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Introduction

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Introduction

I remember the telephone call well. Picking up the receiver, I heard my secretary's voice telling me of an incoming call. "Brother Walker," she said, "Grover Cleveland is on the phone and wants to speak with you."

In a way, that phone call began this book.

Of course, Grover Cleveland—the long-deceased President of the United States—was not on the telephone. My caller was actually Leonard J. Arrington, Church Historian at the time, and he was phoning in his usually cheery way to ask me to join his staff. At the time, I was working at the Salt Lake City headquarters of the Church Education System, helping to write curriculum. Leonard, who enjoyed a little of the cloak and dagger, used President Cleveland's name as a means to give privacy to our negotiation. My secretary, an able worker but not much of a historian, never broke the code. After several weeks of his entreaties, I finally joined his staff.

I was only a day or two on the job when Leonard gave me a proposition. "How would you like to write a biography of President Heber J. Grant?" he asked. "Look over the preliminary register of President Grant's papers and give me an idea of how long it will take."

Just beginning my career, I was hardly on scholarly speaking terms with President Grant. However, there were some things that I knew. I knew, for instance, that he had presided longer than any other Church president, except Brigham Young, whose thirty-year tenure exceeded President Grant's by just three years. So long was

President Grant's career and tenure, his life spanned Mormonism's second, third, and fourth generations, from 1856 to 1945. I also knew my Primary stories about President Grant's grit and persistence. Also, I could recall, as a six-year-old living in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, hearing the radio bulletin announcing his death. My mother said that this news was important, and I knew that it must be so. News about Latter-day Saints was an unusual in the mid-twentieth century in the American Midwest. I understood this fact even as a small boy.

Yet, beyond such incidental and skeletal things, I knew little about the man, though I understood the professional and religious opportunity that Leonard was giving me. Here was a chance to get acquainted with a major Church leader and to learn about Mormon history for more than two-thirds of the Church's existence. Following Leonard's instruction about examining the register, I glanced at its many pages and, hardly understanding the summit to be climbed, told him that the research could be managed in two years, with another year needed for writing. My rough estimate reflected no reality except my own desire and ambition.

The mountain proved to be a steep one. The Grant papers turned out to be monumentally large. Beginning with his call to preside over the Tooele Stake in western Utah at age twenty-three, President Grant kept a diary. It was a task he undertook with little relish but with steeled determination. He felt that journal keeping was a duty that he must answer. Readers of Grant's diaries will find in it many passages of complaint—no one, he thought, would possibly wish to read his record. On other occasions, he asked why should a busy man like himself, often juggling a half dozen Church or business projects, keep a journal? Yet day after day and month upon month, he carried on until his personal diary occupied more than sixty years of Church history, an achievement that hardly can be overstated. In scope and detail, Grant's diaries are one of the Church's great treasures.

He was as careful with his correspondence, which again bulked large. From his early twenties, he retained most letters sent to him, and, still more impressive, he retained copies of his own letters. On both accounts—incoming and outgoing letters—the volume of material was large because he enjoyed an active and full career. But a personal dimension also made his correspondence remarkable, too.

Voluble and people-interested, President Grant liked to talk to others, and in this case, liked writing to others—in fact, writing a *great deal* to others. His lifelong insomnia furthered the inclination. Unable to sleep but enjoying a good conversation, President Grant spent many nights “talking” his correspondence into the various recording devices he kept by his bedside, enough to keep a secretary scurrying. These nocturnal dictations have proven extraordinarily important to a historian and biographer. Often remarkably detailed, frank, and personal—they are almost a stream-of-consciousness—they aid in understanding Grant’s emotions, thoughts, and expectations and do much to reveal and revive his character. For once, a biography is able to get “inside” a character, beyond the usual, impenetrable shell that conceals most historical figures from view.

To be sure, the Grant collection was an embarrassment of riches, both in quality and in quantity. For a worker in the biographical trenches, they represent extraordinary effort. Tens of thousands of diary pages had to be read as well as hundreds of thousands of pages of correspondence, and these estimates did not include President Grant’s account books, the many pages of his published sermons, photographs, and miscellany. Indeed, the voluminous Grant collection requires almost two hundred archival boxes, occupying an estimated sea of almost one hundred linear feet of shelving. In addition to Grant’s collection, auxiliary collections had to be looked at, not to mention Grant’s extensive book collection (MSS 2853) housed in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University. When finished with all this research, my files bulged with more than ten thousand five-by-eight-inch note sheets.

