

Robert Lang Campbell: “A Wise Scribe in Israel” and Schoolman to the Saints

Frederick S. Buchanan

Radical departure from the establishment seems to come with the territory of the west of Scotland. Sir William Wallace began his crusade against English domination in the West, and Robert the Bruce, Earl of Carrick, had his roots and his strategies there too. It was in the West that the Covenanters, who saw themselves, like the Mormons, as a “remnant of Israel,” took up arms against the state church in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, a group of nonconformist believers in Dumfriesshire (the “Buchanites”) caused a stir by their advocacy of unorthodox theology and marriage practices. Other sons of the West include John Paul Jones, Captain William Kidd, and of course Robert Burns—all of whom in their own way challenged the norms of their day.

As Scotland entered the industrial age, the common folk of the West questioned the old attitudes and challenged the stance of both state and church in their response (or lack thereof) to the problems of the day. Out of Ayrshire in 1838 came a radical critique of the religious and political establishment charging that it was more interested in promoting “Toryism” or tyranny than in improving the lives of the poor.¹ And in the West “operative manufacturers” (self-employed weavers) were suspected of being particularly attracted to “Socianism”—the doctrine that denied the divine nature of Christ and viewed salvation in rational terms.² Robert Owens and Robert Dale with their Utopian Socialist enterprise at New Lanark further exemplify the spirit of the west of Scotland in their attempts to make the social ideals of Christianity relevant to the problems of the day.

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Robert Lang Campbell, c. 1870
Photograph courtesy of LDS Church Archives

In April 1830, a religious revival swept through Ayrshire and Renfrewshire with reports of healings, speaking in tongues, and other manifestations of “the spirit” witnessed among the poor, among women, and even among children. This movement was closely related to the charismatic preaching of the Reverend Edward Irving and the Reverend MacLeod Campbell, both ministers in the established church and both subsequently disciplined for their unorthodoxy.³ The richness of the mixture of religious enthusiasm, social idealism, and the Scots bent toward rationality in politics and religion also nurtured Keir Hardie, who introduced socialist ideology to the House of Commons and founded the British Labor Party. From William Wallace to Keir Hardie, then, Scotland’s West Country has stirred the Scottish imagination and made Scots synonymous with social change, reform, and challenges to the approved way.

In 1847 the Reverend Dr. Robert Lee, moderator of the Edinburgh Presbytery, drew attention to another challenge to the establishment during a debate on the need to get more money for Scottish education. Around 1841 he had originally been assigned to one of the “manufacturing parishes” in the west of Scotland and had been appalled at the ignorance and lack of schooling among the common people. He was especially distressed that so many were joining the Mormons, even though the Mormons preached “absurdities so gross that one wondered that any man, even a Hottentot, could receive them and believe them.” And this in the midst of the much vaunted Scottish commitment to education! Nothing could prove more the need for better education in Scotland, said Lee, than the fact that so many Scots were “being baptized into the faith of Joe Smith” and were “expiating the follies of which they were then guilty at Nauvoo.”⁴ Lee’s comments are typical of his time and class, but perhaps they tell us more about him than about the Mormons he condemned. The cry of “credulous” and “ignorant” may be seen as the overly simplistic plaint of those who were most directly challenged by the new religion. Compared to traditional Presbyterianism, Mormonism at this time was actually a radical religion and fit admirably into the 1840s *zeitgeist* of Scotland’s western counties—Renfrew, Lanark, and Ayr.

Among those who were “duped” into believing in Joseph Smith’s revelations were the two sons of a Kilbarchan, Renfrewshire, weaver, Alexander Campbell, and his wife Agnes Lang. But Lee’s contention that ignorance was at the root of the Mormon success doesn’t hold up when applied to the case of John and Robert Campbell. Indeed, the weavers of the west of Scotland have traditionally been viewed as among the most literate (and

radical) of the Scottish workers, and neither John nor Robert was the ignoramus that the establishment so freely and indiscriminately labeled Mormon converts. While exact details of the education they received are slight, Alexander and Agnes Campbell's sons probably received a traditionally solid basic education in the local parochial/public schools in Kilbarchan. Robert attended a college in Glasgow, probably in the early 1840s at Anderson's University on George Street (now the University of Strathclyde), where he studied to become a "writer" or law clerk. While a student there, he often took a shortcut through a cemetery that lay between his home and the university. On one such occasion, he took to jumping over the tombstones, tripped, and broke his arm or wrist. The physician who set it did so improperly, and his arm failed to develop, causing him some difficulty in his professional work but not enough to prevent him from making his ability to wield the pen one of his hallmarks and an important entrée to new opportunities.⁵

It was perhaps at Anderson's University that the Campbells first heard of Mormonism. In June 1840, Reuben Hedlock rented rooms at the university and held the first Mormon meetings in Glasgow there after having saturated the neighborhood with handbills perhaps similar to the ones used by Alexander Wright and Samuel Mulliner in their initial proselyting mission in the Glasgow area.⁶

John Campbell was apparently the first to be baptized, probably in 1840, and two years later his younger brother Robert responded to the Mormon message. This they did in opposition to their father's wishes. Only once were they able to get him to attend a Mormon meeting with them. As they walked the eight miles back to their home, it rained heavily, and Alexander took the soaking he received as evidence that he was being "righteously punished for absenting himself from his own kirk."⁷

When Mormonism was establishing a bridgehead in Scotland in the early 1840s, Scottish Chartism was in full bloom. Unlike its English variant, Scottish Chartism eschewed violence and advocated peaceful and educational resolutions to the problems of the day. In typical Scots fashion, the Chartists had even established some twenty Christian Chartist Churches in the Glasgow and Paisley area by 1841. In Kilbarchan there were strong Chartist feelings, and the 120 members of the congregation owned a Chartist Hall that was used for political meetings and public worship. One Chartist went so far as to claim that so intertwined were Chartist principles with original Christian ideals that a person couldn't really be a Christian unless he were a Chartist.⁸ Perhaps Alexander Campbell's weaving occupation and its concomitant

**THE
FULNESS OF THE GOSPEL**

has been restored by the

MINISTRY OF A HOLY ANGEL;

By whose Ministry also, ANCIENT AMERICAN RECORDS have been discovered, giving the history of almost half a world for more than 1000 years.

