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Letters on Mormon Polygamy and Progeny

Eliza R. Snow and Martin Luther Holbrook, 1866–1869

Jill Mulvay Derr and Matthew J. Grow

Practically I should oppose polygamy of course, believing the one wife system the best,” Dr. Martin Luther Holbrook, editor of the *New York Herald of Health*, wrote to Eliza Roxcy Snow, the well-known Mormon “poetess,” in 1869. Nevertheless, Holbrook continued, “unless a cover for vice I have no objection to the experiment being made as you claim to be making it.” Holbrook, himself an advocate of radical health reforms, even stated, “As long as the practice is conscientiously maintained, it will lead to good.” The following previously unpublished 1866–1869 correspondence between Holbrook and Snow features two prominent Americans in a cordial discussion of Mormonism that crossed boundaries of belief, gender, and age. Snow in particular prized the exchange, as she copied into her journal three of her letters to Holbrook and one of his replies, the only personal correspondence she preserved there (fig. 1).¹

Snow’s letters display her gift for expression as well as the energetic defense of Mormon women and children under the system of plural marriage that characterized her leadership from 1868 until her death in 1887.

1. Eliza R. Snow, Journal, 1842–82, holograph, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. The location of the actual letters is unknown; the only record is Snow’s journal. This journal includes daily entries for 1842–44, when Snow resided in Nauvoo, Illinois, as well as drafts of Snow’s poetry and letters dated through 1882. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, ed., *The Personal Writings of Eliza Roxcy Snow* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1995), the most complete scholarly edition of Snow’s life sketch (1–45) and three diaries, includes only the 1842–44 entries from this journal (52–99), but not any later letters and poems. In reproducing the letters here, the original punctuation and spelling have been retained. Snow’s underlines are represented with *italics*.

Reply to Dr. M. L. Holbrook, N. Y.
 Dr. M. L. Holbrook, Dear Sir,
 Altho' your letter was unanticipated, it was
 no less welcome. I should have acknowledg'd its receipt before this, but
 for previous engagements and responsibilities, I must confess, I have not the
 best recollection of either yourself or your coat; but am happy to say I have
 an agreeable remembrance of your mother, and, as I frequently made coats,
 it is very probable I did myself the honor of making "the coat." Many
 eventful scenes of life have transpired since then, and it is no wonder that
 little circumstances of early youth have escaped my mind, yet I fondly
 cherish the memory of my friends, and am ever pleased to hear of them and
 their prosperity. I am thankful that you Sir, are engaged in so noble an
 enterprise as editor of the Herald of Health. I have not seen a No. of that
 Magazine, but judge from its heading, with the contents of the Rev. No.
 which you kindly sent me, that I should like it. I will enclose in this, the
 amt. of a year's subscription—Please forward as soon as convenient.
 The leading items in the heading of your Magazine, are portions of our
 practical faith, as a people, to which we attach much importance.
 The elevation and redemption, morally, and physically, of fallen
 human nature, and laying a foundation for the prolongation of life,
 are, with us, subjects of great moment. The object is at once grand and
 noble. Ignorance and neglect of the laws of life, resulting from a lack of
 knowledge of the value and design of this present state of existence, and its
 bearing on a future, are telling in results of corruption and depravity, not
 only in the lower ranks of life, but also in what is termed its upper walks—
 abridging the longevity allotted to man—cutting asunder the thread of life,
 by destroying its purity. This state of things is increasing to a fearful extent,
 and the energies of every philanthropist should be aroused and enlisted to
 arrest the deadly work. The latter-day Saints are alive to this great achievement.
 Human progress in the development of all the rational and noble
 faculties of man, physically, morally, mentally, and socially, is what we are
 striving and living for. ----- To ensure the accomplishment of

FIG. 1. A page from the journal of Eliza R. Snow, on which Snow copied the letter she sent to M. L. Holbrook on November 30, 1866. Eliza R. Snow, Journal, 1842–82, Church History Library, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

They also reflect her grasp of Mormon doctrine and errand as well as her interest in health matters. In addition, the correspondence suggests that some Americans involved in aspects of radical reform, such as Holbrook, took a much more nuanced and open view toward Mormonism than most of their contemporaries.²

2. George Francis Train, Thomas L. Kane, and Susan B. Anthony, for example, maintained sympathetic relationships with Latter-day Saints. See Davis Bitton,

Eliza R. Snow and Martin Luther Holbrook

In 1866, the thirty-five-year-old Holbrook initiated the correspondence with Snow, then sixty-two, by reminding her that three decades earlier, she had worked as a seamstress for his parents, Ralph and Margaret Laird Holbrook, in the small town of Mantua in Ohio's Western Reserve.³ Snow (1804–1887, fig. 2) was born in Massachusetts but raised in Mantua. Baptized a Latter-day Saint in 1835, Snow joined the Saints in Kirtland and then in their peregrinations to Missouri, Illinois, and Utah, and chronicled their saga in poetry and song. A plural wife of Joseph Smith and, following Smith's 1844 martyrdom, a plural wife of Brigham Young, she bore no children.⁴ In April 1868, Young commissioned sixty-four-year-old Snow (who retained her own name) to reestablish women's Relief Societies in all the wards or



FIG. 2. Eliza R. Snow. Church History Library, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

"George Francis Train and Brigham Young," *BYU Studies* 18, no. 3 (1978): 410–27; Matthew J. Grow, "*Liberty to the Downtrodden*": Thomas L. Kane, *Romantic Reformer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Joan Iversen, "The Mormon-Suffrage Relationship: Personal and Political Quandaries," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 11, no. 2–3 (1990): 8–16, reprinted in Carol Cornwall Madsen, ed., *Battle for the Ballot: Essays on Woman Suffrage in Utah, 1870–1896* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997), 150–72.

3. Holbrook might have seen one of Snow's jeremianic Civil War poems in the *New York Times* in 1862. The *Times* published several stanzas of Snow's "Response to 'Our Country's Call,'" by William Cullen Bryant, the unnamed correspondent labeling it "an index of the views of the more orthodox Mormons on the present National civil struggle." "Affairs in Utah," *New York Times*, January 20, 1862.

