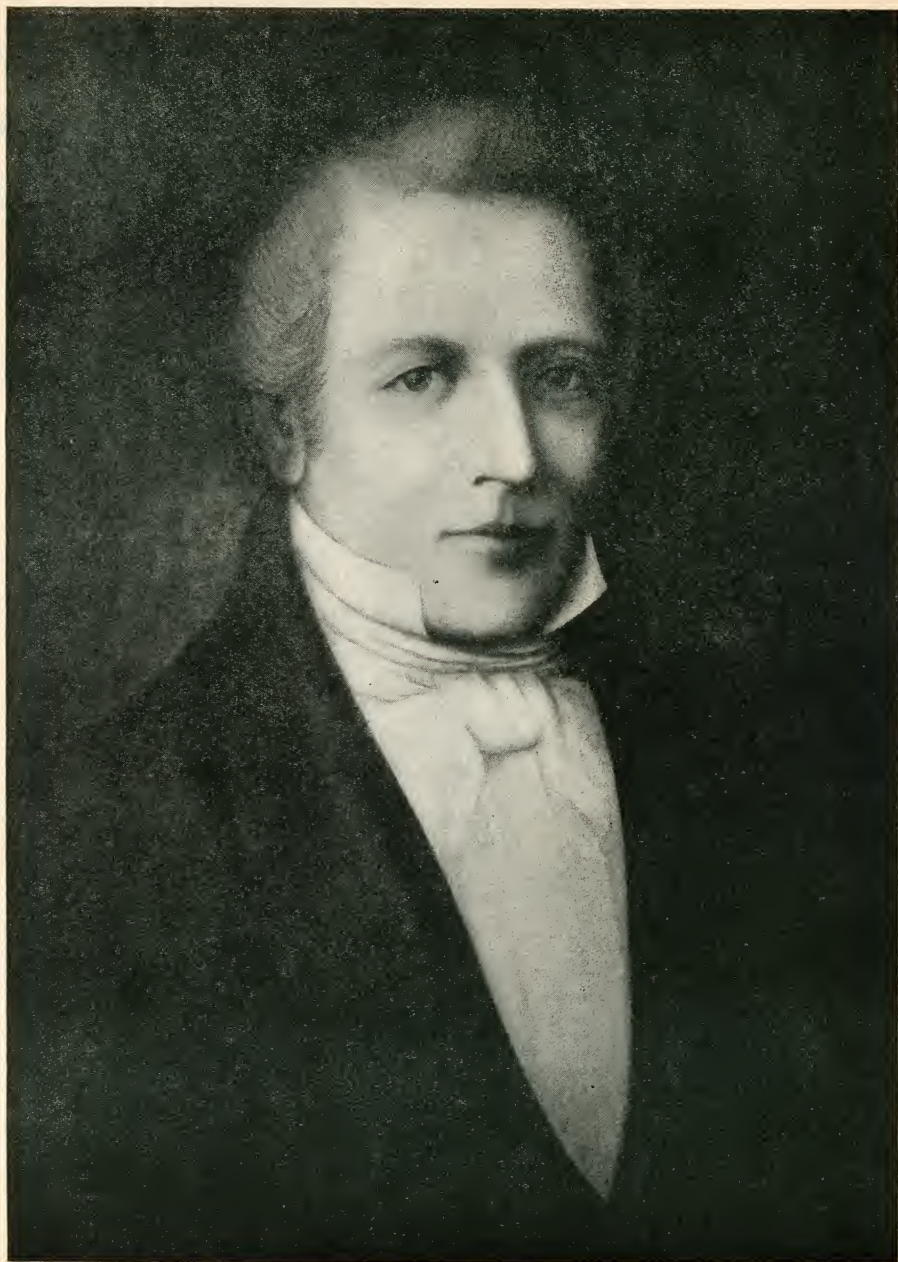


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*Joseph Smith, from a recent painting by Peter M. Kamps*



# Joseph Smith

An Appreciation—By B. H. ROBERTS

*"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." (1 Cor. 3:11-13.)*

IT was a happy circumstance that Joseph Smith tried to lay no other foundation than that laid in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Had he done so his work would have been under condemnation from the beginning, but his announced New Dispensation included the Christ to the very height of his Deity, doctrine and glory. No other foundation could any man lay, and Joseph Smith made the Christ supreme in his scheme of things. It is the Christ and his fidelity and his truth that gave Joseph Smith's announcement the authority and power of God; and hence his work endures. No mere wood, hay, or stubble in it; but gold, silver, precious stones,—the things of highest values!

