Heber J. Grant's European Mission, 1903-1906

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Elder Heber J. Grant landed in Liverpool, England, in November 1903, and by the first of the year he officially assumed his new position as president of the European Mission. The mission began at Tromso, Norway; and ran to Cape Town, South Africa; with Iceland and India serving as distant east-west meridians. While the church had branches in each of these extremities, Grant’s field of labor was more compact. Most of the mission’s effort was reserved to the Netherlands, Germany, Scandinavia, and Switzerland, where he had a general superintendency, and especially in the British Isles, where he had duties that were immediate and day-to-day.

Upon his arrival, he immediately had a sense of déjà vu. Waiting for him at the foot of the pier was Elder Francis M. Lyman, his brusque, good-natured, 250-pound friend, now retiring from the European Mission to assume the presidency of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. As in Tooele two and a half decades earlier, when Grant had succeeded Elder Lyman as stake president, Grant now found his predecessor had “filled up the mud-holes, removed the rocks, and left a good road for us to travel on.” There was another familiar aspect: time had not altered Lyman’s capacity for firm opinion, which, during the next six weeks before he finally sailed for America, flowed readily and at times disconcertingly. Grant wondered if Lyman still regarded him as the Tooele novice, despite Grant’s two decades of service in the Quorum of the Twelve.
There was an immediate issue. “What in the world are you doing, bringing six girls over here?” Elder Lyman asked when he saw Grant, Grant’s wife Emily, and a half-dozen of the Grant children disembark from the ship. Lyman’s opposition continued as the family drove to the mission home. Wouldn’t the blossoming Dessie and Grace distract the young elders? How in the world did Grant expect to get any work done? Lyman was defending established procedure. At the turn of the twentieth century, many Church authorities saw leading a mission as an ascetic obligation, and most mission presidents served without the companionship of a wife, much less children. Grant, unimpressed with the precedent, had previously secured the approval of President Joseph F. Smith for his family’s presence. Nevertheless, to the moment of Lyman’s departure, the presence of the Grant family was a continuing irritant between the two men.

There was yet another problem: Grant badly wanted to be rid of the old mission home at 42 Islington. For half a century, the building had served as the European headquarters of the Church, while both it and its neighborhood had deteriorated. Universal consensus labeled it a byword, if not a hiss. “At first the din from the street kept me awake,” one missionary wrote ironically about his stay at “Old ’42,” “but ere long it acted as a soporific, lulling me to rest, my slumber being broken only when the noise ceased, as it did for a short while between midnight and daybreak.” The three-story structure sat on a stone-paved intersection through which a heavy traffic of trams, buses, cabs, and trucks rumbled. Discolored by Liverpool’s sodden atmosphere, 42 Islington also had a reputation for lingering derelicts and even an occasional haunting ghost.

The Grant family had long entertained colorful and disapproving stories about the old mission home, ever since Emily had fled there during the Raid of the 1880s to give birth to Dessie, the couple’s firstborn. Years had not softened her feelings. Learning of Grant’s call and her expected role as “mission mother,” Emily firmly announced that neither she nor her children would live in the building.

Before he left Salt Lake City, Heber had tried to persuade his fellow General Authorities to approve a $25,000 public subscription to fund a new headquarters. Apparently dismissing the plan as too public and grandiose, they at length quietly instructed Lyman to buy
a new building from Church funds. Lyman accordingly located a property, but after he learned that its deed covenants were restrictive, he lost interest. Grant, however, was not to be denied. He hurried through the city looking for another house, and on finding one that was “very comfortable indeed,” he succeeded in getting Lyman’s approval the day before Lyman left for America. Grant believed his predecessor’s approbation was important, the senior Apostle’s judgment faring better at home than his own.

As the new home was made over for the Church’s use, the Grants, despite Emily’s earlier protest, briefly endured the perils of 42 Islington. The interval prompted some doggerel: “The horrors of that place you no doubt have heard,” one of the Grant daughters penned, “Of the drunkards, the noise and the grime. / The three months we spent there just served to make us / Feel that 10 Holly Road was sublime.” Grant claimed the old place failed to yield him a single “good night’s sleep.”

On the other hand, Grant thought the new residence as quiet as “any of the farm houses in Waterloo.” “I sleep fine and enjoy hearing the birds sing in the morning,” he noted. He chose an upstairs bedroom for his sleeping quarters and office redoubt. When working in the city, he often stationed himself there from early morning to past ten in the evening, his index fingers pounding correspondence on his diminutive “Blick” typewriter. Not counting an attic and basement, there were nine other rooms. The greeting room, or parlor, served as the meeting hall for the Saints in Liverpool, with religious services scheduled several times on Sunday and a service on Wednesday evening. The basement housed the clamorous presses of the mission periodical, the *Millennial Star*. Outside the house, the Grant girls planted flowers and a vegetable garden of lettuce and radishes. “No. 10, Holly Road” would be the Grants’ home for the rest of their Liverpool stay.

Grant approached his official duties soberly. “I am in England in answer to my prayers to the Lord and I hope to do all the good that it is possible for me to do.” Such avowals, coupled with his gaunt and hurried exterior, might have seemed forbidding to his youthful missionaries. As it was, his outward austerity vanished on acquaintance. A day or two after Lyman’s departure, a member of the Liverpool staff inquired about the possibility of shaving his beard.
Elder Lyman, thinking facial hair added dignity, had made beards a matter of mission discipline. Grant, in contrast, immediately awarded the elder’s request, feigning fear that the young man’s crimson whiskers might occasion a fire. Such bonhomie became the rule. The mission president and his staff (most of whom soon appeared close-shaven) good-naturedly teased the elders in the mission, pointing out an elder’s heavy Scottish diction or deflating another’s prolonged and pompous phrases. Nor did Grant object to occasional diversion. First the elders tried cricket in the mission headquarters’ high-walled, spacious backyard. But cricket was soon forgotten with the installation of a tennis court. "Member how you used to whack ‘em over the netting with the speed of a Colt .45? Wham!" recalled one of the missionaries years later.

