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1810

**Remarkable occurrences lately discovered among the people called Shakers;: Of a treasonous and barbarous nature, or Shakerism developed**

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*Shakerism, By James Smith*

PAM. I

REMARKABLE OCCURRENCES

LATELY DISCOVERED AMONG THE PEOPLE CALLED

SHAKERS,

*Shakerism* OF A

Treasonous and Barbarous Nature;

*Shakerism* OR *Shakerism* By James Smith

SHAKERISM DEVELOPED.

*By James Smith*

BY JAMES SMITH.

*By James Smith*

And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter; should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?

To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is, because there is no light in them.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM MOORE, CARTHAGE, (TEN.)

1810.

*James Smith*  
*James Smith*

*James Smith*

of Mobile County  
No. Jefferson

James Madison

Albert Gallatin

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W. Johnston

Part. 1.

AN ATTEMPT  
 To Develope Shakerism.

ABOUT five years ago, three Shakers, viz. Issacher Baits, John Mitcham, and Benjamin Young, came to Kentucky, where I then resided, but was abroad in the state of Tennessee. On my return to my son James Smith's in Kentucky, where I had my home, I found he had joined the Shakers. I knew very little about them, but soon after they having collected a party on Turtle-creek, in the state of Ohio, I asked the above mentioned Baits, if I might go and live with them for some time, to see what sort of people they were—to which he agreed. I accordingly went; and from that time to the present, I have diligently endeavoured to find them out, (which is truly difficult,) and I think I have succeeded in a good degree.

They artfully and insidiously conceal their real views and principles, from those whom they wish to proselyte to their scheme. The main thing necessary to stop the progress of Shakerism, is for mankind to know what it is. I shall therefore endeavor plainly to relate what I have discovered, and as I intend principally to confine myself to matters of fact, I hold myself in readiness to prove the truth of what I shall assert, if required.

I shall first give some account of the Shakers' faith, and secondly, of their practice.

For the Shakers  
 For the Shakers

## SHAKERISM.

who have been a considerable time with the Shakers, and have left them, which may afford farther light respecting the Shaker's faith, and also give some idea of their practice, which is the second thing I proposed. As the persons appear to be ashamed of having been Shakers, I shall not insert their names.

On March 13, 1810, I called on one who had been three years with the Shakers. He said he had formerly been a member of the Methodist society, and was then happy in the enjoyment of vital religion; but was not so while with the Shakers. Moreover that the arbitrary authority and hard usage exercised over the working hands was intolerable. He also added that it is easy joining the Shakers, but hard to get free from them. The same evening I had an interview with three others, who were all together; one of whom had been eighteen months, another near two years, the other three years with the Shakers. They say the only use the Shakers make of the Bible is to gain proselytes. That, as to themselves they view it in the same light as an old Almanac--that what is spoken or dictated by Elder David must be received as the word of God; and (as he is esteemed infallible) implicit faith and obedience must be given to all his precepts. This they call believing and obeying God. These men say that in general their education of children is chiefly a pretence, that their principal leaders only are well educated. They do not approve of those of a lower rank reading

considerable time with the Shakers, which may afford far more than the Shaker's faith, and also their practice, which is the same as the Methodist. As the persons appear to have been Shakers, I shall not

In 1810, I called on one who had been with the Shakers. He said he had been a member of the Methodist Church, and then happy in the enjoyment of it, but it was not so while with the Shakers, that the arbitrary authority exercised over the working people was so terrible. He also added that it is not so with the Shakers, but hard to get free of the same evering. I had an interview with others, who were all together; I had been eighteen months, another had been three years with the Shakers, and they say the only use the Shakers make of the Bible is to gain proselytes. That, they view it in the same light as the Methodists, that what is spoken or dictated must be received as the word of God, and is esteemed infallible. Implicit obedience must be given to all his precepts, they call believing and obeying. They say that in general their education is chiefly a pretence, that their members are only well educated. They say that those of a lower rank reading

any books; they are taken from school as soon as they are fit for other business.

Elder David has overseers appointed over the different societies, called families, throughout the state of Ohio, Kentucky and the Indiana Territory. The overseers provide for the labourers common diet and apparel, and what they earn more than is sufficient for that purpose, is given up to Elder David to be disposed of among his council or as he sees fit--this they call giving up the money to God.