4. On Snow, see Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, "The Eliza Enigma: The Life and Legend of Eliza R. Snow," in *Essays on the American West, 1974–1975*, ed. Thomas G. Alexander (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 29–46, reprinted in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 11 (Spring 1978): 30–43; and Jill Mulvay Derr, "Form and Feeling in a Carefully Crafted Life: Eliza R. Snow's 'Poem of Poems,'" *Journal of Mormon History* 26 (Spring 2000): 1–39. Derr is writing a book-length biography.

local congregations in the Rocky Mountain area. The semi-autonomous Relief Society, which had functioned sporadically in the twenty-six years since its founding by Joseph Smith in 1842, furnished women official responsibilities within the Church organization. Young's assignment to Snow launched her twenty-year tenure as head of the women's organizations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, firmly established Relief Society as an ongoing part of the Church's organizational structure, and opened to Mormon women new opportunities for charitable service, economic enterprise, and personal and political expression.⁵ In addition, Snow was instrumental in establishing among the Latter-day Saints women-directed organizations for young women (1870) and children (1878).⁶

Holbrook (1831–1902) remained in Mantua until 1859, when he went to Cleveland to attend the Ohio Agricultural College and to work as associate editor of the *Ohio Farmer*.⁷ That year he purchased from his father, Ralph Holbrook, part of the Mantua farm that previously had belonged to Eliza Snow's father, a portion of the homestead she had known as a child. Martin Holbrook sold the land in 1860.⁸ In 1862–63, he studied at Boston under the

5. Emma Hale Smith, Joseph Smith's wife, was president of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo. Snow served as secretary and brought to Utah minutes of the Nauvoo meetings, the organization's "Constitution and law." See Jill Mulvay Derr, "The Lion and the Lioness: Brigham Young and Eliza R. Snow," *BYU Studies* 40, no. 2 (2001): 76–79, 82–84. On Relief Society, see generally Jill Mulvay Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

6. Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: General Board of the Y.L.M.I.A., 1911), gives November 28, 1869, as the founding date, but other documents, including "Resolutions, First Young Ladies Department of the Ladies' Co-operative Retrenchment Association," Salt Lake City, *Deseret News Weekly*, June 29, 1870, 249, suggest a founding date of May 27, 1870. On the founding of the organization for children, see Carol Cornwall Madsen and Susan Staker Oman, *Sisters and Little Saints: One Hundred Years of Primary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1979), chapter 1.

7. On Holbrook, see James Grant Wilson, ed., *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 7, supplement (New York: D. Appleton, 1900), 143; *Who Was Who in America. A Component Volume of "Who's Who in American History,"* vol. 1 (Chicago: A. N. Marquis, 1943), 576; and *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 12 (New York: James T. White, 1904), 334.

8. In 1847, Ralph Holbrook purchased 91 acres from Erastus Crocker, who had purchased the whole of the property from Alvirus Snow, the half brother of Eliza Snow's father Oliver, to whom it had been deeded in 1838. In 1859, Ralph Holbrook sold portions to his sons Martin and William, and in 1860, Martin sold his holdings to William. Deeds, Portage County, Ohio, 38:1, 47:553–54, 74:79–81, 76:261, cited in Nancy S. McPherson, "Research Report on the Residence of Oliver

tutelage of Dio Lewis, a leading advocate of physical education, a subject Holbrook subsequently introduced into Cleveland public schools.⁹ After his marriage at Mantua in 1864, he moved to New York, where he obtained a physician's license. In 1866, he began editing *The Herald of Health and Journal of Physical Culture*. Under Holbrook's editorship, *The Herald of Health* discussed a wide range of topics, from water cures and vegetarianism to progressive agriculture and prison reform. The journal encouraged the training of women doctors, advocated a healthy lifestyle complete with exercise and proper diet, and advertised everything from clothes wringers to graham crackers to home gymnasiums. Henry Ward Beecher, Horace Greeley, Phoebe and Alice Cary, and Theodore Tilton were some of the journal's most notable contributors.

Holbrook's interests were many and varied. Among his accomplishments, he worked as a professor of hygiene in the New York Medical College and Hospital for Women for fifteen years; he discovered, through microscopic work, "the terminations of the nerve of the livers and kidneys";¹⁰ he helped to introduce the first Turkish bath in the United States, which he managed from 1865 to 1887; and he patented a "muscle-beater" for exercise. He published several books on topics he discussed with Snow, including *Marriage and Parentage and the Sanitary and Physiological Laws for the Production of Children of Finer Health and Greater Ability*. His obituary in the *New York Times* called him "one of the best-known medical authors and editors in New York."¹¹

Trends in Medicine and Physical Culture

Holbrook's correspondence with Snow occurred at a time of transition of progressive medical thought within American culture. Letter 1, discussed in overview and printed in full below, demonstrates Snow's enthusiasm for what she saw as Mormonism's similarly progressive society.

By the time of the Civil War, both heroic medicine, with its reliance on bloodletting and purging, and the herbal-based Thomsonian botanic medicine, which had proved highly influential in early Mormonism, had

and Rosetta Snow Located in Mantua, Portage County, Ohio," Church History Museum, Salt Lake City, Utah, copy in Church History Library.

9. On Lewis, see Jack S. Blocker Jr., "Dioclesian Lewis," in *American National Biography*, ed. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 13:565–66. For the physical education movement, see Mabel Lee, *A History of Physical Education and Sports in the U.S.A.* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1983).

10. Wilson, *Appleton's Cyclopaedia*, 143.

11. "Dr. Martin Luther Holbrook," *New York Times*, August 13, 1902, 9.

been largely discredited.¹² The Civil War greatly expanded the role of government in medicine and trained legions of professional doctors, hospital managers, and nurses, which helped create a more favorable atmosphere for scientific medicine in the postbellum period. Even as medicine became more professionalized, however, the public continued to subscribe to a variety of medical approaches during the 1860s and 1870s.

During the post-Civil War period, Mormonism also shifted from its inclination toward Thomsonian medicine to tentatively accept more scientific remedies.¹³ For example, Brigham Young, who had often denounced professional doctors, gradually became more open to scientific medicine. In 1869, he even appointed a son of Willard Richards to be trained as a physician in an eastern medical school; Willard, who had served as Young's counselor, had been a Thomsonian doctor. Young then assigned another son of Richards to attend medical school in 1871 and finally sent his own nephew Seymour Young in 1872.¹⁴ Young also began to encourage women to train as doctors, suggesting the idea as early as 1867. Both Snow and Young intensified their call for women physicians in the early 1870s, and Young subsequently assigned a number of women to study at the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, including Romania Bunnell Pratt in 1873, Margaret Curtis Shipp in 1875, and Ellis Reynolds Shipp in 1876.¹⁵ Snow supported their work and simultaneously continued water treatments for herself, specifically cold water baths.¹⁶

12. For overviews of Mormonism and nineteenth-century medical practices, see Cecil O. Samuelson Jr., "Medical Practices," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:875; Lester E. Bush Jr., "The Mormon Tradition," in *Caring and Curing: Health and Medicine in Western Religious Traditions*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Darrel W. Amundsen (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 397–420.

13. Lester E. Bush Jr., *Health and Medicine among the Latter-day Saints: Science, Sense, and Scripture* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1993), 93–96; Leonard Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 367–68.

14. Robert T. Divett, *Medicine and the Mormons: An Introduction to the History of Latter-day Saint Health Care* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1981), 135–43; Linda P. Wilcox, "The Imperfect Science: Brigham Young on Medical Doctors," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 12 (Fall 1979): 34; Thomas W. Simpson, "Mormons Study 'Abroad': Brigham Young's Romance with American Higher Education, 1867–1877," *Church History* 76 (December 2007): 778–98.