So rich a collection of information before me, I moved step-by-step from my “hardly speaking acquaintance” with President Grant to an easy but respectful familiarity, and I must say, in this case, familiarity bred respect, not the opposite. I found my biographical subject to be “human” in the best sense of the term. Certainly there were frailties, but generally these were products of what I saw as compounded virtues. President Grant’s rush and enthusiasm sometimes left behind him a stormy torrent that required calming. Determined to push “good causes,” he sometimes bore down hard and demanded from others the same lofty standard of effort and giving that he held for himself. No intellectual, he seemed uncomfortable

with thoughts, ideas, distinctions, qualities manifest in his preaching: he was always more an exhorter than a teacher or explicator. Yet at the center of his person—President Grant would say, “in his heart of hearts”—he had a remarkable charity for a man of fluctuating but generally modest means. Rumors of his great wealth were largely the creation of his open-handedness. Could a man be so free with his means without an abundance, some asked? In fact, it was true, for his life answered the measure of his religion, that men and women must be judged by the abundance of their heart when dealing out their means. In this great criterion, he was exemplary.

To uncover the “Heber J. Grant story,” I resolved on a piecemeal, step-by-step strategy. I planned to write a series of articles—position papers as it were—from which a larger, perhaps several-volume biography could later be built. During the several years that I worked on the project, I wrote more than a dozen articles about the man and his times, mostly about his “early years.” Then, due to intervening circumstances at the Historical Department, I was required to put aside the biography and move to other publishing tasks.

Recently, I have looked back upon these early essays and wondered, pending my formal biography, whether they should be made accessible to a general reader in a single volume. Considering the idea, I realized these writings actually had about them a uniting theme. They were largely about the making of the man, described by a phrase used by President Grant himself at the time of his call into the Quorum of the Twelve. At the time, he was a scant twenty-five years old (no Apostle since has been younger). He was unseasoned and unsure of himself, something of which he was acutely aware. Musing on the theme, he wondered in correspondence to his boyhood chum and lifelong confidant, Richard W. Young, whether he had “the qualities that count.” However, “there is one thing that sustains me,” he told Young, “& that is the fact that all powers, of mind or body, come from God and that He is perfectly able & willing to qualify me for His work provided I am faithful in doing my part.”¹ That hope became a lifelong journey.

This book, then, is encompassed by its title. It is about “qualities that count,” how qualities were planted by his parents, friends, and early experiences; how qualities took root and grew in the course of business, family, and church service; and how qualities grew and

matured in the man who became the President of the Church. Some still may remember him: his ramrod-straight posture at the pulpit, his stentorian voice extending to the farther reaches of the Tabernacle, and the fundamental values that he taught. During his lifetime, detractors saw some of these qualities as old-fashioned in the New Deal world of change; however, at the beginning of the twenty-first century they appear traditional and time tested. Certainly, these qualities helped to navigate the Church through the troubled sea of economic bad times and world war. This book is about how these traits came to be.

The story opens with a discussion of President Grant's heritage, especially the story of the tutoring of that unusual widow, Rachel Grant—improvident, handicapped by a hearing loss, yet sunny in disposition and brimming with social and cultural values that her son would inherit and then later transmit in Church service to the twentieth century. The essays "Heber J. Grant's Years of Passage" and "Growing Up in Early Utah: The Wasatch Literary Association, 1874-1878" tell what it was like to be a boy and adolescent in post-pioneer Utah, and they suggest that, despite the family's relative poverty, Rachel and Heber were part of a growing social elite that not only changed Utah and Mormon society but provided young Grant a network of important contacts as he moved along in his career.

The next section introduces one of the tugs that conflicted Grant throughout his career. He came of age during America's "Golden Age of the Entrepreneur," and he was unmistakably drawn to the balance sheet and to business. This section displays President Grant's fascination with business and how he used his natural talent to save or aid Church credit in the depressed 1890s, particularly when he assumed the hero's role in the Panic of 1893 when Mormon finances stood at the brink of ruin.

