

GEORGE AND ANN QUAYLE CANNON

(Condensed from the Cannon Family Historical Treasury)

Following John Taylor's missionary efforts in England and the conversion of the Cannon family living in Liverpool, the spirit of gathering, so characteristic of all early-day converts, began to take possession of their souls. George Cannon wrote several letters to his sister, John Taylor's wife, Leonora Cannon Taylor, in Nauvoo. Several of these have been preserved. Of the conversion experience with John Taylor, he wrote: "I bless the Lord that I ever saw your husband's face, and I now see plainly that our dear mother's prayer has not only been answered for you, but has extended to me and my family through you.... I see the hand of the Lord so visible in all that has happened to me that I cannot help telling you of it.... I was happy in an affectionate wife, promising children, good health, plenty of work, and always a pound to spare – but still there was a want of something which made me feel very low-spirited at times. I strove to pray and to return due thanks for His mercies, particularly after some escape from danger of myself or family, ... but when Bro. Taylor came to Liverpool, and I was sincerely desirous to lead a new life, he had the words whereby I might be saved; and though slow of belief at first, and not seeing the necessity of baptism, yet God in His infinite mercy opened my eyes."

Later he wrote to her about his intention to emigrate, and asked many questions about needful preparations. He wrote, "If it is the Lord's will, I am ready to go any time; and I have as much money as will take us there, and perhaps a little to spare."

As this was two years before he actually embarked, and as George and Ann were now religiously saving more thriftily than ever, he had considerably more than a "little to spare" when he at length turned his back on the old country. The fact is, he paid the entire passage money for some of those who make the voyage with him, besides helping materially several others whose funds fell short of the full amount required. From only a few of these did he receive any written note or promise to pay, and probably all of these few obligations were found still unredeemed among his papers after his death.

Increasing anxiety to be on his way, now that he had made up his mind to emigrate, did not cause him to omit the making of all needful preparations for meeting the changed conditions in the new land to which his eyes were turned. More than two and a half years elapsed after the writing of the letter to Leonora before the brother and sister were privileged to clasp hands after their long separation.

Emigration from the interior of England had been and still was very heavy, in spite of the absence of any urging on the subject on the part of the Elders; and it was felt to be desirable that some resident stalwarts remain on hand at the port of sailing to give assistance and encouragement to their fellow religionists who halted there temporarily before going on board ship. This was an appeal to duty which could not pass unheeded by a couple as devout and hospitable as George and Ann Cannon.

After 1840, therefore, the family kept together in Liverpool, everybody earning money who could earn it, and everybody saving to the uttermost penny in augmentation of the comfortable store which had grown during the years. In this worthy endeavor the indomitable mother set the example, and she enforced it unceasingly. She was a good

provider never a morsel to waste. If one of the children squeamishly turned up his nose at times at the porridge or other wholesome nutriment set before him, she would quietly remove it to the pantry shelf with the remark, "Never mind, my son, you will eat it before it will eat you."

Immediately after their marriage, a mutual understanding had been reached with her husband whereby she was to manage the family funds. The husband knew, of course, the amount of his earnings, and he either estimated or she told him the sum required weekly for the usual living disbursements. From these figures he was enabled to know, almost as accurately as she did, how much it was possible to add week by week to their surplus. But in her zeal for economy she did more than this. Managing now and then to save still a little more from this or that expenditure, she found herself occasionally in possession of a few shillings of which he knew nothing, and of which he could have no suspicion, inasmuch as he had not noticed that in any way the home requisites and comforts had been diminished. These additional savings she decided to keep separate and apart from the joint savings account, not with any selfish or improper intent, but that she might be able without strain to meet any unexpected emergency, or perhaps afford her mate an agreeable surprise at some future time. Knowing his liberal and easy tendencies in affairs financial, she argued that if he did not know of this reserve, he could not be tempted to encroach upon it, or relax his efforts to carry on with the regular savings program.

