

**“Is Not This of God?”**  
**An 1847 Proposal for Mormon Settlement**



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Davis Bitton

On 30 September 1847, Charles Root Dana, who had been sent on a fund raising mission to the East by Brigham Young, got off the train in Washington, D.C. For the next month he worked diligently in the capital city to enlist support for his fellow Mormons, asking for “Liberal donations commensurate with the suffering circumstances of an afflicted and oppressed people.” Newspaper editors cooperated by running several articles appealing for Help. Clergymen endorsed the campaign and participated in meetings. Most dramatically, perhaps, a group of young ladies organized a lavish tea party and enlisted the volunteer participation of the Marine Band and the Euterpean Minstrels, a popular musical group. We do not have accurate figures on the total amount collected from the Washington campaign, but Dana’s diary in the Church Archives gives a good idea of the strenuous efforts exerted.

If the Washington campaign was a success at least in arousing strong support from prominent individuals, it was largely due to a sympathetic friend Dana met the day after his arrival. This was General Duff Green, the father of Dana’s landlady and a figure of considerable reputation. Born in 1791, he was the right age for military service in the War of 1812, reaching the rank of captain. After the war he moved from Kentucky to Missouri, built up a large mercantile business, served as postmaster, speculated in land, established the first stagecoach line west of the Mississippi and entered the practice of law. He served in the Missouri legislature and became a brigadier general of militia serving on the Indian frontier.

In 1823 Green purchased the *St. Louis Enquirer* and supported Andrew Jackson in the election of 1824. Then he moved to Washington, purchased the *United States Telegraph*, and continued to support Jackson. Not surprisingly, when Jackson was elected president in 1828, Green was rewarded. He was made printer to Congress and a member of the “Kitchen Cabinet.” Not a strict party man, Green fell out of favor in the 1830s, but he continued to publish his newspapers, and in 1840 he was appointed by President Tyler as unofficial representative to England. Regarded as a master trouble-shooter, Green was sent in 1844 as consul at Galveston, Texas. After the Mexican War he was agent of the United States in implementing the terms of the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

Through all of this Green was involved in private investment schemes of one kind or another, and he repeatedly urged government reforms. Sometimes the proposed government policies and the interests of the promoter were impossible to disentangle. After speculating in land in Missouri, he went on to promote American emigration to Texas and Santo Domingo. He bought and developed mineral lands in Virginia and Maryland and had a financial interest in the development of canals, harbors, and railroads. During the Civil War he operated iron works for the Confederacy but also used his good offices to promote peace discussions. After the war he wrote on a variety of subjects and tried to organize projects to assist in the reconstruction of the South. He died in 1875.

Duff Green's sympathetic assistance to the Mormon Charles Dana in 1847 thus meant the support of a man of many contacts, recognized as a "doer." As Dana wrote in his diary, "In a word all sects and parties are bound to listen to Genl Green."

On 2 November 1847, the day after Dana had left Washington to return to Philadelphia, Green wrote a brief note to the Mormon elder. "Yours of yesterday is received," he wrote.

I will hand it to Mr Reed who will submit it to the benevolent ladies who have exerted themselves to raise a fund for the relief of your suffering people. I sympathise with you & hope that you will find your family & friends in good health. Should your people send a deputation to Washington as I think they should do, it will give me pleasure to aid them as far as I can. I will send you papers containing your card. May God in Mercy preserve & bless you.

The "card" was Dana's statement of gratitude that was printed in Washington newspapers.

Of more interest than the letter was an accompanying memorandum, printed below, in which Green advocated Mormon settlement of Santo Domingo, one of several suggested places for settlement received by the Mormons from the 1840s to the 1870s—Vancouver Island, Texas, various places in Central America, Alaska, and even Japan being suggested at different times. Motives varied, of course, but at least in the case of Green's proposal there is clear evidence that the promoter had financial interest in his plan. It should probably be said, however, that Green, whole willing to benefit from any development that would take place on the island, was also anxious to aid the Mormons with his good offices. If both he and they benefited, so much the better.

Of particular interest is a passage in the memorandum stating that "there is no other place on the face of the habitable globe on which the persecuted Mormons could establish with any prospect of becoming an independent and sov[e]reign nation." Were the hopes of some Mormons for independence widely known? Was Dana privy to the discussions of the

Council of Fifty? We do not know, but it is interesting that a non-Mormon like Green would be so casually confident that the Mormons wanted to become an independent and sovereign nation.

