



Methodist camp meeting, after a drawing by Allison.

—THE BETTMANN ARCHIVE

A REPLY TO DR. BUSHMAN

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I appreciate the magnanimous spirit of *Dialogue* in printing my essay and this reply. Dr. Bushman's courteous and able polemic is regrettably marred by some historical inaccuracies and by a tendency to set aside historical data in favor of unsupported conjectures.

First Dr. Bushman tries to harmonize Joseph Smith's differing vision accounts by some suggestions that themselves do not agree with the details of Joseph's official 1838 version. While reference to his sinfulness and forgiveness is markedly absent from the first vision portion of this official version, Smith's acknowledgment of "the gratification of many appetites" prior to the Moroni vision is really a much bolder admission than ever before. This invalidates the attempt to explain the absence as a playing down due to attacks upon his character around 1834. Furthermore, while persecution and rebuff may have "scarred him," Joseph shows no intention of deliberately "covering" his first vision claim by reference to "personages or angels." In fact, he says, "I could not deny it, neither dare I do it." It is also incorrect to call a narrative written, as the Prophet says, "to disabuse the public mind" a "private" narration, and it is hardly proper to maintain that in the 1838 account Joseph did "frankly say the Lord had come to him" when this must be inferred from the wording and even some of the Mormon leaders did not grasp it, as Dr. Bushman acknowledges.

Dr. Bushman turns next to the task of relieving Joseph of the responsibility for the conflicting account written by Oliver Cowdery in 1834-35. Cowdery represents himself as merely a journalist who writes this account with the assistance of brother Joseph's "labor" and aided by "authentic documents," a role familiar to him during those years from his service as Clerk of Conference. Oliver, therefore, parenthetically adds at this point, "neither is he [Smith] able to inform me," and further along introduces Joseph's description of Moroni with the words, "to use his own description." Dr. Bushman, on the other hand, wishes to place Cowdery in the role of a collector of hearsay, "sticking together pieces that do not belong," and erroneously states that "close cooperation was impossible" at the time the articles were being produced because Smith and Cowdery were widely separated geographically. From Joseph Smith's own *History* it can be shown that the two were together on several occasions in the latter part of 1834, including a leisurely boat trip to Michigan, prior to the appearance of the article in December 1834 dating the revival to Joseph's 15th year (*HC* ii, 162, 165f, 168, 172f, 174f, 176). Again, they were together for a conference Feb. 14, 1835 (ii, 186f) while the issue containing the correction of the date to 1823 did not go to press until the end of the month (cf. obituary dated 19th; ad dated Feb. 27, 1835 — *MA*, I, 74, 80). Stanley Gunn's biography of Cowdery speaks of the two during this "Kirtland Period" of Cowdery's life as "constant companions" (p. 121). Dr. Bushman in a later footnote (no. 11) considers the possibility that the Prophet himself may have caused the confusion by editing out ("held back") a reference to the first vision which Cowdery had started to make, which implies that the two conferred together.

Dr. Bushman places all of Joseph Smith's accounts in opposition to Cowdery's accounts on the point of when Joseph's interest in religious questions began. The point of importance, however, is when it culminated, not when it began, for even Cowdery remarks that the subject "had so long agitated his mind." If we accept Dr. Bushman's plea for age 16 (although Cowdery probably meant age 17 but wrote 17th), then Cowdery's 1834-35 account stands in agreement with Smith's own Strange (1831-32) Account and in opposition to all the later (1835 and 1838) accounts which move the culmination date back to age 14.

Recognizing how impossible it is to find large numbers joining the churches when the Mormon leader was 14, and that "for these people additions were not commonplace," Dr. Bushman tries to help his cause by making that which was small seem large and that which was far seem near. Here he appears torn between two opposing viewpoints. On the one hand he tries to show that the revival only seemed large in the eyes of young Joseph and it is therefore compatible with the smallness indicated by the data. On the other hand, he tries to show that the revival was really much larger than the data would indicate and therefore fits the largeness of Joseph's description.