The next section suggests a counterpoint. While Elder Grant loved business activity, Church leaders saw the young man's talent and spirit and wanted to enroll him in Church matters. The resulting tension is conveyed in the title: "Young Heber J. Grant and His Call to the Apostleship." While he enjoyed his ministry, there were also times when Grant wondered if his Church service was almost unnatural and unreasonable. How could it be that someone of his inborn

business relish and talent be taken from his element? Another essay in this section, dealing with his marriage to Emily Wells Grant during the anti-plural marriage crusade in the 1880s, shows Grant, the Apostle, through the prism of his family life during this difficult personal and Church era. Finally, the essay, "Heber J. Grant and the Succession Turmoil of 1887-1889," reveals the tension among Elder Grant's competing loyalties—business, church, and family—during an extraordinary episode in Church administrative history.

The last section of the book presents Elder Grant in the foliation of vigorous manhood, serving proselytizing missions to Japan and England.

Throughout, Elder Grant's traits march across the page. He is successively devoted, energetic, honest, and idealistic. He is also direct and outspoken, perhaps to a flaw. An enthusiast, he enjoys a campaign for a good cause. As he matures, he increasingly yields himself to Church activity and to the requirement and restraints placed upon him because of his calling. Whatever his earlier ambivalence between business and religion, in later years it seemed increasingly resolved, in part by events. He assumed Church leadership in 1918 precisely at the time when his gifts could best be used for his religion: Utah's economic downturn in the 1920s and the Great Depression of the 1930s.

In presenting this collection of essays, I have deleted some of the redundancies that inevitably occur in articles written for a variety of purposes, and my editors have also suggested occasional minor rephrasing for style and clarity. The articles have undergone minimal editing for uniformity of style, and in a handful of places, new information, which has become available since the essay was first published, has been inserted to bring the piece up to date. Nevertheless, the articles remain mainly as I first wrote them and contain my early views. One exception to this rule is the previously unpublished article dealing with Grant's role in the Woodruff succession. Written over a decade ago for presentation at a historical conference and then set aside to fallow, as this book took form I felt the need to smooth this story, although my original interpretation remains. This important but largely untold story was pivotal in Elder Grant's early experience—and the Church's as well—enforcing upon him the need for apostolic collegiality. Finally, this book also includes

“helps,” such as a family pedigree chart and numerous photographs not used during the first publication of the articles.

Any book is an unconscious recipient of favors, and this one is no exception. I am thankful to Leonard Arrington for asking me to undertake this task, to members of the large and friendly Heber J. Grant family who have indulged my requests for interviews and comment, and to the small phalanx of research assistants, past and present, who have aided me in so many ways. The staff of the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been unfailingly helpful, most recently by allowing me re-access to the Grant collection so that I might confirm the accuracy of more than six hundred citations. This last endeavor required the service of several people, including research assistants Benjamin Austin and James Lambert. Over the years, my colleagues at Brigham Young University’s Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History have read my Heber J. Grant essays and given me helpful comments. Richard L. Jensen remains unexcelled for his facility with a red pen; past and present directors of the institute, Ronald K. Esplin and Jill Mulvay Derr, have generously offered encouragement and assistance. However, as always, the usual and necessary disclaimer must be made: I alone am responsible for this book’s presentation and views.

In bringing the manuscript to publication, I have been particularly pleased to work with publication staff of Brigham Young University Press. Professor John W. Welch, Director of Publications for the Smith Institute and Editor in Chief of *BYU Studies*, lent his support; Heather Seferovich, managing editor of the Smith Institute Series, pushed the project along while at the same time allowing me to profit from her invaluable eye for precision, clarity, and grace in expression. Skilled editors are as rare. Kimberly Chen Pace, production editor for the Smith Institute, made the volume look attractive—inside and out—prepared the illustrations for the press, and even created the family tree (p.11) and the map (p.280). Stephen J. Fleming, having an available summer to help before continuing graduate study, played a key role in laying out the manuscript and selecting photographs. Marny K. Parkin compiled an index, itself an art form. Finally, the BYU Studies staff assisted with various editing duties and production assignments.

Qualities that Count is more than a title of a book or a description of President's Grant's qualities. The phrase of course is also a suggestion for proper living, and, as such, it is a reminder of a past when books were read for personal "growth" as well as for understanding a figure or an era. President Grant, we think, would be pleased with such a phrase, for it captures much of what he and his era were about.

Note

1. Heber J. Grant to Richard W. Young, November 16, 1882, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 5:62-63, Heber J. Grant Papers, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.