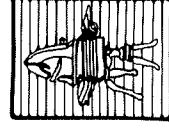


MY LIFE'S REVIEW
AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN JOHNSON



Grandin Book Company
Provo, 1997

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This edition of *My Life's Review* has been painstakingly proofed by the publisher to bring it into conformity with the original manuscript located in the archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Words, sentences, and paragraphs, including author errors, which were omitted from the 1947 edition, have been restored, thereby preserving the immediacy of the handwritten manuscript and adding richness and authenticity to this truly graphic record of early Mormon experience.

The marginalia throughout the book are the creation of the author not the publisher. Words enclosed in brackets have been supplied by the publisher.

Benjamin F. Johnson did not always fully identify the many people mentioned in his autobiography. Instead, he referred to them as "Mr. Bonnell" or "Mrs. Knights" or "Brother Davis" or "Sister Cosby" or "Dr. Carr" or "Captain Congers," etc. When referring to members of his immediate or extended family, Johnson often identified persons only by their relationship to someone else: "mother of my first wife" or "wife of my brother Joseph" or "my oldest daughter" or "my youngest wife" or "my namesake" or "my nephew, Joel F. and his mother," etc. Where identification is possible, complete names are supplied in the index. Therefore, readers should note that names of persons found in the index may in fact not appear in the text, only Johnson's reference (oblique at times) to those persons.

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revealed it to him but had commanded him to obey it; that he was required to take other wives; and that he wanted my Sister Almira for one of them, and wished me to see and talk to her upon the subject. If a thunderbolt had fallen at my feet I could hardly have been more shocked or amazed. He saw the struggle in my mind and went on to explain. But the shock was too great for me [to] comprehend anything, and in almost an agony of feeling I looked him square in the eye, and said while my heart gushed up before him, "Brother Joseph, this is all new to me; it may all be true, — you know, but I do not, to my education it is all wrong; but I am going, with the help of the Lord to do just what you say, with this promise to you — That if ever I know you do this to degrade my sister I will kill you, as the Lord lives." He looked at me, oh, so calmly, and said "Br. Benjamin, you will never see that day, but you shall see the day you will know it is true, and you will fulfill the law and greatly rejoice in it. And, he said, "At this morning's meeting, I will preach you a sermon that no one but you will understand. And furthermore, I will promise you that when you open your mouth to your sister, it shall be filled."

At the meeting he read the parable of the Talents, and showed plainly that to him that hath shall be given more, and from him that had but one should be taken that he seemed to have, and given to him who had ten. This, so far as I could understand, might relate to families, but to me there was a horror in the idea of speaking to my sister upon such a subject, the thought of which made me sick. But I had promised, and it must be done. I did not remember his words and have faith that light would come, — I only thought "How dark it all looks to me." But I must do it, and so told my sister I wished to see her in a room by herself, where I soon found her seated. I stood before her trembling, my knees shaking like Belteshazzar's, But I opened my mouth and my heart opened to the light of the Lord, my tongue was loosened and I was filled with the Holy Ghost. I preached a sermon that forever converted me and her also, to the principle, even though her

*I preached
to Almira.
Both She
and I
converted
to the law.*

heart was not yet won by the Prophet. And so I had great joy in my tribulation.

He had asked me to bring my sister to the city, which I did, where he saw her at my sister's, the widow Sherman, who had already been sealed to him by proxy. His brother Brigham said to me: "Now, Br. Benjamin, you know that Br. Brigham would not sanction this if it was not from the Lord. The Lord revealed this to Brother Joseph long ago, and he put a staff until the Angel of the Lord came to him with a drawn sword and told him that he would be slain if he did not go forth and fulfill this law." He told my sister to have no fears; and he there and then sealed my sister Almira to the Prophet. Soon after this he was at my house again, where he occupied my Sister Almira's room and bed, and also asked me for my youngest sister, Esther M. I told him she was promised in marriage to my wife's brother. He said "Well, let them marry, but it will all come right."

The orphan girl — Mary Ann Hale — that my mother had raised from a child, was now living with us, of nearly the same age as my sister, and I asked him if he would not like her, as well as Almira; he said "No, but she is for you. You keep her and take her for your wife and you will be blessed." This seemed like hurrying up my blessings pretty fast, but the spirit of it came upon me, and from that hour I thought of her as a wife that the Lord had given me.

In lighting him to bed one night he showed me his garments and explained that they were such as the Lord made for Adam from skins, and gave me such ideas pertaining to endowments as he thought proper. He told me Freemasonry, as at present, was the apostate endowments, as sectarian religion was the apostate religion.

At various times he alluded to marriage, among which, of marriage to sisters, of which I will not now write. In the evening he called me and my wife to come and sit down, for he wished to marry us according to the Law of the Lord. I thought it a joke, and said I should not marry my wife again,

*Almira
sealed to the
Prophet,
and Esther
asked for by
him.
M.A. Hale.*

unless she courted me, for I did it all the first time. He chided my levity, told me he was in earnest, and so it proved; for we stood up and were sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise.

This occurrence is referred to in the life of Joseph Smith as "Spending the evening in giving counsel to Br. Johnson and wife." At this time I knew that the Prophet had as his wives Louisa Beeman, Eliza R. Snow, Maria and Sarah Lawrence, Sisters Lyon and Dibble, one or two of Bp. Partridges daughters, and some of C. P. Lott's daughters, together with my own two sisters. And I also knew that Br. J. Bates nobles and others had plural wives, and that the Prophet had sealed to me my first and had given to me a second to be my wife. And I knew of other things in the Prophet's life and teaching that I will not now write, but I do so well remember his declarations in the meetings of the Saints, that the Lord had revealed to him principles that should he teach and practice them, those who were now his best friends would become his bitterest enemies.