15. Divett, *Medicine and the Mormons*, 161–62; Chris Rigby Arrington, "Pioneer Midwives," in *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah*, ed. Claudia L. Bushman (Cambridge, Mass.: Emmeline Press, 1976), 43–65.

16. Susa Young Gates described the "wooden tub of cold water" which stood in Snow's room in the Lion House where Snow, "breaking the ice-crust in the



FIG. 3. The Lion House, left, residence of some members of Brigham Young's family, including Eliza R. Snow. Church History Library, © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

Brigham Young viewed the physical culture movement favorably. His daughter, Susa Young Gates, suggested that her father possibly knew Dio Lewis when Young lived in New York as a young man and may have gained his ideas regarding the importance of "gymnastics and fresh air" from Lewis. In 1862, Young's son-in-law and business manager Hyrum Clawson obtained plans and specifications for a Dio Lewis gymnastics set, which was then built on a porch on the west side of the Lion House, the Young residence in Salt Lake City (fig. 3). Gates noted that the set, complete with "wooden steps or stools, trapeze, vaulting and climbing poles, wands, hoops, backboards, jumping ropes," made the Young children participants in "physical culture pioneering."¹⁷

Overview of Letter 1—Snow to Holbrook, November 30, 1866

As Snow indicated in her first letter to Holbrook (pages 157–59), many of the reforms praised by Holbrook and other physical culture advocates

winter for the purpose," bathed "every morning of her life." Snow had suffered from tuberculosis. "Life in the Lion House," 39, Susa Young Gates Collection, box 12, fd. 2, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.

17. Susa Young Gates, "How Brigham Young Brought Up His 56 Children," *Physical Culture* (February 1925): 29–31, 138–44; Susa Young Gates and Leah D. Widtsoe, *The Life Story of Brigham Young* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 349–50.

resonated with Mormons' optimism about human progress. Written in response to Holbrook's first letter, which is not extant, and to an issue of the *Herald of Health* that he also had sent, Snow introduced the main themes of their correspondence. Concurring with Holbrook's "faith in human progress," she affirmed the Mormon effort to develop "all the rational and noble facilities of man, physically, morally, mentally, and socially." Because the Latter-day Saints had "no particular established system of physical culture," Snow focused on the broader Mormon approach to elevating mankind. Implicitly criticizing Holbrook for "wasting [his] energies in trying to better the condition of man in a mixed mass," Snow provided the rationale for the Mormon doctrine of the gathering, which undergirded the Saints' efforts to improve humanity.¹⁸ By gathering believers in a place removed from the corruptions of the world, the Saints would be "cleansed and preserved in purity." She argued that the Saints' gathering would ultimately "benefit all the generations of man," whereas other reformers sought only to "benefit the condition of a portion of the community."

Snow related her second principal theme, the state of Mormon children within polygamy, to the gathering. She argued that Utah's unique polygamous culture, separated from the wickedness of the world, produced exceptional children, both physically and morally. She explained that the creation of a godly society required "a location on premises with a certain amount of control without which, the greatest talents and the most persevering efforts would accomplish but little." Rather than provide a lengthy defense of polygamy, as she had of the gathering, Snow sent Holbrook a copy of a recent discourse by Apostle Amasa Lyman, which presented the standard Latter-day Saint arguments for plural marriage.

The Publication of Snow's "Man Capable of Higher Developments"

Five months following Snow's letter of November 30, 1866, Holbrook published one of her poems, "Man Capable of Higher Developments," in the *Herald of Health* (fig. 4 and sidebar). The poem charted the potential progress of mankind from birth as mortals with "The germ of the Deity planted within" to immortal beings "Perfected in body, perfected in mind." The poem reads, in part:

18. For the Mormon doctrine of the gathering, see Ronald D. Dennis, "Gathering," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:536–37. More detailed discussions include William Mulder, "Mormonism's 'Gathering': An American Doctrine with a Difference," *Church History* 23 (September 1954): 248–64; and Gustive O. Larson, "The Mormon Gathering," in *Utah's History*, ed. Richard D. Poll and others (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 175–91.

[Man] may learn how to strengthen this life's feeble chain,
And redeem the longevity man should obtain—

.....
Though frail and imperfect, unlearn'd and unwise
We're endowed with capacities needful to rise
From our embryo state, onward, upward!— at length
To a fulness of knowledge, of wisdom and strength.¹⁹

It is unlikely that readers of the *Herald* would have found anything unfamiliar or objectionable in Snow's ten stanzas. Yet Latter-day Saints

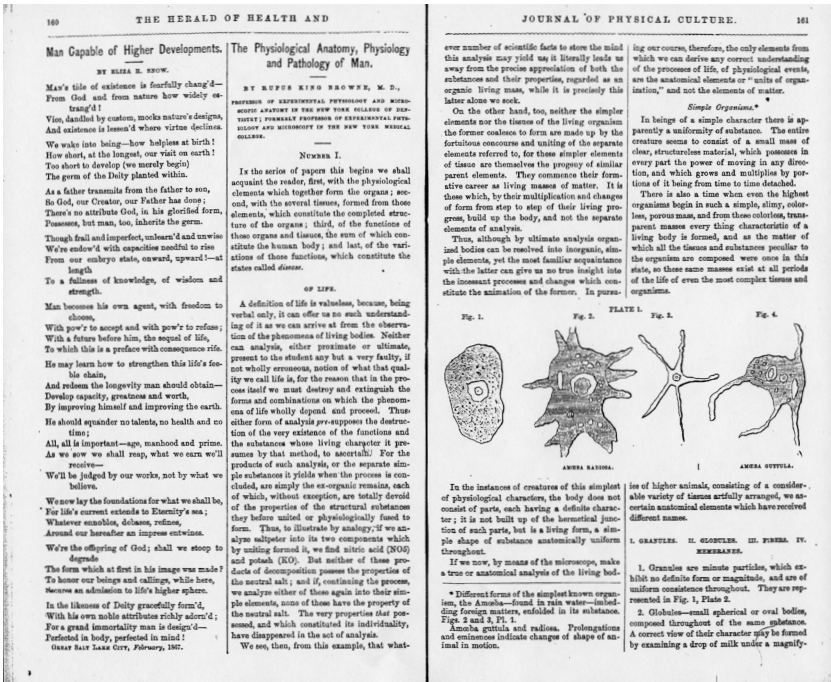


FIG. 4. *The Herald of Health and Journal of Physical Culture* 9 (April 1867): 160–61. Here M. L. Holbrook published a poem that Eliza R. Snow had sent him. The topic of the poem, the potential progress of mankind, was not out of place in this journal, which discussed social reforms as well as scientific discoveries.

19. Eliza R. Snow, “Man Capable of Higher Developments,” *The Herald of Health and Journal of Physical Culture* 9 (April 1867): 160; also in Eliza R. Snow, *Poems, Religious, Historical, and Political. Also Two Articles in Prose*, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Latter-day Saints’ Printing and Publishing Establishment, 1877), 101–3, and Jill Mulvay Derr and Karen Lynn Davidson, *Eliza R. Snow: The Complete Poetry* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009), poem 380.