In support of the first of these propositions he mistakenly suggests that "the revivals of 1824 were not the standard for the people in 1819." Actually, the Palmyra Presbyterian Church received more converts in their 1817 re-

vival ("126 have been hopefully born again, and 106 added") than they did in the 1824 revival (99 added). Most of the people who lived through this 1817 revival were still living in 1819 and in 1824, Joseph's own family to name just one example. In addition, Dr. Bushman cites a revival near Albany in 1820 in which "the face of the country" (200 miles from the Smith home) had been "wonderfully changed," which the Palmyra paper reported as having produced 1,200 converts. It would appear that the people in 1819 were quite capable of recognizing a great revival when they saw one.

In developing his second proposition, Dr. Bushman offers three explanations that relate to one another in a manner reminiscent of the Arab who was accused of having broken a jug he had borrowed. The Arab explained that he hadn't borrowed it in the first place; it was broken when he got it; and there was nothing wrong with it when he returned it. Dr. Bushman suggests that Joseph did not mean there was an unusual excitement in Palmyra, but only somewhere within 25 miles or so of it; that the revival really was at Palmyra but was never recorded; and that Palmyra experienced only an unusual excitement while the great multitudes all joined somewhere else.

In regard to the first of these suggestions, Dr. Bushman seeks by mere conjecture to enlarge the "effective horizon of the Smith household" by speculating that they ranged far and wide in their beer and cake sales. Here, however, he undercuts his point about Joseph's naïveté, for any young man who got around that much would surely know a great multitude from a small one. Conversely, any boy who thought that ten or twenty converts constituted "large additions" would not be likely to call a town 15 miles away "the place where we lived."

To help enlarge Smith's "psychological environs" Dr. Bushman tries psychologically reducing the distances involved, speaking of Oaks Corners (18 miles from the Smith home) and Vienna (15 mi.) as "next door," Junius (25 mi.) as "just east of Vienna," and the Lyons circuit, the closest point of which was about 10 miles away, as "very close to the Smith house." In a day when most travel was by foot or by horse and wagon, when experiments with canal transportation carried 100 persons 4 miles an hour, equal to a stage in bad weather (*Palmyra Register*, Nov. 5, 1819, II, 3), it is certainly not accurate to speak of towns 15 miles or farther away as "next door." Even today a town which takes two hours to reach by car is not considered "next door." Dr. Bushman labels as "nearby," towns which I had listed as fitting the description of "the whole district of country": Williamson (15 miles from the Smiths), Ontario (15 mi.), Manchester (5 mi.), Sulphur Springs (10 mi.), Vienna (15 mi.), Lyons (15 mi.) and Macedon (5 mi.). Even after drawing this 15 mile radius of "nearby" towns, he still cannot find any revival there in 1819-20, with the possible exception of Farmington (Manchester), which I did not "admit" was a revival. He consequently has to extend his "nearby" radius 10 miles farther before he can find a few isolated signs of revival, and we are told that this nearly 2,000 square mile area was what Joseph meant by "the place where we lived."

It is true that someone out of state could refer to an entire area as "the place where we lived" when speaking of generalities, but not when the reference is to specific events directly affecting the individual. For example, if someone said, "There was a bank failure in the place where we lived and I lost all my money," who would conclude he was talking about a bank in a town 25 miles away, especially if there was a bank in the very town where he lived? This is the character of Joseph's story. The excitement was near enough to his home for him to feel the pressure to join the local Methodist Church, just as members of his family had joined the local Presbyterian Church. It was local enough that Smith could observe the Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians scrambling for converts, take note of the "great love" the converts "expressed at the time of their conversion," and see them "file off, some to one party, and some to another." It was close enough to observe that "a scene of great confusion and bad feeling ensued" and to conclude that "the seeming good feelings . . . were more pretended than real." It was so near that his "mind at different times was greatly excited, the cry and tumult was so great and incessant." It was local enough that he could claim to have personally told his vision story to the same minister who had shared in the awakening. It was right there "among the different religious denominations in the neighborhood where I lived," as he says elsewhere. That's how near "near" is in Joseph's story. How by any stretch of the imagination can all this activity be transferred to a location 15 to 25 miles or more from the Smith home?

