

## AN OLIVE LEAF

## THAT PRINCIPLE OF GENEROSITY

By Joseph Smith Jr.

THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH spent the cold winter of 1838–39 in cramped, filthy quarters of the jail in Liberty, Missouri. On 4 April 1839, he wrote the following letter to his wife Emma detailing his desperation to see her and their children. Less than two weeks later, Joseph and the other prisoners would be allowed to escape. (From Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 2002): 463–65. Original spelling and punctuation have been retained, however, other grammatical markings have been removed.)



Liberty, Jail, Clay Co. Mo, April, 4th 1839.

Dear—and affectionate—wife.

Thursday night I set down just as the sun is going down, as we peak throw the greats of this lonesome prison, to write to you, that I may make known to you my situation. It is I believe now about five months and six days since I have been under the grimace, of a guard night and day, and within the walls grates and screeking iron dors, of a lonesome dark dirty prison. With immotions known only to God, do I write this letter, the contemplations, of the mind under these circumstances, defies the pen, or tounge, or Angels, to discribe, or paint, to the human being, who never experiance[d] what we experience. This night we expect; is the last night we shall try our weary Joints and bones on our dirty straw couches in these walls, let our case hereafter be as it may, as we expect to start to morrow, for Davis Co, for our trial. . . . My Dear Emma I think of you and the children continually, if I could tell you my tale, I think you would say it was altogether enough for once, to gratify the malice of hell that I have suffered. I want <to> see little Frederick, Joseph, Julia, and Alexander, Joana, and old major. And as to yourself if you want to know how much I want to see you, examine your feelings, how much you want to see me, and judge for <you[r]self>, I would gladly <walk> from here to you barefoot, and bareheaded and half naked, to see you and think it great pleasure, and never count it toil, but do not think I am babyish, for I do not feel so, I bare with fortitude all my oppression, so do those that are with me, not one of us have flinched yet, I want you <should> not let those little fellows, forgit me,

tell them Father loves them with a perfect love, and he is doing all he can to git away from the mob to come to them, do teach them all you can, that they may have good minds, be tender and kind to them, dont be fractious to them, but listen to their wants, tell them Father says they must be good children <and> mind their mother, My Dear Emma there is great respo[n]sibility resting upon you, in preserveing yourself in honor, and sobriety, before them, and teaching them right

things, to form their young and tender minds, that they begin in right paths, and not git contaminated when young, by seeing ungodly examples, I soppose you see the need of my council, and help, but <a> combinnation <of> things have conspired to place me where I am, and I know it <is> not my fault, and further if my voice and council, had been heeded I should not have been here, but I find no fault with you, attall I know nothing but what you have done the best you could, if there is any thing it is known to yourself, you must be your own Judge, on that subject: and if ether of us have done wrong it is, wise in us to repent of it, and for God sake, do not be so foolish as to y<i>eld to the flattery of the Devel, faslshoods, and vainty, in this hour of trouble, that our affections be drawn, away from the right objects, those preasious things, God has given us will rise up in Judgement against us if we do not mark well our steps, and ways. My heart has often been exceding sorrowful when I have thaught of these thing[s] for many considerations, one thing let [me adm]onish you by way of my duty, do not [be] self willed, neither harbor a spirit of revevenge: and again remember that he who is my enemy, is yours also, and never give up an old tried friend, who has waded through all manner of toil, for your sake, and throw him away becau[se] fools may tell <you> he <has> some faults; these thing[s] have accured to <me> [as] I have been writing, I do[n't] speak of <them> because you do not know them, but because I want to stir up your pure mind by way of remembrance: all feelings of diss[at]isfaction is far from my heart, I wish to act upon that principle of generosity, that will acqu<it> myself in the preasance of through the mercy of God. . . .

[Joseph Smith Jr.]