Man Capable of Higher Developments.

By Eliza R. Snow

Man's tide of existence is fearfully chang'd—
From God and from nature how widely estrang'd!
Vice, dandled by custom, mocks nature's designs,
And existence is lessen'd where virtue declines.

We wake into being—how helpless at birth!
How short, at the longest, our visit on earth!
Too short to develop (we merely begin)
The germ of the Deity planted within.

As a father transmits from the father to son,
So God, our Creator, our Father has done;
There's no attribute God, in his glorified form,
Possesses, but man, too, inherits the germ.

Though frail and imperfect, unlearn'd and unwise
We're endow'd with capacities needful to rise
From our embryo state, onward, upward!—at length
To a fullness of knowledge, of wisdom and strength.

Man becomes his own agent, with freedom to choose,
With pow'r to accept and with pow'r to refuse;
With a future before him, the sequel of life,
To which this is a preface with consequence rife.

He may learn how to strengthen this life's feeble chain,
And redeem the longevity man should obtain—
Develop capacity, greatness and worth,
By improving himself and improving the earth.

He should squander no talents, no health and no time;
All, all is important—age, manhood and prime.
As we sow we shall reap, what we earn we'll receive—
We'll be judged by our works, not by what we believe.

We now lay the foundations for what we shall be,
 For life's current extends to Eternity's sea;
 Whatever ennobles, debases, refines,
 Around our hereafter an impress entwines.

We're the offspring of God; shall we stoop to degrade
 The form which at first in his image was made?
 To honor our beings and callings, while here,
 Secures an admission to life's higher sphere.

In the likeness of Deity gracefully form'd
 With his own noble attributes richly adorn'd;
 For a grand immortality man is design'd—
 Perfected in body, perfected in mind!

Great Salt Lake City, February, 1867.

reading the poem would identify it at once as a summary of their belief in eternal progression, the capacity of men and women to become as God, ultimately to be gods themselves.²⁰ Snow's poem dramatically illustrates that Mormons could readily discuss human progress with other reformers such as Holbrook, while drawing upon significantly different theological frameworks.

Overview of Letter 2—Snow to Holbrook, October 1869

Snow next wrote Holbrook in 1869 (pages 159–62). The intervening three years were a time of significant change for Snow and for the Church due to her April 1868 appointment to reorganize the women's Relief Societies in local wards. These organizations, which resembled in many respects popular benevolent societies, served as the base from which women developed and administered new programs for youth, reinforcing the work of Mormon Sunday Schools, which were revitalized in 1866–67. Relief Societies also succored the poor, supported the Church's emphasis on home industry

20. Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20. See Lisa Ramsey Adams, "Eternal Progression," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:465–66; and Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630–1875* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), chapter 6.

and economic self-sufficiency and, beginning in 1870, rallied women in defending plural marriage and opposing antipolygamy legislation.²¹

Snow's vigorous defense of Mormon children in her letters to Holbrook was a response to the virtually constant criticism aimed at Mormon child rearing. Since the early 1850s, visitors to Utah had regularly and negatively commented on the physical and mental state of Mormon children. Opponents of Mormonism presented the supposedly deplorable condition of children in Utah as clear evidence of the moral depravity of polygamy. Condemnation of Mormon child rearing was not universal, as some commentators, such as Sir Richard Burton and Elizabeth Wood Kane, portrayed Mormon children in a more positive light; however, Mormon children were more commonly depicted as intellectually weak, morally devious, and physically deformed, all as a result of polygamy.²²

Anna Elizabeth Dickinson (1842–1932), to whom Snow refers in her second letter, particularly censured Mormon child rearing in her popular lecture “Whited Sepulchres,” which she developed after a brief visit to Utah in June 1869. A Quaker and one of the most prominent orators on the national lyceum circuit between 1863 and 1875, Dickinson traveled widely in delivering her stirring lectures on issues ranging from women's rights to universal education to rights for former slaves.²³ In “Whited Sepulchres,” she characterized Salt Lake City as the “new Sodom,” claiming there were “no free schools, no general system of education, no libraries, no reading-rooms, no morality in the streets.” She commented that she had “heard of five out of six [children] dying,” and described the remaining children as “puny,

21. See Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, *Women of Covenant*, chapter 3, for an account of Snow's leadership, 1868–87. For Latter-day Saint women's defense of plural marriage, see Kathleen Marquis, “Diamond Cut Diamond: The Mormon Wife vs. the True Woman, 1840–1890,” in *Women in Spiritual and Communitarian Societies in the United States*, ed. Wendy E. Chmielewski, Louis J. Kern, and Marlyn Klee-Hartzell (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 169–81; Lola Van Wagenen, “In Their Own Behalf: The Politicization of Mormon Women and the 1870 Franchise,” *Dialogue* 24 (Winter 1991): 31–43, reprinted in Madsen, *Battle for the Ballot*, 60–73; Joan Iverson, *The Antipolygamy Controversy in U.S. Women's Movements, 1880–1925: A Debate on the American Home* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997).

22. See Lester E. Bush Jr., “Mormon ‘Physiology,’ 1850–1875,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 56 (1982): 218–37; Lester E. Bush Jr., “A Peculiar People: The Physiological Aspects of Mormonism, 1850–1875,” *Dialogue* 12 (Fall 1979): 61–83; and Davis Bitton, “Zion's Rowdies: Growing Up on the Mormon Frontier,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 50 (Spring 1982): 182–95.

23. Giraud Chester, *Embattled Maiden: The Life of Anna Dickinson* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1951), 100.

sunken, stunted animals.”²⁴ Brigham Young sarcastically responded, “Her researches in this community were immense. But let me tell you she is hired by some lackeys to lecture against ‘Mormonism’ and the ‘Mormons.’”²⁵ Like Dickinson, other opponents of Mormonism often asserted that Utah suffered from an unusually high infant mortality rate. In actuality, with the exception of the 1850 census, Utah regularly reported an infant mortality rate substantially lower than the national average.²⁶

Besides these health-based attacks, critics also described Mormon children as exceptionally ill-behaved. Ex-Mormon John Hyde declared in an 1857 book that “every visitor [to Salt Lake] proclaims them to be the most whisky-loving, tobacco-chewing, saucy and precocious children he ever saw.”²⁷ Mormon leaders themselves increasingly recognized that “the children of the promised day were all too often behaving like ordinary nuisance-loving children and at times like thugs and ruffians.”²⁸ The growing concern among Latter-day Saints for the rising generation coincided with a gradual and subtle change among the American middle class, which accepted childhood as a distinct and important stage of life and began to envision children not as economically beneficial, but as socially and morally valuable.²⁹ The organizational attention directed by Snow and other Mormon leaders toward children and youth in the late 1860s was a culmination of both the criticism from without and the growing realization from within that Zion’s youth needed more social and spiritual guidance.

