the leader of the first small group of Mormons to leave England in an organized company, even before the apostles officially organized the emigration program. The letter he wrote at the end of his voyage was published in an earlier "Historians Corner" (*BYU Studies* 17 [Spring 1977]:339-41). It is significant that Clayton actually beat Moon to Nauvoo, though Moon left England three months earlier.