A Minister of the Church of Jesus Christ, of LATTERDAY SAINTS, respectfully informs the Inhabitants of this place, that there will be Preaching in

Where the following subject will be illustrated : viz.—the Gospel in its ancient fulness and glory, showing that the coming of the Lord is near at hand.

And also a relation will be given concerning the ministry of a Holy Angel, and the discovery of sacred Records as mentioned above.

General handbill used to advertise LDS meetings in Scotland, c. 1840
Reproduced courtesy of LDS Church Archives

radical streak, combined with the fact that he was not a member of the established church (he was a Baptist), made it easier for teenage Robert to involve himself with the Chartists and their ameliorative-educative-religious approach to social problem solving. Joining the Chartists may also have been a developmental step in moving him away from traditional religion because on 9 August 1842 he abandoned the Chartists and joined himself to the much despised Latter-day Saints.

He left no written account of why he found the Chartists wanting, although he did address a meeting at Kilbarchan on this subject.⁹ However, some tentative explanations could be suggested given what we know of Campbell and the Chartists. Chartism in Scotland, as has been noted, took on a decidedly religious aura, and an attempt was made to organize the Scottish Chartist churches on a national basis, but this failed to materialize, and local congregations were essentially autonomous in matters of doctrine and practice. However, even *Christian* Chartism was essentially a political-social movement, and the religious aspect was a secondary consideration: a means to the end of achieving certain social goals with minimum concern for the ultimate questions of salvation in the next world.¹⁰ For a young person concerned about his future state, with a disposition toward a literal interpretation of scripture and a need to have direction from those in authority, there was perhaps in Christian Chartism a lack of universal religious authority and a lack of emphasis on “spiritual” aspects of salvation. There was also some disputation over the calling of certain persons to be ministers who were not fitted for that calling, which may have made young Campbell wonder about the scriptural authenticity of the movement. Not to be discounted either is the fact that Chartism peaked in 1842 and began its slide into oblivion by the end of the decade. In the final analysis, however, perhaps Campbell best sums up the reason for leaving the Chartists of Kilbarchan when he records simply that at eighteen he “was convinced of the truth of the fullness of the everlasting Gospel being again sent to man by Priest John Craig and [was] born again on the 9th day of August 1842.”¹¹ He accepted wholeheartedly and without question the unambiguous message of the handbills distributed in the Glasgow area by the early Mormon missionaries.

Mormonism surely answered the questions of authority with precision, and there was certainly no equivocation on the proper beliefs and practices to be followed. Having set his hand to the plough, Campbell apparently never gave Chartism another thought. Six days after his baptism, he attended an LDS conference in Glasgow where he was confirmed a member of the Church in the

presence of Apostle Parley P. Pratt. There was a portent in that, for in the next thirty-two years much of Campbell's life was spent in the company of the first echelon leaders of the Church; like the Clan Campbell of Argyll, he always seemed to be at the right place at the right time and was always, without hesitation, willing to serve those whom he regarded as his superiors.

If he had any lingering doubts about the strength of Mormonism compared to the Christian Chartist Church at Kilbarchan, they must have evaporated as he listened to Elder Pratt. At this particular conference in Glasgow, Parley P. Pratt preached a sermon "upon the spiritual *and* temporal welfare of mankind in general, stating that it was God's will that people should gather together in America. Only through concerted action would the Saints be able to achieve their material aims"; indeed, "in regard to politicks he stated that the Saints are the only people who should rule civil and military in a coming day, for when others rule the people mourn."¹³ Mormonism had all that Chartism offered—and more: spiritual *and* political power based not on the thinking of social reformers, but upon the word of God. Mormonism did not ignore the connection between the two spheres. Thus confirmed—spiritually and temporally—Robert Campbell began a commitment that would take him to Nauvoo, Winter Quarters, and the Valley of the Great Salt Lake and make him a participant in some of the central dramas in Mormon history.

However, before Rob Campbell became a confidant and an amanuensis to prophets and Apostles and schoolmaster to the Saints, he had to prove himself in as hostile an environment as any missionary ever labored in—the west of Scotland. The same environment and mix of people and ideas that created Scottish Socialism, Chartism, and Socianism—not to mention the ever-present Calvinism of the Covenanters and the rising significance of Irish Catholicism—gave no quarter to the Mormons with their "Fantastical, Enthusiastical" claims to divine authority, the impending end of the age, the visitation of angels, and a golden book buried in a New York hill.¹⁴ This was the message that Campbell bore witness to in the environs of Kilbarchan, Johnstone, and Paisley, and in the towns that were strung out along the Caledonia Railway to the Clyde Coast: Kilbirnie, Dalry, Kilwinning, Dreghorn, Irvine, Stevenston, Saltcoats, Ardrossan, Kilmarnock, and Ayr: all former centers of the handloom weaving industry and now, in 1843, part of the burgeoning coal mining and iron smelting industrial belt.

Beginning in July 1843 as an unordained eighteen-year-old preacher, Campbell traveled every Sunday from town to town,

from miners' square to miners' square and from door to door, "warning" the inhabitants of the approaching judgement. In Dalry in his first foray as a missionary, he succeeded in getting the majority of the colliers in one square to attend a meeting that he and his companion had announced in their door to door contacts earlier in the day. A vote of the group asked them to return, although there is no evidence that anyone asked for baptism as a result of the numerous door to door warnings, preaching meetings, prayer meetings, or "discussion" meetings.