And this was already becoming apparent, and the end of his labors in this life, with the hope of the rest prepared for the faithful was now beginning to fill his weary soul. On one occasion, at Macedonia, after he had preached to a large congregation through the day, and at evening meeting had blessed nineteen children, he said to me, "Let us go home." We went home, and I found my wife sitting with our first born still unblessed and said "See now what we have lost by our babe not being at meeting. Br. Joseph replied "You shall lose nothing, for I will bless him too," which he did; and then sitting back heavily in a big chair before the fire, and with a deep drawn breath said, "Oh! I am so tired - so tired that I often feel to long for my day of rest. For what has there been in this life but tribulation for me? From a boy I have been persecuted by my enemies, and now even my friends are beginning to join with them, to hate and persecute me! And why should I not wish for my time of rest?"

His words to me were ominous, and they brought a shadow as of death over my spirit, and I said "Oh Joseph! how

could you think of leaving us? How as a people could we do without you?" He saw my feelings were sorrowful and said sadly, "Bennie, if I was on the other side of the veil I could do many times more for my friends than I can do while [I] am with them here." But the iron had gone into my soul, and I felt that in his words there was a meaning that boded sorrow, and I could not forget them.

In the spring of 1843 I had commenced to erect a large brick residence, and when my sister came to be his wife, and as she lived with us, he wished to become part owner for her and so it was arranged, that I should draw on him for his share, or use proceeds of sales of Church property, all of which, though only verbal, was mutual between us.

About this time was organized his private council of Fifty, the embryo kingdom of God upon the earth - an organization distinct from the Church, a nucleus of popular government which will exist for all people "when the heathen are given for an inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth as a possession "to Him whose right it is to reign."; a government formed of representatives from every nation, principally of one tribe upon the earth; a government of God for the people and by the people, in which man will be taught to know his origin and to govern himself, which will continue through the millennial period as the outer wall or government around the inner temple of priesthood, until all are come to the knowledge of God.

By the Prophet Br. Babbitt and I were called to Nauvoo and made members of this Council at its organization; but of its full object, keys and by-laws I am not fully at liberty now to write, but the future will write up the past, when all will be made plain.

There is one thing in this connection of which I will make mention. It will be remembered that in 1843 one Miller, who had made calculations from Daniel and other prophets, predicted the Second Coming of Christ or end of the world, which was to be on I think, the 7th of May 1843; and great fears

*Plural wives.
The Prophet
weary, his
friends
deserting
him.*

*First Council
of Fifty
organized.
Miller's
prediction.*

1843

I was now called by the Council to rent and keep open the Nauvoo Mansion, late home of the Prophet, and commenced arrangements to leave Macedonia, feeling I should never return there for a home.

I was still indebted in St Louis for goods to the amount of \$250.⁰⁰ for which I was now being pressed, and to settle which I gave a deed for my new brick building, with all needed material for completion that had cost me even thousands, together with seven city lots lying together on which it stood – all for that paltry sum and then turned everything available in to pay rent and furnishings for the Mansion, to keep the Prophet's hotel to the credit of his name and his people.

From a broad and prosperous business and good circumstances, I was now only a renter, with everything available invested in the furnishing & supplying of a public house, while trouble was again beginning to rise. The temple was drawing near to completion. The Devil was mad, and his servants had already began driving the Saints in from the adjacent sections. I was now appointed one of the Captains of Fifty to organize a company to prepare co-operatively for a journey to the west, by constructing wagons, procuring teams and general outfit. Public travel was now cut off and all business profits with it, yet our expenses were nearly the same as the place must be kept open to receive county and state officials; as also people who came to inquire into the causes of our troubles.

Among these were Judge Stephen A. Douglass, James Arlington Bennett of New York, and others, together with military officers sent by the Governor from time to time. So instead of being profitable we were at great expense with small returns.

I organized an emigration company and started wagon making in the basement story of the large brick stable belonging to the Mansion; and our hands were at work, but some of them with an eye more to their own than to the Company's profit, which brought trouble and loss to me. The Temple was

*I rent
the Mansion.
Stephen A
Douglass.
Capt. of 50.*

now open for endowments and sealings, and about Dec. 1st 1845, a third wife – Miss Clarinda Gleason was sealed to me.

Here my real family troubles commenced. The third wife was much older than the second, and was of broad experience and capability. She was unwilling to be second to the younger, and was not satisfied with her proper place, and there was now discord in the family circle.

Rumors of murders were rife. Jacob Backenstos a man of sterling integrity for law and order was sheriff, and boarded at the Mansion, and by him or some of his posse Frank Worrel, one of the mob leaders, was killed, and it was said others were found dead and it was reported that murders were committed at the Mansion stables, – a suspicion prompted no doubt by our cooperative mechanics and laborers at work in and around the basement, there occupied as a wagon shop.

The mob spirit still prevailing, a posse was ordered from Carthage under military escort to explore the Mansion barn and stables for bodies of the dead, said to have been buried by the Mormons. They were soon convinced of the folly of their mission.

I now had three wives and three children, and all means left from the Macedonia Sacrifice had been expended in rent, furnishings, supplies and needed helps to keep the Mansion to its status of respectability; and the time was drawing nearer when the Presidency would cross the river. and for me there would be no safety should I remain. Pres^t Young asked my condition and I told him all He said I must go, and told Br. Hyrum Bostwick one of my company, a man of means, to help me to an outfit. But his means were his own, and the outfit came too slow to get in sight. We were now invited to come to the Temple for our 2nd anointing, but having the historic Coal Arlington Bennett as the city's guest, with his associates to entertain, we were obliged to forego at that time the great privilege and blessing.

*Marry
Clarinda
Gleason.
The mob
search the
stables*

1845