

live an utterly blameless life nor stand forth before his fellows a character perfect throughout. It would hold in constant remembrance that it had been given to the Christ alone to present to the world the one perfect character, and live the one sinless, and perfect life; and that the Christ was not merely man but was *super-man*; he was not only divine but Deity; and one great purpose of his earth-mission was to reveal Deity to the world, and hence, indeed, through him, "God was manifested in the flesh."<sup>24</sup>

It is but just also to the Prophet to say that he made no claim for himself of either impeccability or infallibility. "Where is the man that is free from vanity?" he asked on one occasion. "None ever was perfect but Jesus," he continued; "and why was he perfect? Because he was the Son of God, and had the fulness of the Spirit, and was greater than any man."<sup>25</sup>

Referring to this subject upon another occasion he said:

"I do not think there have been many good men on the earth since the days of Adam; but there was one good man, and his name was Jesus. Many persons think a prophet must be a great deal better than any one else. Suppose I would condescend—yes, I will call it condescend!—to be a great deal better than any one of you, I would be raised up to the highest heaven; and who should I have to accompany me?<sup>26</sup> I love that man better who swears a stream as long as my arm yet deals justice to his neighbors, and mercifully deals his substance to the poor, than the long, smooth-faced hypocrite. I do not want you to think that I am very righteous, for I am not."<sup>27</sup>

The sentence "many persons think a prophet must be a great deal better than anybody else," will bear further

24. *I Tim.* ii:6, marginal reading.

25. From a discourse at Nauvoo on the 6th of May, 1841. (*History of the Church*, Period I, vol. iv, pp. 358-360).

26. Of course this remark was in humorous vein, though humor is a quality quite generally, but erroneously, denied the Prophet. The above is closely akin to the remark he made to Josiah Quincy on the occasion of that gentleman's visit with him at Nauvoo. They had been discussing the concentration of power in the hands of the Prophet—by far too much power, in Mr. Quincy's view, to be entrusted to one man. "In your hands or that of any other person's," was the reply, "so much power would no doubt be dangerous. I am the only man in the world whom it would be safe to trust it with. Remember, I am a Prophet!" The last in a rich, comical aside, as if in recognition of the ridiculous sound they might have in the ears of a Gentile" (*Figures of the Past*, p. 397).

27. *History of the Church*, Period I, vol. v, p. 401.

consideration. President Smith relates that once when he was in conversation with a brother and sister from Michigan, who thought that "a prophet is always a prophet," he told them to the contrary. "But I told them," are his words, "that a prophet was only a prophet *when acting as such*."<sup>28</sup>

These two remarks linked together, disclaim for the Prophet impeccability; and limit his words and actions to which sanctity and inerrancy are to be attributed, to his official or *ex cathedra* actions and utterances.

Again in disclaiming perfection for himself, the Prophet said:

"Although I was called of my Heavenly Father to lay the foundation of this great work and kingdom in this dispensation, and testify of his revealed will to scattered Israel, I am subject to like passions as other men, like the prophets of olden times."<sup>29</sup>

Not only in these personal disclaimers of perfection, and of unusual sanctity or inerrancy may we see the admitted defects of deportment and character in the Prophet, but in the revelations he proclaimed are frequent reproofs of the Prophet. In these revelations he is never shielded, never justified when he steps aside from the path direct; reproof, chastisement, and warnings are administered to him. God in these revelations deals with him indeed as with a son whom he loves, if it be true—and we have warrant of holy writ that it is—that "God chasteneth whom he loveth, and scourgeth every son he receiveth."<sup>30</sup>

Because of these reproofs and corrections of the Prophet in the revelations, however, or because of the disclaimers of unusual sanctity made by himself, it must not be thought that there was any act of great unrighteousness, or deed outrageously wicked in his life; much less that any habit of sinfulness is here admitted. None of these things can be

28. *History of the Church, Period I, vol. v, p. 265.*

29. *History of the Church, Period I, vol. v, p. 516.*

30. *Heb. xii:6-8.* The reproofs and corrections of the Prophet from the revelations are collected and published in the Introduction of the *History of the Church, Period I, vol. v, pp. 36 and 37.*

successfully maintained against him. His defects, such as they were, may be gathered from the reproving revelations themselves, and from the facts set forth in this *History*.<sup>31</sup>

#### THE LIMITATIONS OF A PROPHET

In brief these may be set down as a disposition to be over persuaded by men, as against the strict requirements of the commandments of God; the dangerous weakness of too readily accepting men at their own valuation; a too implicit trust in their protestations of repentance when overtaken in their sins; a too great tenacity in friendship for men he had once taken into his confidence after they had been proven unworthy of that friendship, and by which taint of their sins, in hypercritical minds, attached somewhat to him; and, perhaps, a too fierce disposition to give way to reckless denunciation when once he really broke the ties of friendship—his anger was terrible, all agree upon that. There was also at times, perhaps, a too great inclination to levity, the intellectual playfulness natural to him not always remaining within proper bounds. It arose from the abounding fulness and perfection of physical life which so wonderfully sustained him in the trying ordeals of his career, and from his youthfulness. Men called him "Old Joe Smith," yet he was but a young man at the time of his death, thirty-eight years old—still a youth. Then it must be borne in mind that some things which the sectarian world had denominated as sin by their creeds, or their ethical systems, the Prophet did not recognize as sins at all. "What many people call sin," he remarked, on one occasion, "is not sin. I do many things to break down superstition, and I will break it down."<sup>32</sup> Again, in complaining of those who judged of his acts he said: "The only principle upon which they judge me is by comparing my acts with the foolish traditions of their fathers and the nonsensical teachings of hireling priests."<sup>33</sup>

31. See especially this *History*, ch. vii.

32. *History of the Church*, Period I, vol. iv, p. 445.

33. *Ibid*, vol. v, p. 517.