Every man's work who builds on the foundation of Christ, even, is to be tested as by fire. Time has the same effect; and Joseph Smith's work has stood the test of time as of fire. About the time of the initial movements that founded the New Dispensation of the gospel, a lot of "isms"—"cults," sprang into existence, religions, and philosophies. These—Quakerism, Spiritualism, Owenism—a communistic cult designed by its author Robert Owen to take the place of Christianity; Campbellism, Millerism, with its fixed date for the coming of the Christ; but all these have either passed out or have become very much limited or reduced as factors in religious and philosophical systems.

"Mormonism," so-called, alone has survived in anything like its original force or intent. Its survival is its own witness of its fullness of truth. We might say for Joseph Smith what the Christ once said for His own vindication: If he did not the works of God, believe him not, but if he did, though ye believe not him, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that God was with him. For the works he (Joseph Smith) wrought and their endurance for over 100 years under the searchlight of modern investigation, criticism, mockery, and persecution, are his effectual witness of their truth; the Gospel and the Church he gave, under God, to the world, are his vindication.

\* \* \*

There are three broad sources from which may be drawn an account of the Prophet and Seer of the New Dispensation, his character and his works:

First, the testimony of those who knew him, and received him at his own full-face value of himself—his zealous disciples:

Second, Those to whom he was an enigma—a mystery, that they confess themselves unable to solve;

Third, His out and out opponents—his enemies; those who esteemed him more than a heretic, more

than a false prophet, whom the world would be well served by being rid of, no matter how, and whose works they would utterly destroy—whom they would gladly see cast into hell!

Frankly I confess myself to be of the first class: one who believes in him, accepts him as a Prophet of the Most High God, inspired as no other man has been inspired to establish God's truth in the world; one who believes in him without reservation. To me he was a mighty spirit which made him one of God's "great," and "noble," and "good" intelligences in his own right, by the very nature of him; he was perhaps, second only to the Christ, the Son of God, in that spirit estate preceding earth-life. To this spirit, great, and mighty, and strong, God gave in addition, authority and inspiration which made him of a quick and mighty understanding.

In this atmosphere concerning him, I grew from my childhood; I revelled in the things I heard of him long before I could read them for myself; they were read to me from the books that were published about him—friendly and otherwise—that told the story of his heroisms, his fearless courage, his unbounded love for his friends, his reverence for God and sacred things, his integrity up to his martyrdom. For all this, I loved him, as I now love him.

I was influenced by the boldness of his claims, for the tremendous intellectual daring, that so lifted him above common men. Perhaps in boyhood I loved him for the very sway and swagger of him, and for his unschool'd eloquence. At any rate my own nature formed a union with his that nothing could break. It may be that now, as in Solomon's time, there is no "spot" in the object of our love; no "imperfection!" At least none that I could see or feel.

Later, when judgment began to assert more sway, and knowledge enlarged, and when I learned to regard and to love truth more than men—I saw limitations in the Prophet of the New Dispensation, and became conscious of human frailties and short-comings in action, and saw that he was a man, as he himself explained, of like passions and prejudices with other men. His gracious acknowledgment of the limitations disclosed yet another virtue to admire, the virtue of humility, which endeared him still more to me, and placed him still more beyond detraction from that pride of place I had given to him in my heart.

There let him stand enshrined for me. God who is said to charge even His angels with "folly," may judge Joseph Smith, for His servant he was, and He knows. To me and for me, he is the Prophet of the Most High, enskied and sainted! So let him forever stand.

As for the other two sources of knowledge about him, those to whom he was an enigma and his enemies—let them guess and rave "no matter, he is beyond their power"—the pelting his memory with unsavory epithets, cannot change his place in God's economy of things, or dispose of him in any fashion. He belongs to the ages, his home is with the Gods, his work abides on earth.