

## WILLIAM MARKS.

Because Elder William Marks had been connected with several factions of the church since the death of Joseph Smith in 1844, much adverse criticism has been urged against him, and the work he did in connection with the Reorganized Church. It is said that he was fickle and unstable and that he is not entitled to serious consideration. During the lifetime of Joseph Smith he was steadfast and immovable, and he manifested the same stability in later life, after his connection with the Reorganized Church. It is true that for several years he frequently changed his allegiance to organizations, though always firm in his faith in the gospel and the angel message. Whatever of weakness he may have manifested, as indicated by these changes, we are not disposed to cover up or deny. At the death of the Prophet he favored the claims of Sidney Rigdon; later he gave credence to the claims of those of the Quorum of Twelve who were in harmony with Brigham Young; then we find him with J. J. Strang, at Voree, Wisconsin; and subsequently working with Charles B. Thompson. These things, upon their face, indicate inconstancy.

We have been under the disadvantage of not having Elder Marks' defense, and have had only circumstances from which to form a verdict. Recently, through the kindness of Sr. Byron Adams, of Logan, Iowa, there have come into our hands a series of letters written by Elder Marks during a part of these years of uncertainty, which throw some light upon his movements, from which we here present extracts, believing that all interested will cheerfully admit that to hear from Elder Marks directly is the best evidence possible to obtain.

These letters are written from Shabbona Grove, Illinois, to James M. Adams, a part of the time of Wisconsin, and later

of Western Iowa. They commence after his separation from Strang and at the beginning of his connection with Thompson, but throw light upon his movements and the causes that impelled them, from 1844 until he broke with Thompson.

Under date of April 23, 1852, he wrote of attending a solemn assembly called by Charles B. Thompson at St. Louis, Missouri, April 15, of that year. He says:

I arrived there on that day with but little understanding of the work and about as much faith, for I have been so often disappointed that I had become fearful and unbelieving, and with a determination to be very inquisitive, for I have learned from experience that it is a very easy thing to be deceived.

It appears from this letter that he became sufficiently satisfied at this solemn assembly to accept an appointment, said to have been previously given by revelation, associating him with Harvey Childs and Richard Stevens to locate a place of gathering. The result of this appointment was the location of Preparation, in Monona County, Iowa, the location being made in 1852 by himself and Mr. Childs; Mr. Stevens at the time being sick and not able to accompany them. He returned home with the expectation of selling his possessions and removing to the new place of gathering, which seems to have been designated to begin at Kanesville [Council Bluffs] on the south and to extend for a hundred miles north.

It appears that he was not successful in making arrangements to move as soon as he expected, but in the spring of 1854 he went to the new location to attend a solemn assembly, at which time he seems to have witnessed things he did not approve. On September 3, 1854, he wrote:

I just received a paper from Bro. Thompson and a small note sent in an envelope stating that many had turned away, but urging me to make all possible speed to get there for there was still a chance for those who were willing to make the sacrifice of all they possess of this world's goods. I discovered when I was there last spring that there was a great many that was quite dissatisfied, principally with the time tithing. I was there some ten or twelve days. I came to the conclusion that there was the greatest oppression that I ever saw imposed

upon a community, but I had heard nothing from there since and don't know what has been the cause of their leaving. I suppose by your not settling at Preparation that you discovered something that you was not satisfied with. On the receipt of this I wish you would write me, and give me your views of all the proceedings as you understand them.

I had always felt an assurance that the work was of God. I went there last spring with the view of making preparation to move there, but when I left there I thought I would wait a short time and see what would be the result of things, for I was satisfied that many would leave. In your letter I wish you would mention the names of some that has left. I have heard that Bro. Savage and Bro. Messenger and many others also.

On June 11, 1855, he wrote:

It seems from the tenor of your letter that there has been two spirits manifest, the one asking you if you would deny Christ if you could be healed I should think was to tempt you or try your faith; the other has led you to preach some very interesting discourses such as the first principles of the gospel, and the law of adoption, and that the Lord had not rejected this nation. That I never did believe, although Brigham Young proclaimed it to be so. The church departing from the foundation, that I think could clearly be shown, but the funeral-sermon of the church was a thing quite foreign from my thoughts. If this is from the right Spirit it is of incalculable meaning. It seems to have put an end to so much false pretension, and false prophets, and foolery that has been going on for the last ten or twelve years. O how it would rejoice my heart to see the true light break forth again, that we might know for a surety, for I have long been wandering in darkness, and following false prophets until I had become tiresome and weary.

I came to the conclusion in the fore part of last winter to reject all organizations, and teach the first principles of the gospel, and baptism for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit. I find recently there is quite a number in this region of country that have come to the same conclusion. John E. Page is one, and some eight or ten at Aurora. They want me to baptize them. I want your advice on the subject. Brother Adams, we are living in a day when the Devil has great power and it appears from what we see and hear and read that he will, if possible, deceive the whole world. Therefore it is highly necessary that we are watchful and prayerful that we may not be deceived. Try the spirits faithfully by the written word. I well remember what Oliver Cowdery told me here when on his way to Council Bluffs. He said the work was of God, and the end would be accomplished "let men do or act as they pleased!"