They whip their labourers or underlings severely, and also their children or young people if they refuse to kneel or dance, or confess their sins, or otherwise transgress. Besides they have various modes of inflicting punishment. My informers say they saw them punish a little boy for taking a piece of a cake, without leave, in the manner following:--They made a circle on the floor about a foot in diameter, and compelled the boy to stand within the circle with his face upwards, from twelve o'clock till dark. The Shakers quarrel and fight among themselves, though they endeavor to conceal it from others.

Even when in their dance, which they esteem devotional, my informers say they have seen them strike each other with their elbows, and one to strike another with his fist so that the blood ran from his mouth and nose.

Elder David has taught the Shakers that when assaulted by the men of the world they may borrow their own spirit and beat them.

They further state, that the Shakers told them,



if they bore the cross and abstained from women for some time, they would become so holy that it would be no sin for them to have carnal knowledge with their own holy women. But that it would be wrong for them to have children, as it would be a bad example to the world and might prevent them in living in celibacy so as to become holy. The Shakers charged these men, when about to leave them, that they should not tell what they had seen or heard while they were with them, stating that they would certainly go to hell for leaving the faith; but if they told as above they would never get out, but must sink forever to the lowest hell.

They also say they believe many of the lower class feel sensibly their bondage and are tired of Shakerism, but are so infatuated, they are afraid of going to hell if they disbelieve or disobey. — They dare not converse privately with any one who is not a Shaker, or even each other. It is easy to put on the grievous yoke, but hard to get clear of it.

The substance of the foregoing account, I took in writing from those men, which being read to them, they all said it was fairly stated, the truth whereof they were willing to declare upon oath.

I shall here insert another circumstance respecting the man, first mentioned, which may serve to show something of the spirit and practice of the Shakers. When he left them he brought all his family with him except one daughter who was concealed from him. Some-

## SHAKERISM.

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## SHAKERISM.

5

time after, his son attended an assembly of the Shakers; and seeing his sister, (who was a minor) he took her by the hand to lead her away. The Shakers attempted to take her from him by violence, some spectators came to aid in bringing away the girl, when a violent struggle ensued between the two parties. They collared each other, tore each others' shirts, &c. The Shakers being most numerous prevailed; and afterwards prosecuted the other party at the civil law for a riot; in which they failed being the first aggressors.

Farther, to shew the practice of the Shakers, I shall mention some circumstances relative to my son James Smith. After joining the Shakers, he appeared to be divested of natural affection towards his wife Polly, and other connections; and appeared determined to sell his plantation in Kentucky, and remove to the Shakers on Turtle creek, which at length he did contrary to his wife's consent. Before he removed (which was in October last) he promised to Polly, if she would go with him he would not take her among the Shakers but would buy a place three miles from them. Upon these terms she consented to go, rather than be separated from her children. Notwithstanding this he took her directly among the Shakers. He had also promised that she should go to visit her friends, on Seven mile creek. Some time in February last, my stepson John Irvin went to see Polly, and she proposed coming with him on his return, to see her friends on Seven-mile, to which James at first consented,



and bridled a mare for her to ride. But I suppose instigated by the Shakers, he took the bridle off the mare's head and said if she went, it would be against his will. She told him she was only going on a visit, according to what he had before promised, and would soon return. John Irvin promised to bring her back in a few days or send some of her friends with her. Accordingly I and my stepson William Irvin went with her. On our arrival at Shaker-town we found that on the same day on which Polly started on her visit, James had advertised her in a public news-paper as follows:

TAKE NOTICE, that this day my wife Polly left my *house and board* without any just cause and contrary to my mind; I therefore forewarn all persons from trading with her, or harbouring her, as I am determined not to pay the debts she may contract.

JAMES SMITH.

*Turtle-creek, Warren county,*  
*state of Ohio, Feb. 24th, 1810.* }

The next day after Wm. Irvin and I arrived with Polly at Turtle-creek, being on Monday March 5th, we applied to James, to know what he would do for her, he had to consult the Shakers, and nothing could be done but by the direction of David Durrow. Finally the conclusion and answer signified, that whereas Polly had eloped contrary to the mind of James, nothing could be done for her; unless she would confess her sins to them and receive their testimony; to which she replied, she would rather suffer death.