In November of 1843, he was ordained a priest, and a few months later his employer, a "writer" (legal clerk) in Johnstone, Renfrewshire, hearing that Campbell was preaching Mormonism, thereupon terminated Rob's engagement in his law office. Apparently Campbell didn't object, but saw it as an opportunity to fulfill his ambition to be a full-time missionary in the west of Scotland; besides "he had no great liking to be in a Writer's office," and he eagerly offered his services to the Church.¹⁵

The general impression one gets from reading Campbell's account of his first mission is that there was at times a lot of interest in what he had to say, but it is almost as if Mormon meetings (in the days before TV) had a high entertainment value; the business of converting individuals was extremely slow—best seen in the Scots phrase "gie dreich"—very, very dismal. Indeed, it took some ten months before Campbell records any baptisms—two persons who joined at Irvine in April 1844. In the same town, Campbell was preaching four times on Sunday and twice during the week in the Spring of 1844. According to his record, his preaching "infuriated" the people against him, and threats were made on his life. Debates between Campbell and "hecklers," however, always insured a big turnout, and the hall in Irvine at one time was "crowded to suffocation."¹⁶

While he records instances at Kilwinning and Irvine where people "listened with breathless anxiety to the truths of heaven," most of his impressions tend to support the notion that a strong thread of cynicism towards the Mormon message ran throughout the West. For example, he "bore testimony twice to very inattentive sinners," "preached to a set of infidels," and some of his listeners "looked up through the ceiling of their houses and said 'God forbid I should become a Latter-day Saint.'" He was threatened with stoning, told he should be muzzled, and the minister in Dreghorn counter-warned Campbell *not* to warn him!¹⁷

In addition to having his straightforward message about the restoration of the Primitive Church and the Book of Mormon rejected because it was at odds with orthodox theology, Priest

Campbell had to contend with the ever-present anti-Mormon publicity that was widespread throughout the west of Scotland. In the early 1840s, Alexander Gardner of Paisley was reprinting an American tract entitled "The Folly and Falsehood of the Golden Book of Mormon" by Matilda Davidson, widow of Solomon Spaulding, who attributed the book's origin to her late husband's *Manuscript Found*, written c. 1812. Warning the public that religious novelties, such as Mormonism, could put their salvation at stake, the pamphlet ended with the stirring challenge, "Let the Mormonites Refute this, if they can."¹⁸ There were also the attacks of apostates who seemed to follow the missionaries from town to town with their exposés of Mormonism. These circumstances led Campbell to conclude that "people here have not heard anything save the false and slanderous reports." In addition, some people were very cautious about the new ideas from America because they remembered the Irvingite phenomenon that swept through the West a decade before, and they did not want to be deceived a second time by another group of false prophets.¹⁹

Although Campbell does not tell us directly how he responded to these challenges, in spite of this opposition and criticism he never wavered in pressing forward with his task of warning his fellow Scots about the results of rejecting the Restored Gospel. He was convinced that what he had was true and would prevail—ultimately. This teenage missionary was so sure of his position as to express some genuine puzzlement over those who were glad to hear him preach, acknowledged the correctness of the teachings, and even said they believed, "but do not evince any symptoms of wishing to obey" and join the Church. In a note of exasperation he cried, "Oh! that men were alive to the things of God!!!"²⁰ Robert Campbell demanded, as he gave, *active* commitment. He was satisfied with no less than absolute, unquestioning commitment in his own life and appears to have had a low tolerance for those who might be lukewarm.

As far as can be determined, in spite of his zeal and personal commitment (or because of it?) only a dozen or so people joined the Church as a result of Rob Campbell's mission. He observed that "a few of the offscourings of Society seem to be the only persons who are looking for the truth."²¹ And even some of those who wanted to join the Church "were bound down by their tyrannical employers" and were prevented from joining because "their masters are much endowed with the Spirit of aristocracy and they have to crouch beneath their opinions as semislaves."²² Shades of Chartism? Perhaps more discouraging was the fact that even of those who had accepted and obeyed, many lacked, in Campbell's opinion, a

“saintly disposition,” and some opposed his being made their presiding officer. Such people he viewed as “withered branches” and totally out of character as “children of God.”²³ There was simply no equivocation in Campbell’s mind: Mormonism was true and he intended to commit himself fully to the cause—whether it was in warning his fellow Scots in Ayrshire or driving himself at times beyond reason to further the schools of the kingdom of God as Utah Territorial Superintendent of Common Schools and as a promoter of numerous civic enterprises.

Here then was a young nineteen-year-old with a crippled arm, one of only about a thousand Mormons in the west of Scotland, a neophyte convert of less than two years, confronted with apostates, criticism, anti-Mormon propaganda, unfaithful Saints, and cynics who challenged him to speak French in a public meeting to prove that he actually believed in tongues.²⁴ The amazing thing is perhaps not that he didn’t baptize hundreds in the Firth of Clyde, but that he himself survived this baptism of fire. Though his preaching in Dalry bore little good “to all human appearances” because the meeting was held in a “garret room . . . which was no way enticing to any respectable people” and the personal lives of the Saints in Ayr “nullified” his efforts, yet perhaps because of the adversity he faced the principal convert out of all this contact with real life in the west of Scotland was assuredly Robert Campbell himself. He was discouraged, however. He wrote to President Reuben Hedlock about the “little success” he had had in his labors and expressed a desire to leave Scotland for America. Hedlock left it up to him to be led by the Spirit whether he stayed or left, and near the end of 1844 he indeed claimed to have received a personal manifestation through the gift of tongues in which he was told that he would soon be gathered to Zion—the ultimate seal of approval for numerous Mormons in the nineteenth century.²⁵

But like so many Mormon emigrants in that period, Campbell’s rationale for emigrating was probably not as purely spiritual as first blush would indicate. The general spirit of emigration was strong in the land among both Gentiles and Mormons, and Rob’s non-Mormon family members apparently went to Canada for economic and social reasons later in the 1840s. It should also be remembered that Robert Campbell was unemployed at this time (apart from meager support he may have received from Mormon congregations) and his crippled wrist put a stigma on his professional work as a writer. According to one family tradition, Campbell approached the doctor who had treated his broken wrist a few years before and convinced the doctor that he was responsible for its failure to develop and that the subsequent impairment of his

wrist made it difficult for him to follow his profession. “Writer Rob” succeeded in getting the doctor to compensate him by paying for his passage to the United States.²⁶ He had apparently not worked in a lawyer’s office for nothing!