### Memorandum for Mr. Dana

The Island of St. Domingo was first colonised by the Spaniards, and here Columbus was buried. The French made a settlement on the western part and occupied about one fourth of the Territory.

St. Domingo is 400 miles long and 200 miles wide in its widest part. The whole was for a time subject to the Hatian government, but the whites after a severe conflict obtained possession of the Spanish part being about three fourths of the whole Island, and having adopted a written constitution are now seeking to obtain from other nations a recognition of their Independence. With this view they sent agents to the United States and to Europe.

The peculiar relations between Great Britain[,] France & Spain and their possessions in the West Indies prevent either of them from giving their sanction to a measure which would convert what was a colony of Spain into an independent government. Not so the United States. They have sent agents to enquire into the condition of the new government whose reports represent the whites as capable of maintaining themselves [and state] that their Constitution is framed on the same fundamental principles as ours, with the exception that the Roman is made the Religion of State with toleration to other sects.

The population in 1798 was 115,000 whites & 10,000 slaves. War has since diminished their numbers. The Original Indian tribes are extinct. It follows that if the "*Latter-day Saints*" remove in a body their present number would give them a great influence and very soon enable them to alter the government to meet their own views. When we see what our armies are doing in Mexico we may anticipate what such a body of our people would do in the midst of a people similar in all respects to those of Mexico.

The country is mountainous, but has large savannas or Prairies, on which feed immense herds of wild horses, mules & horned cattle. The forests abound with hogs and other game, and the Rivers and Sea abound with almost every variety of fish. There is no frost, and the Earth gives two and three crops per annum, without regard to seasons, and a great variety of tropical fruits especially the guava, Pine apple, banana, and other fruits, which grow and ripen at all times of the year.

The Valleys on the Rivers & low lands on the coast are subject to fevers, but there are immense plains and valleys on the mountains fanned by constant breezes from the sea, remarkably healthy and capable of sustaining many millions of people.

The mountains abound with valuable timber—the Live Oak—Mahogany & Dye woods and also in mines of gold, silver, iron, copper, lead[,] zinc and other materials. The principal products now are sugar, coffee, cotton, tobacco[,] Indian Corn[,] potatoes & vegetables.

Why is it that God in his Providence has permitted this Island, second only to Cuba in extent, and, as all accounts agree greatly superior to it in soil[,] climate and resources, to remain for fifty years in a state of anarchy,

governed by ferocious and savage negroes? Why is it that at this moment he has enabled the whites to organise a government whose right to the country is not denied by any of the great powers of Christendom, but which, being surrounded by other Islands, subject to European governments those governments hesitate to acknowledge their independence fearing the influence it may have on their own colonies? Do you not see that thus situated the Dominican government will seek to recruit their numbers and encourage colonisation? Do you see that being but few in numbers the present population have paved the way for your people to occupy the country? There is no other place on the face of the habitable globe on which the persecuted Mormons could establish with any prospect of becoming an independent and sov[e]reign nation. Here they may establish themselves in the mountains. Here they may grow and become a great people. Here they may raise their standard and invite all nations to unite with them in building up the Messiah's Kingdom. Is this not of God?

St. Domingo is on the route by which all ships going from any part in Europe to the Gulf must pass. Your people can go there from Norfolk, New York, Philadelphia or New Orleans in eight or ten days and at an expense not exceeding from five to ten dollars. The means of subsistence and of Individual wealth are greater than you can find in any other part of the habitable globe. And the writer of this has under his control a large tract of land containing valuable copper mines, and can as he believes obtain a most advantageous contract for colonisation under which the whole or any part of your people can remove.

Aware of the prejudice that exists against your people as a body it is indispensable that all the arrangements should be made before an intimation goes to the public that they contemplate such a removal and then it would be better for a small colony should be first formed as the nucleus on which the whole may hereafter concentrate.

Your principal settlement should be in the mountains remote from the sea, and central to the whole Island to be hereafter connected with the coast by rail ways. Should your people propose to remove there, they should first send some persons in whom they have confidence to confer fully with the writer of this, and in case that conference is satisfactory he would go with them to explore the country and make a contract of colonisation and introduce and sustain them in all their rights and privileges. Thus you would avoid all the suspicion and jealousy which would attach to a deputation from your own body, because he has been for some time in negotiation for [a] colonisation contract with a view to work large and extensive copper mines on the Island.

Whatever is done should be done without delay and it is necessary that there should be great caution and discretion.

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