## SHAKERISM.

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## SHAKERISM.

11

She then asked of James the privilege of seeing  
 her children. He told her where they were, and  
 said she might go and see them, but refused to  
 go with her. Wm. Irvin and I went with her to  
 the house where the children were, and asked to  
 see them. We were told by John Woods, and  
 Malcon Worley that James had committed the  
 children to their care, and she should not see  
 them. We used entreaties and finally threatened  
 Woods and Worley with the civil law but all in  
 vain.

That night we retired into the country, the  
 tender mother in deep distress, bereft of her chil-  
 dren, not knowing whether she ever would see  
 them again. Tuesday, March 6th, we returned  
 to Shaker-town, to try again, if by any means  
 Polly could be admitted to see her children.—  
 A short interview was granted on condition that  
 she must not converse with her children except in  
 the presence of the Shakers. When she was a-  
 bout to take her leave of her children, her eldest  
 son laid hold on his dear Mamma, and wept bit-  
 terly. O! mournful scene! I there beheld the  
 tender child forcibly wrested by the iron hands  
 of a despotic Shaker, from the affectionate arms  
 of a weeping mother.—The feelings of my heart,  
 I cannot describe. My son before he received  
 the Shakers' testimony, was kind to me, and af-  
 fectionate to his wife, he received me into his  
 house, and gave me every reason to expect his  
 succour in my declining age. To see him not  
 only seduced from christianity, but divested of  
 the feelings of humanity, to see my kind daugh-

ter treated with savage barbarity, her heart rending sorrow, made a subject of mock and exultation, my dear grand children forced into despotic bondage, which tends to the ruin of both soul and body, was too much for human nature to bear. This is the fruits of Shakerism! James was naturally friendly; a dutiful son, a kind husband, and a tender father: He is now a dupe to those deceivers.

Before he left Kentucky, he frequently told me their chief elder David, was infallibly inspired and could do nothing wrong, and that he must implicitly believe and obey him; this he called believing and obeying God.

We again applied to James to know if he would do any thing for Polly: he told her privately she might go into a house which was on land which he had bought about a mile from Shaker town, and no one should dispossess or disturb her. He also gave her a part of the household furniture. Wednesday, March 7th, William Irvin started home. The same day the Shakers came to us, and proposed to give Polly one third part of all James possessed, provided we would sign an instrument of writing, which was false and illegal, implying that she had eloped.

Under this idea James said he rejected that he was now clear of a wife.

The same evening after this had passed, three Shakers came to said house and ordered Polly out immediately, under the idea that James had nothing, having given up all to God. But Mr. Bowman who had a lease of the place, came and

warned the Shakers  
ted Polly to stay

Tuesday, March 14th, I  
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## SHAKERISM.

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## SHAKERISM.

13

warned the Shakers off the plantation, and admit-  
ted Polly to stay in the house during his time.

Tuesday, March 13th, I and some others went  
again with Polly to see her children; we found  
her eldest son, about eight years of age, chop-  
ping in a clearing, his hands were very sore, and  
all his knuckles bleeding; when Polly com-  
plained of bad usage, John Woods said she ought  
to be thankful to them for the privilege of seeing  
her children, and ought not to talk so, that if he  
was in James's place, she should never see them  
again.

The Shakers are a hidden people, they say  
they are not of this world, and all others they call  
the *world*, and have no connection with them,  
only to buy or sell whatever they can, so as to  
make gain or to bring money into their treasury.  
Their leaders I believe, live in ease and luxury,  
and conceal their principal views from the lower  
class, who are slaves. One of the men above-  
mentioned who had left them told me, he believ-  
ed that Elder David stored up liquor for their  
own use, which was as far as possible concealed  
from the common people. He said that he saw  
Elder David's steward at one time buy several  
barrels of rum and wine, which were taken to his  
lodging.

Little can be known of Shakerism from their  
publications; M'Namar's pamphlet and a piece  
printed in an Almanac, give but a faint idea of  
it. Besides their language is so ambiguous, that  
no one who is unacquainted with their style can  
fully understand them. For instance, when they

mention *Christ*, they mean Anna Lee, or the unction or spirit in her. When they say in the piece called the Religious Register published in an Almanac, "The mission of Christ into the world, was to save his people from their sins, and before him, behind him, or at the side of him, there never was a soul saved, but in him," they deny the personality of Christ, what they mean is the unction or spirit, and that this unction or spirit is come the second time without sin unto salvation, into Anna Lee, and that those only who believe and obey this testimony can be saved.