24. “Anna E. Dickinson in Boston,” *The Revolution*, October 21, 1869, 241–42.

25. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 13:88 (January 2, 1870).

26. Bush, “Mormon ‘Physiology,’” 233. The Mormon Historical Demography Project, based on a data set of 1.2 million individuals, also concluded that late-nineteenth-century Utahns experienced rates of infant mortality which “compared favorably with the experience of other white populations [in] the United States at that time.” The demographers suggested that Mormon doctrine, which stressed the primacy of family, probably contributed to a lower infant mortality rate. Katherine A. Lynch, Geraldine P. Mineau, and Douglas L. Anderton, “Estimates of Infant Mortality on the Western Frontier: The Use of Genealogical Data,” *Historical Methods* 18 (Fall 1985): 161–62; Lee L. Bean, Ken R. Smith, Geraldine P. Mineau, Alison Fraser, and Diana Lane, “Infant Deaths in Utah, 1850–1939,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 70 (Spring 2002): 158–73.

27. John Hyde, *Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs* (New York, 1857), 77, quoted in Bitton, “Zion’s Rowdies,” 185.

28. Bitton, “Zion’s Rowdies,” 191.

29. Priscilla Ferguson Clement, *Growing Pains: Children in the Industrial Age, 1850–1890* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 38; Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 3–6, 209.

Snow evidenced her concern by regularly contributing didactic poetry and articles to the *Juvenile Instructor*, which began publication in Salt Lake City in 1866. In addition, six months after she penned the October 1869 letter to Holbrook, she began organizing retrenchment associations in which young women resolved to eschew worldly fashions and gradually, along with young Mormon men (1875), turned their efforts to “mutual improvement.”³⁰

Aside from the larger context of attacks on the Mormon family, Snow’s October 1869 letter to Holbrook was prompted by a “slip” (clipping) from the *New York Evening Post* Holbrook had sent her.³¹ The August 23, 1869, *Post* article read:

As might be expected, the mortality among Mormon children is frightful. The polygamists are like the old woman who lived in a shoe, and do not know what to do with their many children, at any rate they do not properly care for them.

Of sixty deaths in Salt Lake City in a month, forty-four were children. Heber Kimball is reported to have buried forty-eight children out of sixty-three in his collection; one bishop had lost twenty children; another, twenty-eight; another, seventeen. Joseph Smith had six wives, but left only two sons. The death rate among Mormons of all ages is said to be greater than that of this city or New Orleans, and more than twice as great as that of Oregon.³²

Snow replied to Holbrook by avouching Latter-day Saints’ unique understanding of “the worth of children” and by drawing upon her own information to refute the *New York Evening Post* critique and Dickinson’s attacks. For her, however, the practice of plural marriage could only be understood within the theological framework of Mormonism’s contemporary “revelations of God.” She concluded: “We have the Gospel of Jesus Christ as taught by Him and His apostles. The power of the gospel qualifies men to cooperate with God by which they can accomplish good for their fellow men that no others can. It has a Priesthood which confers an authority by which they bind on earth and it is bound in heaven and benefits not only the living but also the dead.” Thus Snow offered Holbrook the opportunity of perusing Orson Spencer’s *Letters*, a compilation of early

30. The impact of these organizations on the lives of Latter-day Saints is discussed by Ronald W. Walker, “‘Going to Meeting’ in Salt Lake City’s Thirteenth Ward, 1849–1881: A Microanalysis,” in *New Views of Mormon History*, ed. Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 138–61.

31. Holbrook had also recently featured the topic of infant mortality in the *Herald of Health*. See Mrs. M. A. Baines, “On the Prevention of Excessive Infant Mortality,” *Herald of Health and Journal of Physical Culture* 14 (July 1869): 1–7.

32. “Mortality among Mormons,” *New York Evening Post*, August 23, 1869.

missionary tracts by Spencer (a well-educated former Baptist minister), including a chapter defending plural marriage.

Public Debate Regarding Plural Marriage

The sympathetic conversation in the letters stands in striking contrast to the highly polemical debate surrounding the Latter-day Saint practice of plural marriage.³³ After a brief (and failed) plural marriage in the mid-1830s, Joseph Smith introduced plural marriage during the Saints' sojourn at Nauvoo, Illinois, during the early 1840s, though The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints did not officially acknowledge the practice until 1852. Orson Pratt, the eloquent Mormon Apostle who made the 1852 announcement at the Saints' first tabernacle in Salt Lake City, emerged as the leading defender of polygamy, and his systematic arguments, largely based on historical and biblical justifications, provided the rationale for almost all Mormon defenses of the practice. Latter-day Saints commonly contrasted Utah society under plural marriage with what they viewed as the pervasive prostitution, divorce, and general immorality of monogamous America.³⁴ In 1870, shortly after her correspondence with Holbrook, Eliza Snow and Mormon women entered the debate to speak forcefully for themselves. Their vigorous defense of polygamy surprised many

33. On Mormon plural marriage and society, see for example Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History* (Salt Lake City: Signature, Books, 1989); Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); B. Carmon Hardy, ed., *Doing the Works of Abraham: Mormon Polygamy, Its Origin, Practice, and Demise*, Kingdom in the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier, volume 9 (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark, 2007).

34. See, for example, David J. Whittaker, "The Bone in the Throat: Orson Pratt and the Public Announcement of Plural Marriage," *Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1987): 293–314; David J. Whittaker, "Early Mormon Polygamy Defenses," *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 43–63; Davis Bitton, "Polygamy Defended: One Side of a Nineteenth-Century Polemic," *The Ritualization of Mormon History and Other Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 34–53; Hardy, *Doing the Works of Abraham*, 86–90; Belinda Marden Pratt, *Defence of Polygamy: By a Lady of Utah in a Letter to Her Sister in New Hampshire* ([Salt Lake City, 1854]); and Breck England, *The Life and Thought of Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985), 241–46.

Americans who assumed that Mormon women were repressed, abused, and silently opposed to plural marriage.

American politicians, clergymen, jurists, and reporters countered these Mormon defenses by asserting that polygamy degraded women, produced misshapen children, and was unbiblical and immoral. The cartoon image of the Mormon harem became nearly ubiquitous in the national press.³⁵ The first antipolygamy federal legislation, the Morrill Act of 1862, made bigamy a criminal offense and invalidated Utah laws that supported polygamy. While the Morrill Act went generally unenforced, the political pressure intensified after the Civil War with a new round of proposed antipolygamy legislation. On both sides, a “zealous, polarized quality, an unyielding insistence on their exclusive moral rightness” generally characterized the debate regarding plural marriage.³⁶ Holbrook, however, was not alone in giving credence to the Mormon point of view, as a group of prominent observers—including Horace Greeley, Richard Burton, and Mark Twain—attempted “to establish a point of view on the ‘Mormon Question’ that was neither apologetic nor detracting but interactive and dialogic.”³⁷ Like Holbrook, they validated the role of the Mormon voice in the national dialogue about polygamy.