This same local atmosphere is present in the Cowdery-Smith account. The "religious excitement" was "in Palmyra and vicinity" where under Rev. Lane's preaching, "calculated to awaken the intellect, . . . in common with others, our brother's [Joseph's] mind became awakened." This "great awakening, or excitement" was more than a mere state of anxiety, for the anxious "professed a belief in the pardoning influence . . . of the Savior." But then "a general struggle . . . for proselytes" followed and "in this general strife for followers" members of Joseph's family joined the Presbyterian Church, thus becoming themselves a part of the "large additions" made to the churches of Palmyra and vicinity. Joseph himself received "strong solicitations to unite with one of these different societies" while others were seen to manifest "equal warmth" in proselytizing.

This type of local coloring is strikingly present in the 1824-25 revival. After progressing moderately through Sept. 26, 1824, the revival "appeared to break out afresh" when on Monday, Sept. 27 four were converted and the next day seven made profession at a prayer meeting at the home of Dr. Durfee Chase, son of the active Methodist family whose farm adjoined the Smith homestead. Among the seven converted was 19-year-old Lucy Stoddard, relative of the [Russell?] Stoddard who had been the principal workman in building the Smith home. Lucy had apparently been a Baptist until her conversion to the Methodists, and her zeal for "persuading others to embrace that religion in which she had found such solid happiness" and her dramatic death five weeks later (to which Rev. Lane devotes nearly a page of his three page

report) greatly impressed the whole community and especially the young people. The following spring Lucy's cousin, Calvin Stoddard (the future brother-in-law of Joseph Smith) along with his parents and sister were converted and joined the Baptist Church, while his future wife, Sophronia Smith, along with other members of the Smith family, had joined the Presbyterian Church. Knowing how zealous such young people in their late teens and early twenties can become in seeking converts, and how this particular 1824 revival, as the Palmyra newspaper noted, was "mostly among young people," we cannot doubt that the unconverted Joseph at this time received many solicitations to join the various churches which the neighboring young people of his own age had recently entered.

There are signs of Dr. Bushman's longing for evidence of such a revival at Palmyra in 1819-20. Else why suggest that the revival may have gone unrecorded, or that they had an unusual excitement, but the multitudes joined beyond this area, or why minimize any evidence which might preclude an 1820 revival at Palmyra? Dr. Bushman dismisses the Methodist membership figures because they take in an entire circuit, involving at most a dozen small Methodist groups, clustered so as to be served by one circuit-riding preacher. However, he does not hesitate to appeal to the nationwide report of the Presbyterian Church which speaks of a year of "unprecedented mercy" with six of the areas of special grace being in New York — yet not one of the six is in western New York or anywhere near Palmyra. Again, he dismisses William Smith's statements because it is a late reminiscence of a boy of 9 (although he would have been about 14 if the revival occurred in 1824-25), while he appeals to an equally late reminiscence by a Mr. Sarsnett reporting a camp meeting near Vienna. This reminiscence, unlike that of William Smith, does not even give the date of the occurrence, but it is dated by the writer, Mr. Blakeslee, to the year 1820.

At another point Dr. Bushman infers from Rev. Abner Chase's statement ("for two or three years we saw no great awakenings") that prior to 1820 there was a great awakening, yet he objects to deducing anything from loss and gain figures for the Baptists in 1820 because such figures "are deceptive." While one might logically deduce an 1819 revival from Rev. Chase's report, actually this is ruled out by the fact that Mr. Chase was not even in that area prior to 1820 and he is merely making his concluding report of his own four-year term of office (1820-24). What Mr. Chase's report does imply is that the membership figures for the Ontario Circuit do correctly reflect a situation where no revival was occurring during the 1820-23 period, and these same figures show this situation prevailed also in 1819.

The Baptist figures, on the other hand, do provide a legitimate basis for meaningful deductions. The Ontario Baptist Association *Minutes* are extant for the entire period, except for the years 1820 and 1827. The 1821 report shows the Farmington (6 mi. s. of the Smiths) Congregation with no gains and 4 losses (2 by letter, 1 excluded, 1 death) and a total membership (as of Sept.) of 93. This means the membership stood at 97 in Sept. 1820, and compared to the Sept. 1819 total of 106 shows a net loss of 9 for the year

1820. No matter how great the gain may have been, the loss must exceed it by 9. Since the total number of losses in any year between 1816 and 1825 never exceeds 16, it seems most improbable that any "large additions" were made there in 1820. Furthermore, from the church's own records, extant through June 1819, we learn they added by baptism 20 (1 in Feb., 3-Mar., 3-Apr., 7-May, 6-June) of the 22 reported in the Sept. 1819 *Minutes*. This means that between July and September they added only 2 by profession and approached the year 1820 with no significant signs of a revival.