When the Shakers first appeared in the Western country, they were covered with sheep's clothing, they pretended to be meek and inoffensive, that they would not violently resist nor seek redress at the civil law on any account, but in proportion to their increase in numbers, power and influence, the disguise is in some measure thrown off. I rejoice in the freedom of our American Constitutions, that all men are privileged to worship God according to the dictates of their own conscience. Yet I clearly see that this class of people under their protection are endeavouring to sap their foundation. They condemn all religion except their own as anti-christian; they also condemn all government both civil and ecclesiastical except their own.

Let Shakerism predominate, and it will extirpate Christianity, destroy marriage and also our present free government, and finally depopulate America. According to their scheme civil and ecclesiastical government are blended toge-

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## SHAKERISM.

*Christ*, they mean Anna Lee, or the spirit in her. When they say in the Religious Register published in 1806, "The mission of Christ into the world, to save his people from their sins, and to stand behind him, or at the side of him, when a soul was saved, but in him," they mean the personality of Christ, what they mean by the Holy Spirit, and that this unction or Holy Spirit came the second time without sin unto Anna Lee, and that those only who would obey this testimony can be saved.

The Shakers first appeared in the West-India, they were covered with sheep's clothing, they pretended to be meek and inoffensive, they would not violently resist nor seek to alter the civil law on any account, but in order to their increase in numbers, power and influence, the disguise is in some measure necessary. I rejoice in the freedom of our American constitutions, that all men are privileged to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience. Yet I clearly see that this class under their protection are endeavouring to overthrow their foundation. They condemn all other religions except their own as anti-christian; they condemn all government both civil and ecclesiastical except their own.

Shakerism predominate, and it will extirpate christianity, destroy marriage and also our civil government, and finally depopulate the earth.

According to their scheme civil and ecclesiastical government are blended together.

## SHAKERISM.

15

ther, theirs is a despotic monarchy.

The Pope, their chief, has the treasury in his own hand---money creates influence---theirs is a money making scheme. It may be thought the enlightened states of America is a sufficient security, but from the progress of Shakerism for a few years past, I think it is time for the friends of liberty and of mankind to bestir themselves. Popery had its beginning; the assumed infallibility of the Pope, was the source of his power and influence, which was arbitrarily exercised over all who believed in him, which is precisely the case with David Durrow. The supremacy of the Pope, prevailed until 10 kings and their people became subject to him. If American freemen are enlightened to know their rights and the value of their privileges, Tories have also increased in subtilty and artifice. I believe if all the infernal Spirits had united to invent a plan to destroy christianity and enslave mankind, Shakerism could not have been exceeded. Satan is transformed into an angel of light, and his ministers into ministers of righteousness. Holiness is their theme whilst they bind fetters on poor deceived souls, disturb the peace of families and society, violate marriage, which is an institution of God, the nearest, the happiest relation in social life.

Who would have thought that Shakerism could have succeeded as far as it has already done in our Western country? Soon after the arrival of the three first Shakers who came hither, some men of learning, talents and apparent piety, joined



ed them--it may be they were traitors in their  
before, and the more readily acceded to their  
treasonous scheme. All who join them of this  
description take the place of recruiting officers,  
who are actively employed in their master's ser-  
vice. They compass sea and land to make one  
proselyte, and he is ten fold more a slave to Pope  
David than they are, for they partake of David's  
benefice, and the proselyte becomes his slave.

They have a large party on Turtle-creek, ano-  
ther on Eagle-creek, both in the state of Ohio.  
Also a considerable number in Kentucky, and on  
the Wabash river. But admitting there is no  
general danger as to our government shall not  
the innocent be protected? Shall the children  
be torn from the mother's breast and subjected  
to servile bondage, and she be left without re-  
dress?