Perceptions are perhaps more important than objective realities, however, and whatever material reasons might be given for Robert Campbell leaving his native land—discouragement with his work as a missionary, failure to get adequate employment, or success in putting pressure on his doctor—it is clear that when he decided to leave he did so because he believed he was following the direction of the Spirit, even if it meant going against his father’s wishes.²⁷ On 14 January 1845, he left Glasgow on the first phase of his sea voyage, and as he sailed westward on the *Palmyra* he wrote: “I am now on the Atlantic Ocean fulfilling that which I believe to be the mind of God.”²⁸ A few years later he would reaffirm that his decision to emigrate was related to his conversion, saying that before that event “I never thought of leaving my native soil.”²⁹ This twenty-year-old “veteran” thus left parents, brothers, sisters, and his sweetheart, Joan Scobie, to become a participant in the Mormon drama unfolding in Nauvoo, Illinois. He had a clear, if general, perception that what he did was part of a divine plan, not just a series of random happenings, but he surely did not foresee what would happen to his fondest hopes within the next twenty months.

Campbell arrived in New Orleans on 8 March 1845 and finally reached Nauvoo on 26 March after a journey of ten weeks and one day. While in St. Louis he met a number of his old Scottish acquaintances who had apparently apostatized from their original commitment to Mormonism. They told him there was no work to be found in Nauvoo and discouraged him from continuing his journey, warning him that “there was nothing but trouble and difficulties there.” Not only was he discouraged by these reports, he was probably homesick and thinking of his sweetheart in Scotland. In addition, when he arrived in Nauvoo he was suffering from the agony of what may have been an impacted wisdom tooth.

Believing, no doubt, in the Scottish proverb that “ye get nothin wi a shut moo,” on his first morning in Nauvoo Rob approached Brigham Young and asked him for a blessing. Brigham Young obliged, told him his sins were forgiven and that God was pleased with him for gathering with the Saints, rebuked the swelling and pain, and promised him that he would leave the Young home with his heart full of joy and praise to God. Some years later, Rob acknowledged to Brigham Young that this blessing had been a major means of keeping him faithful at this difficult juncture in his life.³⁰ Indeed, his need for the approval and support

of those whom he deemed his superiors is a dominant theme in his life, and it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that his very busy life in Utah and his driven style as Territorial Superintendent of Schools were a result in part of his need to prove himself in everything he undertook. The Protestant ethic was alive and well in Robert Lang Campbell; as one prominent Mormon educator described his life-style, he was “a scholar of whom it is said, ‘He worked all the time.’”³¹

Given his Scottish educational background, his ability as a writer, and of course his crippled arm, the job of teaching would have been a natural pursuit for him to follow, and this he did—either privately or in the public common school system organized in Nauvoo.³² Perhaps here was nourished and revived the old Chartist ideal of education as a means of shaping society and also the perspectives that led to his later being considered the father of Utah’s common schools. His other specific competency, that of writing, also gave him an entrée (albeit as a clerk) into the Mormon hierarchy. In May of 1845, he received a patriarchal blessing from John Smith (one of many he received during his lifetime) and was promised that he would prosper, do miracles, bring thousands to Zion, “share in all the glory the Lord hath in store for the Saints, [and] live till your satisfied with life, even to see the winding up scene of this generation.”³³ Heady stuff for a twenty-year-old immigrant who hadn’t yet found his niche in life.

Perhaps more important than the actual promises made was the fact that Rob’s skill as a writer and clerk were being noised about Nauvoo; John Smith employed him as a clerk in May, and between June and September 1845 he “clerked” for William Smith, from whom he received another patriarchal blessing. Once again he was given a glimpse of the possibilities that lay ahead:

[A]s a shock of corn that is fully ripe thou shalt sit down in Zion, and enjoy thy inheritance in peace forever thy name shall be enrolled among the honored ones of the earth, and thy Priesthood shall beget thee great praise among thy Brethren & with fond remembrance shall thy goodness in days to come be cherished in the hearts of thousands, and a multitude shall call thee blessed forevermore.³⁴

Here are set out some aspirations that could do nothing but reinforce his own inclination to be a “high achiever” in the kingdom of God—with more than a hint that he might also be something of a leader. From the first such predictive blessing, which he received from a Brother Houston in a Johnstone prayer meeting in October 1843, to these officially recorded blessings pronounced by the Church Patriarch, young Campbell was being prepared by such portents for a life of service to Mormonism and its leaders. On

10 November 1845, he was hired as a personal clerk by Willard Richards and began his career as an amanuensis to a number of Apostles and eventually the Prophet Brigham himself. This word holds special significance for Robert Campbell because it literally means “a slave with secretarial duties.” It was a role the emigrant lad from Scotland accepted willingly and without hesitation. He was indeed a slave for the cause he had espoused.

These things, like the implementation of the patriarchal blessings, were still in the future, however. More practical matters of living (and dying) presented themselves. On 15 November 1845, Joan Scobie arrived from Scotland, and five days later she and Rob were married by Patriarch John Smith. A few months later the patriarch gave her a blessing that Robert dutifully recorded. In typical fashion, she was blessed to be a “mother in Israel” and told that she would have “numerous posterity,” that her “days and years would be multiplied,” and that she would “stand on Mount Zion with the 144,000 and enjoy all the blessings of eternal lives.”³⁵ Joan was now pregnant with her first child, and the patriarch’s words must have comforted both husband and wife because the reality of Nauvoo was something less than an ideal location in which to begin their family.

