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Cover Page Footnote

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William Adee Whitehead

***Memorandum of Peregrinations by Land & Water.
Recorded for My Own Amusement. Vol. 2nd from July
1830 to May 1832 by W.A.W. [excerpt]***

[August 8 and 9, 1830]

Tourists generally arrange their route in such a way as to pass a Sunday at Lebanon, for the purpose of visiting the “Shakers,” within about 2 ½ miles of the Springs and witnessing their exercises. The morning after our arrival therefore, as it was Sunday, we procured seats in a Vehicle for the Shaker village. As they live in families of 70 or 80 the houses are all large and kept in the nicest order, both externally & internally, and so very clean are they kept that the most notable housewife in the country might blush to behold the difference between their several establishments & her own.

Their Church is a beautiful, large, white building, built of wood, the roof of which is an arch, to which the ceiling in the interior corresponds giving an air of lightness and extent which no other form would do. Some seats are arranged on one side, for the accommodation of visitors, leaving the body of the Church unencumbered by pews or ought that can impede them in the service; the congregation sitting upon benches that are removed as soon as they rise to commence.

The men were all in their shirt sleeves, with vests cut in the old fashion, coming half way down to their knees and stiff trousers, all their dresses being similar. The women had white dresses, short waisted & small sleeves, a white muslin handkerchief around their necks, a close white cap, a white handkerchief spread with the greatest precision over the arm, & high heeled shoes, a dress which in connection with their pale faces, gave them the appearance of so many corpses just risen from their graves, rather than living beings.

When all were ready, they arranged themselves in rows. The females & males opposite each other, with a space of two or three feet between the front ranks; a few words were then said by one of the Brethren, showing that “it was meet and necessary that the bodies of men should labour in praising God as well as their s[—];” when he had ended, a Hymn was sung

were in the way to be saved, and that if we persisted in the course we were pursuing, we would inevitably perish. When they had finished, another Hymn was sung and the exercise finished by the whole congregation perambulating the Church, in ranks one after the other in a kind of jog trot, swinging their hands to the music of the choristers before mentioned, who were stationed in the centre. There were 3 negroes among them and several boys some apparently not more than 6 or 8 years old.

On returning to the Springs, we were fortunate enough to find some vacancies at the "Hall," and we therefore transported ourselves thither as soon as possible to enjoy the delights of seeing & being seen.

Early the next morning, we took a hack and rode up the mountain about 2 ½ miles to what is called Prospect Hill; where there is an observatory from which you have a most extensive & beautiful view. The Hill is itself in Massachusetts, and parts of 4 states are to be seen. Massachusetts, New York, Vermont, and Connecticut. Unfortunately the morning was rather damp so that clouds hanging over the mountains to the Westward prevented our seeing the Hudson River, which in clear weather is plainly to be distinguished with the Catskill mountains beyond it.

Delighted with the richness & extent of the landscape we returned in time for Breakfast, after partaking of which a party was formed, for the purpose of visiting the Shakers again to inspect their domestic arrangements and inform ourselves more particularly as to some of their doctrines.

"This Society originated in England though the ministration of Ann Lee, who was born in Manchester in the year 1730. She began to preach the faith which forms the primary principles of this community about the year 1770. Her testimony was attended with remarkable manifestations of Divine light and power, and was embraced by a small number, among whom were William Lee, James Whittaker, and John Hocknell. These in connection with this distinguished female, became the first founders of the Society." In 1774, these came to New York. In 1776, they settled the town of Watervliet near Albany, in 1788 the first regular society was formed at New Lebanon which has been the pattern for all the societies & branches of this community in various parts of the U[nited] States; and numbers at present about 700. The faith and principles of the society are said to be these 7.

1. Abstinence from all carnal and sensual passions, and a strict life of Virgin purity, agreeable to the example of the Lord Jesus and the

- recommendation and example of the apostle Paul.
- 2 Abstinence from all party contentions and politics.
 - 3 Abstinence from all wars & bloodshed.
 4. Perfect justice & Honesty in all dealings.
 5. A faithful discharge of all just debts.
 6. For good to all men as far as possible.
 7. Agreeable to the example of the first Christian Church to support a common interest.

Persons joining the Society go through regular gradations, but before they can become fully members of it they must have all their temporal affairs settled, and their property & themselves dedicated to the service of God. A Ministry of four persons have all the guidance of the affairs of the community. A party of us getting into conversation with one of the Brethren, apparently a well informed man; he made us acquainted in answer to our questions with several of their doctrines & opinions; my memory may not serve me well enough to record their sentiments in respect to all the points that were touched upon.

They believe that Jesus Christ was merely a man “like unto us,” but inspired and made a pattern for our guidance in the right path accounting for his being stiled [*sic*] the “Son of God” in this way; that he was made the heir of the qualities of the Father, and as the Son in all temporal matters is considered the inheritor, the title was conferred upon him by the apostles. As we are termed the “children of God” when we “follow after his commandments doing his will.”

As to the second manifestation of the divine spirit so generally looked for in the world, it is their belief that it has already taken place in the person of Ann Lee; “who made her appearance not “with clouds” in the usual acceptance of the word and as it is supposed the second appearing is to be; but in the manner St. Paul uses the word, with clouds of witnesses.” So said Br. Green and he even endeavored to convince his hearers that the “second coming” must necessarily be in a woman; but “that so lamely” that I do not recollect the arguments he made use of.

They base their doctrines relative to marriage upon the example set them by our Savior, who never married and the advice of St. Paul, and say they can prove their opinion correct, not from any one part of the Bible but from Genesis to Revelations. We had with us an Irish gentleman from Baltimore who asked how they could reconcile it to themselves, if our Savior was not an advocate for matrimony, why he should have attended

a wedding in “Canaan of Galilee”, and contributed to the entertainment of the guests by turning water to wine? As “Doctors differ” they would not acknowledge that it went to prove anything and said they thought, “it no more proved he advocated marriage than it did that he advocated drunkenness.”

In reply to a question of mine as to their opinions of a future state of rewards & punishments; the gentleman with whom we were conversing said they believed in such a state but differently from the world. When we die, according to their doctrine, no matter what may have been our manner of living, in this world: we all go to the world of Spirits, where the good & the bad form separate communities enjoying either heaven or hell as our hearts are more or less purified. And that the same offer that we have here “to repent & turn to a better mind,” is still held out to us; and should we be so unfortunate as to rank with the ungodly, it is not then too late to flee from them & join the community of the righteous; enjoying the bliss of heaven in their own bosoms; where alone is to be found either felicity or despair. They do not believe in any other heaven or hell. Their life in this world they believe to be a foretaste of heaven, but when they drop the clog of the body and become ethereal spirits their happiness will be increased. They believe themselves to be perfectly the followers of Christ in every respect. “Even as he was so are they” “saving that they are not endowed with divine inspiration.”

We visited several of their houses, dairys &c. Every thing was excessively clean & neat, and a Blacksmiths shop that we noticed was far more so than any kitchens I have seen. Even the anvil shone. They manufacture many little articles, which they sell to Visitors and their Garden Seeds taken to every part of the US for sale. Altogether, they are a most singular people, and while I pitied the delusion I believe them to be under, I could not but wonder at their appearing so perfectly convinced of its truth. They are very polite, treating visitors with the greatest attention and are very free in acquainting you with their doctrines.