For the Palmyra Baptist Church (3 mi. n.w.) the local records are extant from 1813 on, and show 5 received by baptism (2-Dec., 1-Feb., 1-Apr., 1-July) from Sept. 1818 to Sept. 1819, and 6 received (1-Mar., 1-June, 4-Aug.) from Sept. 1819 to Sept. 1820. In fact, between June 1819 and June 1820, where one might expect the greatest increase if a revival had really occurred that touched Joseph in the spring of 1820, we find the Palmyra congregation with only 3 professions.

With regard to the Presbyterians, Dr. Bushman passes by the monumental history of Rev. James Hotchkin, whom Dr. Whitney Cross described as "a close and accurate observer" (*The Burned-Over District*, p. 13). Mr. Hotchkin lists no revival for the Palmyra church in 1819 or 1820; he wrote backed by Synod's official order for all churches to open their records to him and he carefully notes when such materials were unavailable. Instead Dr. Bushman only comments that the local records are now missing and the congregation failed to report to Presbytery in Feb. 1820. This is true but it does not mean Presbytery was ignorant of what was happening, for Canandaigua also failed to report yet Presbytery specifically noted it as a place with "prospects" of a revival. In addition, Lyons reported more professions (14) than did Phelps (10), yet Presbytery credited only Phelps with "prospects." This is because 10 of Lyons' 14 were received in May (with 3-July, 1-Aug.) and all prospects had clearly disappeared by Feb. 1820. Phelps, on the other hand, was just beginning to show hopeful signs (1-Aug., 7-Jan., 16-Apr.), but by the summer of 1820 the prospects here also diminished (5-Aug., 2-Nov.) and no further mention is made in the September Presbytery meeting. Presbytery was certainly keenly aware of the spiritual condition of all of its churches.

Dr. Bushman does contribute a most useful observation when he notes that Mr. Turner's testimony must have reference to the period prior to 1822. For one thing, it will establish that the Smiths' money-digging activities, of which Mr. Turner speaks in the same context, date considerably prior to his working for Josiah Stool and certainly cannot be attributed to anti-Mormon sentiment following 1827. It also shows that as late as 1822 Joseph was still associated with the Methodist Church, since this is the image Mr. Turner, "who knew the Smiths personally," carries away with him. Since the Methodists did not acquire their property in Palmyra "on the Vienna road" until July 7, 1821 (Deeds of Ontario Co., Bk G, 345) we may even be able to fix the lower limits of this camp meeting experience. This may have provided the one core of truth around which he later wove his various vision stories.

Furthermore, any telling of his story over the extended period in which he "continued" to affirm his vision, and any subsequent "great persecution which continued to increase . . . at the hands of all classes of men" must date after Turner has left Palmyra. In his position in the office of the local newspaper he could not have missed an item of this magnitude and interest. Unless we also attribute this to the over-activity of a 14-year-old's mind, or to "reshaping" done later to meet changing circumstances, any period of persecution must be moved to a time following 1822.

Even in his failures Dr. Bushman has helped to clarify the picture. We can see how extremely difficult it is to make Joseph's story fit an 1820 setting. It involves a reshaping that ignores the natural sense of his words, dismisses much of the evidence, minimizes distances between towns and injects conjectures in place of facts. Instead of a period of intense religious activity, one finds only less than two dozen joining the Manchester Baptist Church in the spring of 1819; a July 1-8, 1819 Methodist annual business meeting 15 miles away with conjectural week-end preaching; two dozen becoming Presbyterians 18 miles away in the winter and spring of 1820; and a possible Methodist camp meeting at Vienna in the latter half of 1820 or the first part of 1821 (the 654 figure was reported in the July 1821 Conference, the church year running from summer conference to summer conference). Beyond this one must look a considerable distance before anything religiously significant can be located. One need not present such a strained interpretation with the revival of 1824. All the factors are there, and there in just the magnitude in which both Smith and the Cowdery-Smith account describe them. I tried myself for a considerable length of time to establish an 1820 revival, but it was the stubbornness of the facts themselves that led me ultimately to abandon this position.