The Mormons were in the process of being driven out of the city, and the few pages of Campbell’s journal that deal with this period suggest the tensions they lived under, describes the fighting as Nauvoo came under bombardment of the mob, and poignantly assesses his position when he saw at the very stairs of the temple the mob and their cannon: “*I felt* indeed I was an outcast and a stranger there.”³⁶ By 19 September, he and Joan had crossed the Missouri River on the first lap of their journey to Winter Quarters, Iowa, and by October they were on the prairie after crossing the Des Moines River. On 16 October they were about forty miles from Nauvoo when Joan gave birth to a stillborn son and she herself died two hours later. Rob Campbell, who had been promised so much, who had worked so hard for the kingdom, and who had come to Zion for a sense of security, was left a childless widower at the age of twenty-one.³⁷

For a time following Joan’s death, he was in a delirium from malaria and perhaps from grief. He even felt a stranger among fellow Saints and grieved for the company of “her who was my chief delight & better society than hers I never longed for.” He worried over how their parents in Scotland would take the news of Joan’s death and feared they might blame him for going against their advice not to emigrate. For the first time, he wished he were back in his native land where he could “unbosom his feelings” to

his ain folk, but he realized that going back would not help his situation. Reflecting upon his misfortunes, he wrote, “[I]n this thing and in this trial has the Lord tried me and I feel now to fret not, nor repine at the dispensation of God’s providence, but like Job I feel to say ‘The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.’ ”³⁸

Between this acceptance and his expressing hope in eternal life, he inserted a sharp condemnation of the “Mobocrats of Illinois,” claiming that they were ultimately responsible for Joan’s death “and at their hands do I require it.” In a verse written in farewell to his Joan he lamented:

O cruel man ! hast thou a hate,
Which innocent blood alone can satiate;
Like heathen Gods, dost thou require
A victim’s life to appease thy ire.³⁹

But for the care and ministrations of a “Sister Mayberry,” Robert himself might have joined Joan because of the “flux” and associated illnesses. However, by 16 January 1847 he was living at Brigham Young’s “home” in Winter Quarters and helping write out the “Word and Will of the Lord,” the revelation Brigham Young issued on 14 January 1847 as he rallied the Saints for their assault on the western plains and the distant Rocky Mountains. With Brigham’s approval, Robert volunteered to be a member of the first “pioneer” company, but instead of accompanying the first company to the Rocky Mountains he was put in charge of the post office at Winter Quarters and from there on 7 April 1847 he witnessed the “Pioneers starting over the hill Westward. God bless them.”⁴⁰ He must have been sorely disappointed that he would not be among the first to see the promised land.

Perhaps in consolation, Willard Richards gave him yet another blessing on that same day and reminded him to “be humble, and be faithful, be diligent in all things that shall come before you.” If he did this, he would know the mind and will of God for him, “for the Lord has great good in reserve for thee.” He was being left at Winter Quarters “to do a good, great and glorious work in common with thy brethren,” and he should be ready at all times to “whisper Peace, Peace, and do good and prove yourself a wise scribe in Israel.”⁴¹

Ironically, the west of Scotland’s challenge to the establishment had produced the quintessential public servant. In his role as Saint, scribe, or schoolman, Robert Campbell never seems to have once rocked the boat or questioned the directives he received. For twenty-seven years he could be trusted to prove himself wise in all

things pertaining to the kingdom of God, which in the nineteenth century was much more than a spiritual abstraction. It involved Robert Campbell in the creation of a here-and-now “Mormon country” with a focus on farms and commerce, politics and government, taxes and schools, in addition to Sunday preaching and meditations on the glories of the next world.

Campbell arrived in the Salt Lake Valley sometime in 1848. During the winter of 1848–49 he is recorded as being engaged in writing out one dollar bills for use by the Saints in their new home and in impressing the bills with the seal of the Twelve Apostles.⁴² In the fall of 1849 he was called to participate in the exploration of the southern region of the territory between November of 1849 and February of 1850 under the direction of Parley P. Pratt. As recorder for the expedition, he prepared a report for the territorial legislative council based on his “Journal of the Southern Exploring Expedition” and helped familiarize the legislators with the geography of their new home.⁴³ On his return from this expedition, Campbell was called and set apart to labor as a missionary in the British Mission in fulfillment of his own 1848 prophecy that within three years he would return to his “native soil,” where he would preach and “baptize my kindred, and bring them to Zion, all of them, and thousands of my countrymen should come along, and esteem me as their Saviour.”⁴⁴ On 13 April 1850, Robert was set apart for his mission to Scotland by Heber C. Kimball and Ezra T. Benson, with Kimball promising him that his enemies would flee before him, his speech would be sharper than a two-edged sword, that he would “do many mighty works,” and that “no one would supercede thee.”⁴⁵ Once again, the blessings he received from those whom he esteemed his spiritual superiors reinforced the notion that he had an important role to play in the building of the kingdom, although the frequency with which he received blessings may also indicate that he was less than confident that he could do what was required of him. Indeed, following Heber Kimball’s encouraging words he received yet another set of promises from the Church Patriarch, John Smith, which included the promise of a “companion to comfort thy heart” and an honorable posterity.

The function of these blessings and prophecies served to encourage Campbell—and other Mormons, of course—to keep going in spite of difficulties and to provide cautions to him about possible shoals on which his spiritual barque might founder. It must be added that Kimball’s warning for Robert Campbell to “be humble & meek” and to “cease from your lightness” seems redundant given the seriousness the young Scot seems to have reflected from the moment of his baptism. However, perhaps such warnings

were a necessary balance to the other promise that “no one shall supercede thee.” Taken seriously, that promise could cause problems in a system based on hierarchical authority! Paradoxically, it appears that such blessings enhanced and fed the fires of ambition and aspiration as they also banked the fires of too much ardor, independence, and enthusiasm. In so doing they played an important role in educating and socializing Robert Campbell into the value orientation of the Mormon faith community. They were considered as instructions from God to be taken very seriously as personal spiritual guidelines by the recipients, but they undoubtedly also helped in the task of boundary maintenance on which social systems depend for their continuance.