The Shakers teach their disciples, that it is a  
virtue to be without natural affection. If then  
under the influence of this doctrine, men become  
monsters, and abandon their wives, shall we suf-  
fer the mother to be robbed of her tender off-  
spring, by a father professedly destitute of pa-  
rental affection; and by him consigned to bon-  
dage? Here is a species of involuntary servitude.  
And the rights of conscience, are also violated.  
Children under the terror of the lash must kneel  
and dance to the Shakers' Idol Anna Lee. Thus  
the principles of servile subjection are to be in-  
grafted in them, that they may be wretched dupes  
and pests to society; and under the pretence of  
worshipping God, the root of civil and religion-

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erty is deeply wounded.

I do not conceive that the Shakers in general,  
who have come to mature age, are voluntary  
slaves, they have been artfully decoyed into it,  
by the promise of greater liberty, they are objects  
of pity, seduced, bewildered, and lost, under  
strong delusion, kept in bondage, by the fear of  
hell, or the terror of the whip.

It may be enquired, can the Legislature con-  
stitutionally interfere? I leave this question with  
politicians of the present day to answer. But I  
ask again, if a law can be past to prevent black  
and mulatto persons from residing in the state of  
Ohio, except they give bond with sufficient se-  
curity, because they have been degraded and  
unmanned by slavery, can we not touch a trea-  
sonous nest which is hatching and breeding  
among us?

I am an old man, my time of service in this  
world is near an end. I have fought for liberty  
in the American-revolution. I have in my weak  
manner been an advocate for it in conventions  
and legislative assemblies, and now when I  
see a snake in the grass or a poisonous worm  
gnawing at the root of the **TREE OF LIBER-**  
**TY**, shall I not at least cry-out, **TAKE CARE!!**

P. S. Since I wrote the preceding, I had an in-  
terview with two women, who had been three  
years with the Shakers; also with one of the  
aforesaid men. From these I received some ad-  
ditional information respecting the Shakers.  
From what is stated in this pamphlet, it may be

seen that all those who have left the Shakers agree in their testimony, and do not contradict each other. Yet, as the success of Shakerism depends entirely on secrecy, their leaders do every thing in their power to conceal their principal designs, not only from the world, but also from their own common people, therefore, some of those who have left the Shakers have made discoveries, which the others have not.

I lately conversed with that girl, already mentioned, whom the Shakers concealed from her father, after he left them. She is now about sixteen years of age, and was three years with the Shakers, inured to implicit faith and obedience. She says, that while her father was threatening the Shakers with the civil law, if they would not give her up, they took her before a civil Magistrate, and by their menaces compelled her to swear falsely, viz. That they had not concealed her, but that they had repeatedly told her to go to her father, and that she would not, but hid herself. It can easily be proved that they took her before a Magistrate, and that she did swear as above stated. But this does not corroborate with the Shakers' raising a riot, and taking her from her brother by violence before this, as before mentioned.

She also says, that when the Shakers saw that this scheme would not answer their purpose they fell upon another plan to keep her from her father, which was this: They told her she must be married to a young Shaker, and M'Namar was to perform the ceremony; that she must also

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be bedded with this man, otherwise it would not be a legal marriage; she replied, that this was contrary to what they had taught her, would she not go to hell if she did so; They said, that on this extraordinary case, it would be right; that they must use every means to subdue the devil, the world and the flesh and to support and increase the kingdom of God. She also said that she did not like the man, whom they were forcing her to marry, and rather than be compelled to marry a man she did not love, she made her escape and came to her father.

I also lately conversed with another woman, who had been three years with the Shakers. She says, that they hold it to be right to tell lies to the men of the world; that they ought to take every method in the compass of their power, to subdue the devil and the world and build up the kingdom of God; she also told me many other things, but in substance the same, as already mentioned as told by others.

One of the aforesaid men, whose testimony has been mentioned already, told me since, that he saw a considerable number of women in Elder David's lodging, drinking wine very freely. He then thought that this was the way his hard labour was going, and therefore left them.