Letters 3 and 4—Holbrook to Snow, November 18, 1869, and Snow to Holbrook, December 2, 1869

Snow copied into her journal the letter Holbrook sent in response to her letter of October 1869, the only letter from him that she recorded (pages 162–63). The letter shows the physician to be friendly, polite, and tolerant. Snow must have derived some satisfaction from his skepticism about journalists’ depictions of Latter-day Saints and from his openness to the “experiment” of plural marriage. In addition, Holbrook praised the

35. For studies on the nineteenth-century Mormon image, see Terryl L. Givens, *Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jan Shippo, “From Satyr to Saint: American Perceptions of the Mormons, 1860–1960,” in *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); and Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Graphic Image, 1834–1914: Cartoons, Caricatures, and Illustrations* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983).

36. Gregory Pingree, “‘The Biggest Whorehouse in the World’: Representations of Plural Marriage in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Western Humanities Review* 50 (Fall 1996): 214.

37. Eric A. Eliason, “Curious Gentiles and Representational Authority in the City of the Saints,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 11 (Summer 2001): 156–57.

Mormon reputation for “temperance, sobriety, & industry,” virtues already attributed to the Latter-day Saints by friendly observers and which became the hallmark of Mormon image by the mid-twentieth century. He also mentioned the possibility of visiting Utah himself.

His liberal response brought an immediate reply from Snow (pages 163–64), wherein she reaffirmed the uniqueness and expansiveness of Mormon doctrine. While praising Holbrook and other “noble philanthropists,” she observed that despite the reformers’ efforts, “the streams of degeneracy and corruption are increasing.” Snow ended their correspondence with a characteristic appeal to Holbrook to join the divinely appointed labors of the Latter-day Saints in “renovating and regenerating the human family,” rather than “exercising [his] abilities in other channels.” She expressed her unwavering confidence that her own experience had confirmed that the Mormon social experiment was commanded by God. Snow testified that “no other people are doing so much to promote the happiness—to purify, elevate and redeem the human race,” guided by the gospel of Jesus Christ, his Apostles, and priesthood authority which “qualifies men to cooperate with God by which they can accomplish good for their fellow men that no others can.”

Falling Out of Touch

Nothing suggests that Snow and Holbrook ever met following their correspondence. She visited New York City in November 1872, but her letters do not reference a visit with him. In 1881, she sent Holbrook a volume of her poetry and money to renew her subscription to the *Herald of Health*, which Zina Diantha Huntington Young—Eliza’s close friend, sister-wife, counselor, and successor as Relief Society president—personally delivered while in New York City.³⁸ Likewise, while it is unclear whether Holbrook ever fulfilled his wish to visit Utah, he wrote a letter of introduction for a fellow physician traveling to Utah in 1875.³⁹ Holbrook did not feature in the *Herald of Health* any discussion of polygamy, and Snow, except for her emphasis on training female physicians, did not champion Holbrook’s ideas about health. Yet, their polite encounter by correspondence may have had an impact on Snow’s emerging public defense of polygamy.

38. Zina Diantha Huntington Young, Journal, August 30, 1881, Church History Library. For information on Zina Young, see Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 71–113; and Martha Sonntag Bradley and Mary Brown Firmage Woodward, *4 Zinas: A Story of Mothers and Daughters on the Mormon Frontier* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000).

39. M. L. Holbrook to Eliza Snow, May 6, 1875, Eliza R. Snow Papers, Church History Library.

Snow's Public Defense of Polygamy

Interestingly, within five weeks after her last recorded letter to Holbrook, Snow rallied Mormon women in the first of many large gatherings where they defended their commitment to Mormonism and to plural marriage. These public meetings received national attention precisely because they shattered many of the common assumptions that portrayed Mormon women as the victims of an unyielding and authoritarian patriarchy and a degrading and licentious polygamy.⁴⁰ The “Indignation Meetings” that commenced in January 1870 provided Snow and her sisters a platform for denouncing the Cullom Bill, antipolygamy legislation pending in the United States Congress, as well as answering other critics.⁴¹

Perhaps her correspondence with Holbrook piqued Snow's willingness to lead Mormon women in publicly countering ridicule and widespread misrepresentation as she organized mass meetings, sent memorials to Congress, and commenced publication of a new newspaper by and for Mormon women: the *Woman's Exponent* (1872–1914). In any case, Snow's letters to Holbrook were written at a turning point for her and for Mormon women. This friendly correspondence allowed the physician and the poet to transcend the polarized national debate regarding Mormon polygamy and allowed Snow to present her deepest convictions with greater respect and less polemic than was her wont. They also prepared Snow to initiate the highly visible defense of Mormon women and children that was a critical component of her leadership over the next two decades. Snow's correspondence with Holbrook provides a window on her thought at a critical juncture in her life and in the history of Mormon women.

40. Quoting statements from the *New York Times* and the *New York Herald*, Lola Van Wagenen observed, “The newspaper coverage of the meeting offered the most positive account ever given of Mormon women and that helped to deflect criticism of the whole community.” See Lola Van Wagenen, “Sister-Wives and Suffragists: Polygamy and the Politics of Woman Suffrage, 1870–1896” (PhD diss., New York University, 1994), 21.

41. In January 1868, when earlier antipolygamy legislation was pending in Congress, Snow and her sisters penned for Salt Lake City's *Deseret News* a one-hundred word “expression of indignation towards Senator Cragin and his despicable Bill,” but declined to comment further. “Correspondence: Cragin and His Bill,” *Salt Lake City Deseret News [Weekly]*, January 15, 1868. “But,” Snow declared in January 1870, “there is a point at which silence is no longer a virtue. In my humble opinion we have arrived at this point.” “Great Indignation Meeting,” *Deseret Evening News*, January 14, 1870. On this topic see also J. Smyth Iversen, *The Antipolygamy Controversy in U.S. Women's Movements: A Debate on the American Home* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

Correspondence between Eliza R. Snow and M. L. Holbrook

Letter 1: Eliza R. Snow to M. L. Holbrook, November 30, 1866

Reply to Dr. M. L. Holbrook, N.Y.

Dr. M. L. Holbrook,

Dear Sir,

Altho' your letter was unanticipated, it was no less welcome. I should have acknowledg'd its receipt before this, but for previous engagements and responsibilities. I must confess, I have not the least recollection of either yourself or your coat; but am happy to say I have an agreeable remembrance of your mother, and, as I frequently made *coats*, it is very probable I did myself the honor of making "*the coat*." Many eventful scenes of life have transpired since then, and it is no wonder that little circumstances of early youth have escaped my mind, yet I fondly cherish the memory of my friends, and am ever pleased to hear of them and their prosperity. I am thankful that you Sir, are engaged in as noble an enterprize as editor of the Herald of Health. I have not seen a No. of that Magazine, but judge from its heading, with the contents of the Nov. No. which you kindly sent me, that I should like it. I will enclose in this, the amt. of a year's subscription— Please forward as soon as convenient.

The leading items in the heading of your Magazine, are portions of our practical faith, as a people, to which we attach much importance.