In a similar manner, Robert’s assignment as pastor of the Scottish Latter-day Saints between 1852 and 1854 gave him the satisfaction of serving as leader of the Church in his native land and also reinforced in him the attributes of a faithful and diligent servant who could be depended on to do the will of his superiors. In a letter to Brigham Young, he expressed pleasure in having been called to serve but also indicated that he couldn’t quite understand why, given “my weakness, my foolishness, my youth & inexperience, God’s servants have placed me forward to occupy such stations, as have been assigned to me on this mission, but so it is.”⁴⁶ It may have been difficult for young Robert to understand, but in the perspective of history it seems obvious why the “brethren” chose the “weak things of the world to confound the wise.” They could rest assured that when Rob Campbell was given an assignment he would fulfill it to the letter. As Orson Pratt and Franklin D. Richards said of him when they initially appointed him to labor in the Glasgow Conference in September 1850, “Elder Campbell has been associated for some years past with the ‘Twelve’ and also with the Presidency of the Church from whom he had gathered glorious truth calculated to benefit the Saints and all who will listen to him.”⁴⁷ This characterization of him as a gatherer and disseminator of information comes very close to the mark in describing his role as one of the most committed of civil servants in the kingdom of God. It was a characteristic that would continue as his hallmark long after his mission to Scotland.

In the fall of 1854, he returned to Utah with a large company of gathered Saints and a new Scottish wife, Mary Stewart, whom he married in Glasgow on 14 November 1853. During the next decade, he devoted his energies to becoming one of the pillars of the community and establishing a family. He married a plural wife, Jeanie Miller of Glasgow, in 1855 in Salt Lake City. Between 1854 and 1864 he fathered twelve children, seven by Mary and five by

NOTICE.

MR. ROBERT CAMPBELL,

A Latter-Day Saint Missionary,

From Eastern Upper California, North America, will deliver a
COURSE of LECTURES on the

FULNESS OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST,

as restored to earth in these days, in its ancient purity, accompanied with all its privileges and blessings; also, set forth the Prophecies which are yet to be fulfilled, as spoken by holy men of old, who were moved upon by the Holy Ghost.

IN THE

LOUDOUN HALL, BOAT VENNEL,

EVERY SABBATH-DAY, AT ELEVEN A.M., AND SIX P.M.

ALSO,

ON EACH WEDNESDAY NIGHT,

COMMENCING AT EIGHT O'CLOCK,

When all classes are respectfully invited to attend and hear for themselves. A wise man will hear a matter and then judge.

"Doth our law judge any man before it hear him," John vii. 51.

On WEDNESDAY Evenings, Pamphlets, explanatory of our Faith will be exposed for Sale; also, any Books published by the Latter-Day Saints can be had, if ordered.

Ayr, 25th Nov., 1850.

PRINTED BY THOMAS M. GEMMELL, AT THE AYR ADVERTISER OFFICE

Handbill published by Robert L. Campbell
during his mission to Scotland, 1850-54
Reproduced courtesy of LDS Church Archives

Jeanie. Eventually Mary would bear him eleven children and Jeanie ten. In 1857 he married another Scot, Elizabeth Beveridge, but had no children by her. His honorable posterity was certainly on the rise and so too were his accomplishments as a citizen and public servant. Much of what he accomplished, however, could not have been done without not just the comfort, but the active aid of the three women he married. Quite apart from bearing, tending, and rearing his numerous children, Mary Stewart, Jeanie Miller, and Elizabeth Beveridge undoubtedly played an important role in the farming he was involved in. It is unfortunate that an understanding of how much he may have depended on them for his success must be a matter of speculation rather than being based on their accounts of how busy *they* were! Nonetheless, Mormon women of Robert Campbell's era (including his wives) were essential to the success of the community as they dug ditches, pruned trees, sheared sheep, and spun and wove cloth for their households. As Brigham Young himself is reputed to have said, "Great as the achievements of women were, they would have been much greater if they had had wives to help them."⁴⁸

Because of the assistance he received from his wives, Robert was better able to meet the incessant demands on him as a secretary and recorder for this or that society—the General Scientific Society, the Deseret Theological Institute, the Pomological Society, the Deseret Agricultural and Manufacturing Society—in addition to his service as one of the presidents of the Twenty-ninth Quorum of Seventy and, of course, his full-time work as a clerk in the Church Historian's Office and his service as a regent and secretary of the board of the moribund University of Deseret (which served as a supervising agency of the quasipublic school system in Utah). Other tasks included the role of chief clerk of the territorial legislature, and when the University of Deseret was reactivated he served (with Issac Groo and fellow Scot David O. Calder) as the presiding officer of the committee that supervised the work of the university, being privileged to offer the invocation and "opening remarks" at the installation of John R. Park as principal of the university on 8 March 1869. No wonder it was said of him, "He worked all the time."⁴⁹

Campbell's involvement in one set of activities led like the branches of a tree to other activities. On top of all his other personal, professional, church, and civic responsibilities, he accepted a "call" from the county court to be Superintendent of the Common Schools of Salt Lake County, and two years later, in 1864, the legislature elected him to the position of Superintendent of Common Schools for the territory of Utah. At the age of thirty-nine,

Rob Campbell was now literally the chief school officer of what Mormons regarded as the earthly manifestation of the kingdom of God. Gie guid for a weaver's chiel and Chartist reformer frae Kilbarchan, wi a crippled airm at that!