I was lately conversing with a Shaker who demed that their leaders were living in luxury. It is generally granted, that they are learned, cunning, artful men. Can it be supposed that they have no design in forming such a wonderful money-making machine, without some way to lay

it out or to make use of it? The Shakers ridicule the Bishops of the church of England as mercenary creatures, or worldlings, who take so much for their preaching. If the bishops of the church of England, by receiving the tenth part of their peoples' labor can raise such immense sums of money, what must David Durrow raise now, and as Shakerism increases, who receives the whole of the labor of his subjects; and not only that, but also that they or their ancestors ever had made; for they must bring all with them, to be given up to Pope David and his cardinals with the additional benefit; that is, they have no children to maintain. Since they settled in the Western country, a Shaker-woman has rarely been seen to suckle a child; if they beget children, they put them out of the way, or by some means prevent propagation: because this would be an injury to their money-making plan. Can it be supposed that all their money is designed only for the support of their riding ministers, who deceitfully live low when they are travelling about making Proselytes? If the leading Shakers do not intend to live sumptuously on their money, they must have something worse in view; that is, collect a fund in order to raise and pay an army of Tories whenever an opportunity offers. I believe they have both these ends in view, and that the leading Shakers live in luxury in wine and women as far as their plan of secrecy will admit of.

The Shakers pay their fine rather than attend musters; they pretend it is against their con-

it out or to make use of it? The Shakers ridicule the Bishops of the church of England as mercenary creatures, or worldlings, who take so much for their preaching. If the bishops of the church of England, by receiving the tenth part of their peoples' labor can raise such immense sums of money, what must David Durrow raise now, and as Shakerism increases, who receives the whole of the labor of his subjects; and not only that, but also that they or their ancestors ever had made; for they must bring all with them, to be given up to Pope David and his cardinals with the additional benefit; that is, they have no children to maintain. Since they settled in the Western country, a Shaker-woman has rarely been seen to suckle a child; if they beget children, they put them out of the way, or by some means prevent propagation: because this would be an injury to their money-making plan. Can it be supposed that all their money is designed only for the support of their riding ministers, who deceitfully live low when they are travelling about making Proselytes? If the leading Shakers do not intend to live sumptuously on their money, they must have something worse in view; that is, collect a fund in order to raise and pay an army of Tories whenever an opportunity offers. I believe they have both these ends in view, and that the leading Shakers live in luxury in wine and women as far as their plan of secrecy will admit of.

The Shakers pay their fine rather than attend masters; they pretend it is against their con-

science to fight. I believe it is against their principles to lift arms, or to do any thing in favor of American liberty: it is evident that Elder David is a despot, that his subjects yield implicit obedience, and when he says *fight*, it may alter the case.

When they first came among us, they put on the appearance of a very humble sort of people, they would discourse delightfully with those they were endeavouring to proselyte to their scheme, on the beauty of holiness, and perfection; and would tell them without these, none could see the Kingdom of God, that they had done very well so far; but must go farther, that they could not be freed from sin in the dispensation they were now in; but if they would only confess their sins to them and receive their testimony; they should surely be saved from sin, and get fully into the Kingdom of God. They would express this in such terms as to make the proselytes believe that they should be immediately freed from sin, and they should receive heaven and perfect happiness as soon as they received their testimony; but afterwards, when the proselytes complained that they were not free from sin, according to their expectation, but were in greater bondage and distress than before; the Shakers would tell them that they are not to receive this happiness and deliverance immediately, that it must be procured by their own sufferings. This they state in such a way that their deliverance and happiness are always prospective.

They tell those who are fully under their yoke,



that they must suffer on till death. Their sufferings among the lower class, are chiefly hard labor and low living. It is a sentiment among the Shakers, that it is a sure symptom of a hypocrite to die in peace, or to rejoice in their last moments that the true christian must suffer until the last, and die in deep distress. The injury that Shakerism has done, or may yet do to religion, I leave for the Ministers of the gospel to enquire into; I speak of it as a political evil, under the pretext of divine worship. I appeal to my fellow-citizens, who live near the Shakers, if they do not know and believe a considerable part of what I have written to be true. Every one who believes the above statements and testimony, must see that Shakerism is in every respect destructive to mankind, to soul and body, church and state.

\*\*\* Since I published the piece on Shakerism in the public newspaper, I hear that a Shaker has positively and vehemently asserted that he will sue me at the civil law. But I fear that he dare not do it. I do not think they want Shakerism investigated; it cannot bear the light. If they would only proceed in this way, I apprehend the world would have a clearer discovery of the dangerous and treasonous nature of Shakerism, than by any thing contained in this pamphlet.

(THE END.)

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Archibald W. Overton

AW OVERTON Attorney at Law