She found it necessary to take her eldest son, George Q. Cannon, into her confidence. This she did, cautioning him to keep the knowledge to himself, and pointing out how important it was that his father particularly should be kept in ignorance of it, in order that the surprise of the unexpected revenues, when the time came to announce it, might be complete. For a time, he reveled silently in the secret entrusted to him, and dutifully carried the little surplus savings deposit to the institution chosen for its safekeeping. But once when a severe and well-deserved corporal punishment was about to be administered, something whispered to him that he had at hand a sure means of escape. "If you whip me," he impudently threatened, "I'll tell father about the savings account, and tell him how much there is of it!" Of course, the boy did not divulge their mutual secret, in fact had never thought of doing so—he loved his mother too much to be guilty of such betrayal.

This surplus savings account, when it came to be produced, had reached quite considerable proportions. The husband was not only astonished that it should have existed at all, he was fairly amazed at the sum total to which it had attained. We do not know the precise amount in pounds and shillings, but it was of sufficient to pay the entire cost of the voyage of the whole family to America and to assist many others.

The wish to get to Zion became with Ann a consuming desire. She could not reconcile herself to the thought of remaining longer so far away from the body of the Church to which the family had now consecrated themselves. With the advent of summer in 1842, she felt that to tarry longer would be unbearable.... She began to count the days that must elapse before the ship's sailing. She was impressed that if this season also should pass and find the family still in England, she would not be alive to urge the journey another year. And then what would become of her children? She feared that their father, brokenhearted by her death and overpowered by the entreaties of his relatives

and hers, would indefinitely defer his going — might indeed not go at all.... If she were destined to die before beholding the promised land, yet would she die content, knowing that he and they would reach their journey's end and join with the people with whom they belonged. It would then be too late to turn back, her children would be numbered among the Saints at home.

Ann had a sure premonition that she should not live to reach the shores of America, and hold her husband so. It grieved him beyond the power of expression, but it held no terrors for her. With every manifestation of endearment he tried to induce her to consent to further delay, to wait until another season. She refused absolutely.... The husband prayed for strength and guidance in choosing the proper course, and besought the Almighty that his own apprehensions and his beloved wife's might yet prove baseless and false. She prayed that her companion's heart might not fail, nor his resolution falter, and that her children might be preserved to come to Zion in health and peace and live to fulfill the glorious hopes she had for them. Both prayed, all prayed, that God's blessing would attend them in doing what they believed to be His will; and in this sanctifying spirit they turned their faces towards the setting sun and committed themselves to His care.

The summer waned into autumn. George gave up his employment, and the good ship *Sidney* lay in anchor in the river awaiting her passengers. A sturdy company of Latter-Day Saints, among them George and Ann Quayle Cannon, and their six children, prepared to go aboard.

George wrote: "All our friends know that we will bitterly repent leaving England and a constant employ. We can get nothing for our furniture — our friends who are so anxious about us will buy none of it, not even the clock or drawers which belonged to the family. My wife's brother did not come to see us off. Well, this show how deeply they have our happiness in view!"

"Saturday morning about nine o'clock, 17th of Sept., 1842, we hauled out of the Waterloo dock on board the ship *Sidney*.... On Sunday, the 18th, we all left Liverpool in good spirits, and nothing cause me so much regret as leaving so many of the Saints behind, anxious to go but without the means to do so.

"We are now launched on the bosom of the mighty deep, and seasickness has made the passengers for the most part very ill. My dear Ann is dreadfully affected with this nauseous sickness, perhaps more so on account of her pregnancy.... Yet I have never heard one complaint from her on her own account, but regret at not being able to assist me in the care of the children. Her stomach seems to have changed its functions, and this is the tenth day without anything passing through her.

"...Many years since, I dreamed a dream which time or circumstance has never been able entirely to remove. I was impressed with a conviction that my wife should die while in a state of pregnancy. This was before I thought of marrying. Many would think this proceeded from...superstition; but my dreams (those I mean which made a deep impression on my memory) have been fulfilled so plainly that I never could doubt but that God sent them for some good purpose. I have never seen my wife pregnant without this fear of her death, and always felt thankful to God in a twofold sense when

this critical time was past. She was aware of this feeling of mine, and it was a trial of our faith to cross the sea while she was in this state. But thoughts of undertaking the voyage in the spring when the weather was so cold, and with an infant of two or three months old, was in her estimation worse; and both of us feeling, while in England, that we were away from home and could not rest satisfied, although worldly circumstances favoured us, still our hearts were in Zion and with our children, however persecuted, calumniated and belied.