He was kept busy writing reports, visiting outlying communities, pleading for better schools, better teachers, and better books, and acting as chief booster of Brigham Young's ill-fated attempt to reform English orthography through the Deseret Alphabet. It is in the arena of education that Campbell left his most remembered service to the Mormon cause. One historian of education has credited him with being the promoter of uniform textbooks in Utah and an early advocate of consolidated schools and of the improved preparation and remuneration of teachers. During his administration the gradual shift from funding schools through tuition to a public tax began, although it was not until a month before his death in April 1874 that the legislature finally made an appropriation of fifteen thousand dollars to aid district schools.

As one reads the numerous entries under Campbell's name in the Journal History of the Church during these years and his official school reports to the legislature, one is reminded of the hard-driving ardor of Horace Mann as he sought to shake Massachusetts out of what he perceived to be its lethargic attitude toward public schooling in the 1840s. Campbell also complained about the apathy and indifference towards education on the part of many of the Mormon school trustees, and he surely would have empathized with Mann's own somewhat discouraged response to one of his less than successful evangelical tours on behalf of common schools in Massachusetts: "When I am about to present my gospel of education in some new place, I feel as if I were standing in bad weather before the door of a house and vainly pulling the bell, with no one at home, or all too busy to see me."⁵⁰ In spite of official Church backing for his efforts, Campbell too had to wage a relentless campaign to convince the Saints of the value of common schools.

When Robert Lang Campbell died on 11 April 1874 of typhoid fever, the *Deseret News* described him as an "industrious, useful, upright, trustworthy man" who had expended his life in service in ecclesiastical and secular affairs, and noted that his life was "closely interwoven with [Mormon] history." Indeed, the *Deseret News* obituary suggested that his commitment to duty as "an indefatigable worker" may have been one of the factors that precipitated his early demise at the age of forty-eight.⁵¹

In correspondence in the months following Campbell's death, the man with whom he worked most closely, Church Historian George A. Smith, paid personal tribute to him for his

devotion to Church and civic affairs: “As he had chief charge of the Historian’s Office for many years, his absence makes everything here appear lonely.” “My intimacy with him was such that it seemed as though I had lost a brother.” “His earnest zeal in the cause of education had rivited upon him the affection of the entire community.”⁵²

There can be no doubt that Robert L. Campbell was held in high regard by his fellow Mormons and that his willing and obedient service in the Mormon cause was seen as a positive and necessary virtue by the leaders of the Church. However, no person could function in the various capacities that he did in a Utah that was slowly but surely becoming more pluralistic without raising doubts about whether his compliant disposition was best for the territory. Its increasingly diverse population did not always appreciate the Mormon ideal of loyal service, and it fell to the nemesis of Mormon hegemony in Utah, the *Salt Lake Tribune*, to critically editorialize on Campbell’s multidimensional contributions to Utah. While declaring that he had “been cut off in the midst of his usefulness and a sorrowing community mourn his loss” and characterizing him as a great civil servant who outdid himself in his devotion to the many causes in which he was involved, the *Tribune* editorial asserted that his energies and abilities had been spread too thin and he couldn’t keep up mentally and physically with the demands continually made on him by family, civic responsibilities, employment, and Church assignments, with the result that the schools of Utah suffered. As was the *Tribune*’s wont, it focused on what it perceived to be his subservience to his master, Brigham Young, who “had no more obsequious and humble servant.” The review of Campbell’s contribution to Utah’s civic life concluded—tongue in cheek—that he would live “green in our memories as a pious and much married Saint, an indefatigable—albeit hopelessly confused—worker, and a disciple faithful and true to his great Master.” Like Damon and Pythias, Boswell and Johnson, it continued, “Brigham and Campbell will be enshrined in the minds of future generations as lovely in their lives and in their deaths not long divided.”⁵³

Given its anti-Mormon orientation, it is easy to see why the *Tribune* would interpret Campbell’s faithfulness, diligence, and commitment as weaknesses rather than the strengths they were certainly considered by the Mormon community. Indeed, in a very real sense his lifestyle epitomized the source of much of the friction engendered between Saints and gentiles in nineteenth-century Utah (and that to some extent still persists): devout faith and obedience to authority for one can also be construed as blind

faith and servitude to another. The *Tribune's* criticism of Robert Campbell's life also reflects the challenges arising between the traditional patriarchal notion of a good society and the more secular, open variety seeking to assert itself in late nineteenth-century Utah.

Be that as it may, whether acting as an agent of the gathering to Zion in his native land, as a peripatetic recorder of the decisions of the Church's highest echelons, as an enthusiastic supporter of commercial and horticultural affairs, or a promoter of a formal system of education in the territory of Utah, Robert L. Campbell was playing out the role he consciously and conscientiously adopted when he was "born again" on 9 August 1842. He put his hand to the plough and never looked back.

Here on the very edge of civilization, in the wilds of the American West, where "manifest destiny" was being realized by the constant flow of emigrants moving westward, the writer's apprentice and former Christian Chartist from Kilbarchan was working out his own personal "manifest destiny." Because of his faithfulness, he was promised that he would yet play a role in bringing to pass the divine purposes far from the garret meeting places of Dalry, the infidels of Irvine, or the writer's office in Johnstone. Although he was not the recipient of the divine will directly, as a faithful disciple, a "wise scribe in Israel," and as schoolman to the Saints, Robert Campbell can be viewed as one of many unsung "civil servants" of the kingdom who recorded and transmitted the revelations to the world and to the Saints. He clearly accepted that his task was not to interpret or question what was done, but to implement the social policies of those who received the revelations and formulated the epistles and policy statements. Even prophets and Apostles still needed faithful Saints with the skills of the pen—including expertise in such mundane things as spelling and punctuation. Although the particular needs of the brethren defined, and in some sense circumscribed and limited, the aspirations of those who served them, the saintly scribe from the west of Scotland found his niche on the western frontier of North America and carved out for himself a place in the annals of Mormon and Utah history. And it all began with the conversion of a Christian Chartist to Mormonism in Johnstone, Renfrewshire, in 1842.