The elevation and redemption, morally and physically, of fallen human nature, and laying a foundation for the prolongation of life, are, with us, subjects of great moment. The object is at once grand and noble. Ignorance and neglect of the laws of life, resulting from a lack of knowledge of the value and design of this present state of existence, and its bearing on a future; are telling in results of corruption and depravity, not only in the lower ranks of life, but also in what is termed its upper walks—abridging the longevity allotted to man—cutting asunder the thread of life, by destroying its purity. This state of things is increasing to a fearful extent, and the energies of every philanthropist should be aroused and enlisted to arrest the deadly work. The Latter-day Saints are alive to this great achievement.

Human progress in the development of all the rational and noble faculties of man, physically, morally, mentally and socially, is what we are striving and living for. ——— To ensure the accomplishment of any grand pursuit, it is of vital importance, that we get a correct starting point; without which, no definite calculation can be made of the results, and nothing can

be done to elevate mankind, without purity of heart and life. We are at war with the corruptions of the world; and we know it to be indispensably necessary for us to occupy a position where virtue, purity and innocence can be successfully guarded and defended. This includes a location on premises with a certain amount of control without which, the greatest talents and the most persevering efforts would accomplish but little. It is impossible to purify the water of a muddy stream, while flowing in its own filthy channel, but, if taken out in detach'd portions, it can be cleansed and preserved in purity.⁴² It would not avail much for us to extend benefits to our fellow beings, unless we had the power of securing those benefits to them.

“We have faith in human progress, and look forward to a future, not far distant, that shall develop the most perfect types of manhood.” This is part of our creed, but we anticipate it on a vastly more extensive scale, than other people can possibly anticipate. Others propose to develop types of man, we, of nations—others are laboring to benefit the condition of a portion of community, we, to redeem the whole world. We have now established an order of things and a location which constitutes a nucleus for the gathering together of the good of all nations, through which to benefit all the generations of man, and which will, ultimately extend its influence to the ends of the earth. It has taken years of struggle amidst all the ignorance and wickedness with which we have had to contend; but, instead of wasting our energies in trying to better the condition of man in a mixed mass, surrounded by influences which tend downward, we have been gathering them by thousands, from all nations, and placing them in a position where influences will be in the right direction.

But with all these advantages, it is a slow business: Habit is like an iron band, and it requires more time to undo what has been done wrong, than to implant truthful and saving principles in minds untrammelled. But one grand point is gained when people are in a place where they can be taught, and can observe the laws of life, and those principles which lead to perfection: and yet, much more is anticipated from the children born here, than from those who gather. The children inherit the advantages of all the healthful physical and moral influences consequent on the location. As a matter of course, great care is taken of children here, and we have many more growing up, in proportion to the number of families, than are to be found elsewhere. In some families here, the children are very numerous,

42. Snow elaborated this idea in a poem, “The Fountain and the Streams of Life,” published in the *Salt Lake City Deseret News*, June 12, 1867, and reprinted in Snow, *Poems*, 2:99, and Derr and Davidson, *Eliza R. Snow: The Complete Poetry*, poem 385.

which is the result of the system of polygamy, of which much is said abroad. I will send you by the same Post, a paper containing a discourse by A. Lyman, on this subject.⁴³ I think you will find some suggestions in it that will interest you.

With the exception of a few instances, where children have inherited feeble constitutions from their mothers, in consequence of sufferings to which they were exposed during our persecutions, children here are very healthy, and as much so in large families as in small ones. As a sample, I wish you could have seen a few of our young men, born in polygamy, who passed through N. York this season en route for Europe, on missions.

Although great pains are taken in rearing children, as yet, we have no particular established system of physical culture—we are a practical, not a theoretical people, and with us, all the physical as well as mental powers are called into requisition. We have not had sufficient time for development. This great work is still in embryo—but it is so far, established on an omnipotent basis. It is not of man—it is of God, and what one generation does not accomplish, another will.

I thank you Sir, for your kind invitation—should I visit your City I shall certainly avail myself of it. With the best of wishes for your success in doing good—I am &c

Nov. 30, 1866

E. R. Snow

Letter 2: Eliza R. Snow to M. L. Holbrook

To Dr M. L. Holbrook

S. L. City, Oct. 1869

Dear Sir,

Yours of Aug. 25,—enclosing a slip from the Evening Post should have been answered nearly two months ago.

With mortification I confess I had forgotten it. At the time of its receipt I was just starting on a visit to our Southern Settlements—by mischance it was mislaid, and this morning in looking over a parcel of letters

43. Amasa M. Lyman, “Marriage: Its Benefits,” in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:198–208 (April 5, 1866). Lyman’s discourse attacked the evils which he perceived flourished in monogamous societies, including the lack of opportunities for all women to marry, prostitution, and the general mistreatment of women. Perhaps of interest to Holbrook as a physician, Lyman claimed that monogamy contributed to “physical degeneracy,” which explained the decreasing lifespan of humanity from the days of Adam to the present. Lyman stated that “plural marriage is the great necessity of the age, because it is a means that God has introduced to check the physical corruption and decline of our race.”

I discovered it, and forthwith reply. But in doing so, I trust you will sufficiently allow me freedom of speech to say that I consider the article in question to contemptible to hold any claim on our valuable time—written, as it evidently was, without a particle of candor. So far as all such articles are concerned, and their authors I feel as an ancient prophet express'd himself as recorded in the good old Book, to wit, "As the Lord lives before whom I stand, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehosophat, the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee nor see thee."⁴⁴ And let me assure you Sir, that it is purely out of respect to yourself that I refer to it.

The Press, with a few honorable exceptions, has been teeming with effusions of ridicule, scandal, malice and bigotry against the Latter day Saints for nearly forty years—long enough, at least, to have lost their novelty.

I very well know that much of this is attributable to ignorance; but at present there is no excuse for this ignorance. We have always courted investigation—our history is before the world—our missionaries are among all nations or nearly so, and our works are not in secret.

Pardon this digression—you wished me to inform you how much of the article enclosed is truth and how much falsehood. It contains one truth, or, I think the statement "Of sixty deaths in S.L. City, 44 were children," is a correct one. I have not time to examine the Sexton's report, but presume it is a true copy probably from the Sep. report one year ago.⁴⁵ The month of Sep. is much the worst month in the year both for sickness and death especially for children. Salt Lake City Sexton's report for last month very much exceeds every previous one—ie. 97 deaths of whom 86 were children.⁴⁶ But this report is not confined to deaths in the City—many who live at a distance, having friends buried in the SL Cemetery, prefer coming here to inter their dead. The Sexton's report includes all burials, regardless of where from.

A few months since, I was comparing the mortality of S.L. City with other large cities particularly of England, France & Scotland, and found our average death-rate very little less more than half as much, and I think in one or two instances, less than half. Ours averages between 12 & 13 to the thousand.

44. 2 Kings 3:14.