“While racking my mind and considering and devising what more I could do for my Ann — I had given her consecrated oil, castor oil, pills, salt water, etc., had the hands of the Elders laid on her, still she continued in the same state, and I feared that inflammation would take place. Leonora and David have had no sickness, and are less trouble than I expected; but George, Mary Alice, Anny and Angus have all been very sick, particularly George and Anny.

“Perhaps a more agreeable ship’s company, both of the Saints and seamen, never crossed the Atlantic. The Captain and officers are kind and humane men, and so far from disputes or hard feelings that the sailors say they never saw a family who agreed better; and they wonder

how a company of people who were many of them strangers to each other can bear and forbear in the manner they do. One of the sailors, an intelligent man, told me that he had been in the passenger line of shipping for years and never saw anything like it; in general the Captain kept his distance and did not allow of freedoms from the passengers; but here he allowed them every indulgence, took pleasure in having the children round him on the quarter-deck and would play with them as if they were his own. May the Lord bless him for his kindness!

“...During the whole of this time my dear Ann continues very ill and is still getting weaker.... My heart used to die or sink within me along with the breeze. ‘Are we far from New Orleans that I may get some grapes and wine?’ was my dear Ann’s constant inquiry, when I came down off deck, as she is too weak to be taken on deck herself. I endeavored to speak words of comfort to her, while I had no prospect of her ever seeing the land of Joseph in this life. Dear Ann, the next wine thou shalt get will be pure in the Kingdom of Heaven! She talked of her death as of a sleep, told me not to lament her, that if she lived to reach the Mississippi she must be buried on land, if not, the great deep must receive her poor body that is shrunk to a mere skeleton.

“I will not attempt to describe the night in particular which I have passed while watching by the side of one of the best wives that ever man was blest with — to see the grim tyrant approaching slowly but steadily to his victim; yet with all her sufferings no complaint ever escaped her, but the words, ‘Dear George, what am I to do?’ These words are never to be forgotten by me while I have memory. O God, how mysterious are Thy ways! Teach me resignation to Thy will!

“This morning, Friday 28th of October, she fell asleep without a sign, and in the performance of what she considered the commands of God, at half past four o’clock, and was buried in that element which needed no consecration, it never being cursed, in Lat. 24.37N, Long. 69.50 W, at five o’clock in the afternoon of the same day.”

“How soon our plans and prospects are changed! Although in expectation of bearing many things which are not of a pleasant nature – privation or poverty we agreed to share with the Saints, but we are tried in a more tender part, and were it not for our helpless children’s sake I should like to repose under the peaceful blue waters with her who shared my every joy and sorrow. Heavenly Father keep me from repining! But seeing other people enjoying the society of those they love, my heart sickens and I long to be at rest with my dear wife.”

After the trial of their voyage from England and travel from New Orleans up the Mississippi, the family then found it necessary to spend the winter of 1842-43 in St. Louis, owing to low water and difficulties of navigation at that late season. They made their way in April to Nauvoo with the boat’s first trip of the season. At the end of the seven months’ journey, upon arriving at the city of the Saints, they found a large crowd at the landing stage to give the boat’s passengers cordial greeting and bid them welcome. Mingling in this crowd was Joseph Smith the Prophet, whom our immigrant family were instantly able to identify, though of course they had never before seen him or even a portrait of him. But there was something about him – not that he was especially distinguished by figure or size or by apparel or aloofness – which seemed to single him out as particularly noticeable no matter how closely pressed on all sides by the accompanying throng; wherefore these travelers, according to the testimony of the eldest son, knew him at first sight. He met them with a warm handclasp and with kindly words of sympathy and blessing, for he had heard of them through his intimate friends John and Leonora Taylor, and was aware of their faithfulness and hospitality to the Elders in Liverpool, as well as of their bereavement on the sea. The meeting with their kinsfolk was happy and affectionate as such an occasion could not fail to be. Though the reunion recalled poignantly the great sorrow which they had suffered in the loss of the fond wife and mother, and though it opened afresh the fountains of their hardly suspended tears, yet was their gratitude unbounded and their joy full. If she whom every one of them loved more than life itself was not present in bodily form to share in their gladness, they almost felt that her adorable spirit hovered near and shed benignant and grateful approbation upon the blessed scene.”