NOTES

¹*An Address to the Radical Reformers of Ayrshire* (Kilmarnock, Scotland: Ayrshire Examiner Office, 1838).

²Chambers, *Book of Scotland*, cited in the *Scotsman*, 29 October 1830.

³Rowland A. Davenport, *Aldbury Apostles: The Story of the Body Known as the Catholic Apostolic Church (Sometimes Called the "Irvingites")* (London: Neillgo Publications, 1971), 7–34.

⁴*Scotsman*, 1 May 1847.

⁵"Sketch of Robert Lang Campbell," typescript in possession of Alice Spencer, Salt Lake City; see also reference to Campbell's crippled arm in Peter McIntyre, "Autobiography," c. 1846, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as Marriott Library).

⁶*Millennial Star* 2 (October 1841): 92; letter of J. S. McGrath, Archivist, University of Strathclyde, to the author, 8 October 1986; handbill from Alexander Wright Collection, Library-Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

⁷"Sketch," 1.

⁸Sydney and Olive Checkland, *Industry and Ethos: Scotland 1832–1914* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), 70–72; letter of Alexander Wilson, University of Manchester, to the author, 8 July 1982.

⁹Robert L. Campbell, *Journal*, 20 October 1844, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo.

¹⁰Alexander Wilson, *The Chartist Movement in Scotland* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970), 138–51.

¹¹Campbell, *Journal*, 1 July 1843.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³Minutes of Glasgow Conference, 15 August 1842, LDS Church Archives (emphasis added).

¹⁴One of the earliest publications that attempted to counter the Mormon work in Scotland was a broadside that proclaimed: "A Reply to the Fantastical, Enthusiastical Messrs Hamilton and Ure," *Millennial Star* 2 (March 1842): 169–70. Hamilton and Ure were LDS converts and local missionaries in the early period.

¹⁵Campbell, *Journal*, January 1845.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 20 April 1844.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 15 October 1843; 26 November 1843; 27 May 1844.

¹⁸This pamphlet was found in the Paisley Public Library under "Paisley Pamphlets," vol. 24. The librarian there, Mr. Kenneth Hinshalwood, drew my attention to it.

¹⁹Campbell, *Journal*, 27 May 1844.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 12 August 1844.

²¹*Ibid.*, 27 May 1844.

²²*Ibid.*, 3 July 1844.

²³Campbell included in his journal a synopsis of his mission under the date of January 1845. These comments are from that section.

²⁴Campbell, *Journal*, 22 July 1844.

²⁵*Ibid.*, January 1845.

²⁶"Sketch," 1.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 1; Campbell, *Journal*, 20 November 1846.

²⁸Campbell, *Journal*, January 1845.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 27 March 1848.

³⁰Robert L. Campbell, Dundee, Scotland, to Brigham Young, 14 June 1853, Brigham Young Letterpress Book, LDS Church Archives.

³¹George H. Brimhall, "Evolution of Education in Utah," *Improvement Era* 16 (July 1913): 900.

³²Sketch, 1; conversation with James Kimball, 27 March 1987.

³³Campbell, *Journal*, 7 May 1845.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 25 July 1845.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 20 November 1845.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 21 September 1846.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 16 October 1846.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 20 October 1846.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 3 March 1847, 7 April 1847.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 7 April 1847.

⁴²See entries in *Journal History of the Church*, 29 December 1848, 4 January 1849, LDS Church Archives.

⁴³Robert L. Campbell, *Journal of Southern Exploring Expedition*, LDS Church Archives.

⁴⁴*Journal*, 27 March 1848. This prophecy was made at Winter Quarters at the command of Dr. Willard Richards, who on being informed that Campbell's father and grandmother and other kin had just died in Scotland, addressed Campbell thus: "Son of man! Prophecy."

⁴⁵Campbell, Journal, 91.

⁴⁶Robert L. Campbell, Glasgow, Scotland, to Brigham Young, 28 April 1852, Brigham Young Letterpress Book, LDS Church Archives.

⁴⁷Campbell, Journal, 95.

⁴⁸I am indebted to Leonard Arrington for giving me the Brigham Young quote in a conversation on 27 April 1989. See also his "The Economic Role of Pioneer Mormon Women," *Western Humanities Review* 9 (Spring 1955): 145–64, and "Blessed Damozels: Women in Mormon History," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6 (Summer 1971): 22–31.

⁴⁹The Journal History of the Church is replete with references to the many facets of Campbell's career from the early years as scribe to various Church leaders through his years as Superintendent of Common Schools until his death in 1874. For a factually oriented overview of his civic and educational involvements, see J. C. Moffitt, "Robert L. Campbell: Territorial Superintendent of Schools," *Utah Educational Review* 40 (15 March 1947): 159–63, 190.

⁵⁰See Moffitt, "Robert L. Campbell"; the quotation from Horace Mann's journal is cited in David B. Tyack, *Turning Points in American Educational History* (Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell Publishing Co., 1967), 124. Campbell's complaints about apathetic school trustees who were supposed to be setting an example to the rest of the Mormon population can be found in his reports for the years 1866 and 1867 in J. C. Moffitt, comp., "Reports of the Superintendents of Schools for Utah, from 1861 to 1896" (Provo: Privately printed, 1941), 15–16, 19–22, photocopy of typescript in Marriott Library.

⁵¹*Deseret News*, 14 April 1874.

⁵²See George A. Smith to Dr. Humphrey Gould, 26 May 1874; to William Geddes, 7 July 1874; to Lyman Coleman, c. August 1874 in George A. Smith Letterpress Book, LDS Church Archives.

⁵³*Salt Lake Tribune*, 14 April 1874.