Under date of July 26, 1855, he wrote:

My mind has never been at rest since the breaking up of the church (or the death of Bro. Joseph). I have always had fears that all was not

right, but I am satisfied now that all of the false prophets have arisen that can with any degree of plausibility, and if there can be any system adopted that will be calculated to mitigate the condition of the faithful Saints that are scattered about on the face of the land it would rejoice my heart. I would state my views and then I should like to get the views of my brethren on the subject, asking our heavenly Father to direct us, and claim the promise, If any man lack wisdom let him [ask] God. I had it in contemplation when I wrote you the last letter to look out a good location somewhere in the West and enter a large tract of land, if it was thought advisable by my friends and brethren, and invite all of the honest in heart, and as many as was disposed to gather around where we could enjoy some society, for it is like living alone in the world as many of us do. I have mentioned my views to several of the brethren since I wrote you, and they seemed very much pleased with my views, and hoped that I would do it by all means, for they would gladly fall in with the idea.

And now, Brother Adams, I want your advice on the best course to pursue, asking our heavenly Father to direct you in this matter; and I want your answer on this subject as soon as possible. For if I should conclude to make a location this fall it would be necessary to make a move before a great while; and your opinion about where to make the location, if it should meet your views. I am somewhat advanced in age, near 64 years, but my health was never better than at present, although I can't endure so much hardship. My strength has been greatly increased since I have come to the present conclusion. While under the influence of Baneemyism I lost all of my strength and former vigor. I never went on a mission without returning home, sick and finally reduced so low as to despair of ever being able to do anything more.

Tell McHenry and family that we are all in good health and should like to hear from them by letter soon.

I wanted no connection with Bro. George in entering land, for it appeared from his conversation while here that he had made complete shipwreck of his faith. It appeared that all his object was to get gain.

I saw Bro. Little John Gaylord at Chicago two days since; he said he had been writing a large pamphlet on the future result of Russia and the eastern powers. He said he had been to J. E. Page's about three weeks a copying the work. He said his views and Mr. Page's was much like mine, except the gathering they thought must be on the Colorado. I think if we are faithful to observe the law and keep the commandments of God that we shall know for a surety all that will be necessary for us to know.

In your next letter I wish you would give me an explanation of your views of what you mentioned that was taught at Preparation, of probation and regeneration, and all the Preparation news as far as you have it.

The papers have stopped and I don't feel interest enough to subscribe

for any more. The prospect in Shelby County for entering land is quite good, I think, according to your description.

Under date of March 16, 1856, he wrote:

Through faith and prayer and the gift of the Holy Spirit I believe I have partially come to understanding. I consulted with some of the brethren here, stating my views in part, and we agreed to call a conference to be held on the tenth day of April, which comes on Thursday, to meet at 2 o'clock p. m., and organize on that day and continue till Saturday evening, preaching on Sunday. . . . We had but about a month's notice before our conference, and so we have had to notify mostly by letter. I should have wrote you before but there was not time for you to attend if you should have been disposed.

Our object is to meet and discuss the subject and try to get a starting point, and not complete an organization then, but to try to come into union, and to concentrate of faith and strength, and travel this summer and give a general notice, and call a conference in the fall, disseminating our views and preaching. My views are to organize according to the Book of Mormon. These are the views of some of the brethren, but I have not seen but few to converse with. It has been manifested to me in a few days past to organize as the Nephites did, with a high priest to preside over the whole church, with elders, priests, and teachers; the high priest to be elected by the voice of the people. This requires a man of God and of great faith. This I should wish to defer until we could get a more general expression of the brethren. . . . The Book of Mormon is of great worth to us in our day. I read it with more interest than I ever did before.

This temporary and partial organization was effected, including such men as William Marks, John E. Page, John Landers, William W. Blair, John Gaylord, Russell Huntly, and other historic characters, the majority of whom subsequently became associated with the Reorganized Church.

Elder Marks was received into the Reorganized Church, June 11, 1859.

The language of the foregoing letters, written as private letters to a friend, without thought of publicity, discloses the inward thought of the man, and reveals the motives that prompted him through the dark and cloudy day, and is a better index to his character for integrity, stability, honesty, faithfulness, and devotion than any comments we could make, and we submit it for candid consideration.

While considering the many trying ordeals through which he passed and the narrow escapes he made, both to his spiritual and physical life as recorded in these letters, we wish to call the attention of the reader to the prediction made of him in 1838 by Joseph Smith the Seer. Compare the prediction with subsequent events and their effects and judge of the character of the Seer and the man of whom he wrote.

In a letter written from Far West, Missouri, March 29, 1838, Joseph Smith, writing to the authorities of the church at Kirtland, Ohio, said:

I would say to Brother Marks, that I saw in a vision while on the road, that whereas he was closely pursued by an innumerable concourse of enemies, and as they pressed upon him, as if they were about to devour him, and had seemingly obtained some degree of advantage over him, but about this time a chariot of fire came, and near the place, even the angel of the Lord put forth his hand unto Brother Marks, and said unto him, "Thou art my son, come here," and immediately he was caught up in the chariot, and rode away triumphantly out of their midst. And again the Lord said, "I will raise thee up for a blessing unto many people." Now the particulars of this whole matter can not be written at this time, but the vision was evidently given to me that I might know that the hand of the Lord would be on his behalf.  
—Church History, vol. 2, p. 147.

H. C. S.