45. Actually, the *New York Post* used the October 1868 sexton's report, as did another opponent of Mormonism, J. H. Beadle, in an 1870 book which also denounced Utah's infant mortality rate. See Bush, "Mormon 'Physiology,'" 233.

46. For a copy of the sexton's report for September 1869, see *Journal History of the Church*, September 30, 1869, 1, Church History Library, microfilm copy in Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Our annual foreign immigration—the process of acclimating and influx of transients & persons through have a tendency to increase mortality.⁴⁷

Another consideration—We have proportionately more, many more children—than other cities, and, notwithstanding the E. Posts⁴⁸ allusion to the “old woman in the shoe” there are fewer deaths in proportion to numbers in our larger families than in the small ones. The idea of “Mormon” mothers having more children than they know what to do with, is a ludicrous one—and the statement of Anna Dickinson that we have no schools and the children are not educated, is a libel on good sense and matter of fact.⁴⁹

There are no people on earth, but the Latter day Saints that know the worth of children, for no others understand the purposes of God in the creation—the present and eternal destiny of man; and no other people are doing so much to promote the happiness—to purify, elevate and redeem the human race.

Through the revelations of God, we know that many spirits are yet waiting in the spirit world to come forth and take tabernacles of flesh, without which they cannot be perfected; and it is a matter of great importance that they should have a parentage where they will be trained in principles of purity & righteousness—where they will be surrounded by influences which elevate & ennoble—which tend to the highest attainments physically, intellectually, morally and spiritually.⁵⁰

We have the Gospel of Jesus Christ as taught by Him and His apostles.

The power of the gospel qualifies men to cooperate with God by which they can accomplish good for their fellow men that no others can. It has a

47. Snow crossed the *l* in *acclimating*.

48. “E. Posts” refers to the *New York Evening Post*.

49. Historians differ in their assessments of the quality of schools in Utah Territory. See M. Lynn Bennion, *Mormonism and Education* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1939); Frederick S. Buchanan, “Education among the Mormons: Brigham Young and the Schools of Utah,” *History of Education Quarterly* 22 (1982): 435–59; Charles S. Peterson, “The Limits of Learning in Pioneer Utah,” *Journal of Mormon History* 10 (1983): 65–79; Tally S. Payne, “Education on the American Frontier: The Territory of Utah in 1870” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 2000).

50. For a brief discussion on the Mormon belief in a premortal life—which prompted a theology advocating large families in order to provide “tabernacles of flesh” to the spirits “yet waiting in the spirit world”—see Gayle Oblad Brown, “Premortal Life,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1123–25.

Priesthood which confers an authority by which they bind on earth and it is bound in heaven and benefits not only the living but also the dead.⁵¹

But to return to the subject—I have omitted telling you how much falsehood the “slip” contains. *All* except the *one* truth is egregiously false.

You will please excuse this *long* letter—I am in haste and did not design writing but short. Should I see you, I should have much to say. Would you accept a small work entitled “Letters by Orson Spencer?”⁵² If so *Will you read it?*

Yours truly

E. R. Snow.

Letter 3: M. L. Holbrook to Eliza R. Snow

Reply to the foregoing

New York, Nov. 18, 1869,

Dear Friend,

I thank you for your kind letter. I have little doubt but most of the letter writers from Utah tell some big stories. If the gentiles would but copy your virtues, and avoid whatever vices may be found among *you* Latter Day Saints or any other people, I should be thankful. I have no holy horror of what you are doing and should be glad if outsiders would do you justice. I will gladly read the book you mention, and write you if you care for it my opinion.

Practically I should oppose polygamy of course, believing the one wife system the best, but unless a cover for vice I have no objection to the experiment being made as you claim to be making it. As long as the practice is conscientiously maintained, it will lead to good. I hear with admiration of the temperance, sobriety, & industry—These virtues will save any people or nation.

51. Snow is referring here to the Latter-day Saint doctrine of salvation of the dead. Mormons believe that all humanity must receive certain ordinances, such as baptism, which can be properly administered only with the authority of the Latter-day Saint priesthood. Thus, Latter-day Saints utilize temples to perform ordinances by proxy for their deceased ancestors and others. See 1 Corinthians 15:29; Doctrine and Covenants 124:29; 127, 128, 138; Douglas Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation: Force, Grace, and Glory* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000), 85–86.

52. Orson Spencer, *Letters Exhibiting the Most Prominent Doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Liverpool: Orson Spencer, 1848). First published in 1848, Spencer’s *Letters* became a highly popular explanation of Latter-day Saint doctrine and went through several editions. In 1853, Spencer added a final chapter defending plural marriage.

I hope sometime to go west on the great R. R. now running to the Pacific—but it may be a long time yet.

With regard & esteem

(Signed) M. L. Holbrook—

Letter 4: Eliza R. Snow to M. L. Holbrook

S. Lake Dec. 2, 1869,

Dr. M. L. Holbrook,

Dear Sir,

With this, I forward you the book referred to, trusting that it will be rec'd with the same kind feelings with which it is sent. I certainly would be gratified with your opinion respecting it, if you can spare the time to write.

You say “practically I should oppose polygamy.” I certainly expect you to do so until you are convinced that God is speaking, and that it is His special **command** <requirement>. In saying this, I am giving my own experience, and that of thousands.— —Altho' it is abundantly proven by the Bible, to have been anciently sanctioned and approved by the Almighty, such is the power of tradition, that it requires a special command directly from Himself, not only to introduce, but, (I think) to justify its adoption. Knowing that “God is the same yesterday, today & forever,” and also that He is now revealing His will, as formerly, and that He has commanded His people to practice this doctrine, I have no fear that it will ever become a cover to vice: Were it introduced by the device or wisdom of man, as a matter of experiment, I should cherish no such confidence. Altho', with us as with the ancient Church of Jesus Christ, tares are mingled with the wheat—where there is a Peter, we may look for a Judas.

All the wisdom of the world fails to meet the exigency of the times. It is time a few noble philanthropists like yourself, are at work with their might, to stem the torrent of evils with which the inhabitants of the earth are being inundated; but with all your efforts, the streams of degeneracy and corruption are increasing. None but God can provide a remedy. He alone has wisdom to introduce an order of things by which “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the seas.”⁵³

In doing this, He establishes His own platform and chooses His own stand point—and He will accomplish His purpose.

Is it not better for us to cooperate with Him in the great work of the last days—in renovating the earth and in regenerating the human family,

53. Habakkuk 2:14.

than to be exercising our abilities in other channels? This surely is, as the ancient prophet said, “a marvelous work and a wonder⁵⁴—affecting not only the living but also extending to the dead.—If by writing so lengthy, I intrude on your time, I have only to plead in apology, the importance of the subject.—Should your anticipated visit to the West be in *my day*, I hope the pleasure of personal interview.

With feelings of much Respect I am &c,

Eliza R. Snow

54. Isaiah 29:14. This phrase is prominent in Mormon scripture as well; see, for example, 2 Nephi 25:17 and 2 Nephi 27:26.

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