Despite Liverpool’s “rich brown November mists,” tennis became an office passion. Grant found it to be his best sport since baseball. For one thing it was efficient. “With tennis one can step out and play for a short time and then drop it," he analyzed. But if his enthusiastic letters to friends in Salt Lake City were an accurate index, his playing was not so discreetly programmed into his schedule. One of his daughters agreed, writing, “Our father just loved... [the game] and played all he could, between conferences, meetings, and trips.” Always conscious of his fragile nerves, Grant had no difficulty justifying the activity. “I eat and sleep better by taking this pleasure. Physical exercise by using dumb bells may be equally as beneficial but it certainly is very annoying to me,” he wrote to his mother at home.

The new mission president refused to stand on ceremony or allow his age or high office to distance him from his subordinates. Perhaps as a result, a bond quickly grew between the impressionable missionaries and their leader. New elders usually first met him at the Holly Road meeting room, where one recalled that his instructions were “brief, inspiring, lovable, and full of the spirit of the Lord.” Rather than exhortation or pulpit pounding, Grant’s style was democratic. He typically would ask each novice to join in a covenant with him to do their best and serve their mutual God. During the missionaries’ later experience, he was equally open, sharing both the problems of the mission and details of his own personal or business life. Unfortunately, talk soon begat talk, and echoes of his

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conversation were heard in distant Salt Lake City, where some Church
officials murmured disapprovingly of his undignified talkativeness. 24

Much of his talk to missionaries was fatherly counsel, with two
themes dominating. First, he repeatedly urged his young charges
to observe standards and keep commandments. And there was a
frequent corollary: “We were . . . [told] to avoid wine and women
like we would the gates of hell,” recalled future General Authority
LeGrand Richards. 25 Among Grant’s most distressing tasks was
excommunicating a handful of elders who strayed sexually. “I would
a hundred times rather send the body of an Elder home in a coffin
than to have to notify his family that he had transgressed the laws of
chastity and been cut off from the Church,” he wrote in his diary. 26
Of course, Church law on the matter was inexorable.

A second theme was as much to the point. Grant counseled the
missionaries to work hard. “It did not take long to find out [what
kind of leadership you would provide],” mused one of Elder Lyman’s
holdovers. “For with characteristic frankness you struck straight out
from the shoulder and showed by your leadership that the way to go
ahead was to push and keep on pushing.” 27 Everywhere the trump
sounded. “Work, work, work,” proclaimed the Millennial Star.
Grant’s private correspondence was as firm. “You both have my love
and respect,” he wrote to two wayward missionaries, “but I have felt
for many months that you were taking things altogether too easy.” 28
Grant himself set the example. In happy contrast to languid Japan,
where he had previously served as mission president, he now dis­
covered himself outpacing even his old entrepreneurial pace. “I can
truthfully say that I have never worked more hours in my life per day
than I have since I arrived in Liverpool,” he wrote to a colleague in
Salt Lake City. 29

Grant’s openness, friendship, advice, and example were power­
ful tonics to his youthful cohorts. “Nothing unusual happened,”
wrote a member of the office staff one day, “We observed Pres.
Grant’s golden rule today—‘Work. Work. Work.’” Throughout the
mission, productivity soared. Each year of his presidency, despite
a slight decline in his missionary force, the British Mission
increased its street meetings, private gospel conversions, baptisms,
and especially distribution of literature, which by 1906, the last
year of his presidency, assumed avalanche proportions. That year
four million tracts were distributed, or about eighteen thousand for each elder.\textsuperscript{30}

To Elder Lyman, who from Salt Lake City was monitoring his successor’s work in Liverpool, the tempo appeared “super human,” perhaps immoderate. Grant, however, was confident he had not lost perspective. Most elders, he said, were not overworked one bit. They might put in at most six hours of “real work” daily, hardly sufficient to maintain a business position back home at ZCMI. Assuring President Lyman, Grant stated his only wish: that each elder sense the holy spirit in his life and “satisfy his own conscience that he was a diligent worker for the spread of truth.”\textsuperscript{31}

None of the activity of Grant and his missionaries, however, produced the conversions Church leaders desired. “It is the gleaning after the vintage is over,” one leader despairs. A young elder put the matter more quaintly, commenting that the Mormon missionary effort was “gleaning the wheat field after the chickens have been turned in.”\textsuperscript{32} President Lyman’s last year netted 472 baptisms, down from 581 the year before. Grant’s first year saw convert baptisms rise to 602, and from there the total grew with annual 10 percent increases.\textsuperscript{33} These numbers, while significant to the struggling missionaries, were dwarfed by Great Britain’s 37 million turn-of-the-century population.

The main reason for the Church’s poor showing lay with their image. The British public saw the Saints as strange, if not licentious, an image stemming largely from the practice of plural marriage, which the Fleet Street tabloids played on with merciless delight. Grant had been in England only a few months when one of the press’s periodic outbursts began. Riding a train from London’s St. Pancras station to the mission headquarters in Liverpool, he noticed a disturbing advertisement on newspaper placards at each succeeding railroad station, “London Sun: A Protest against Mormonism.” The editorial was in response to the possible seating of Elder Reed Smoot to the United States Senate.\textsuperscript{34}

At length Grant himself also became a target. He had hastily left Salt Lake City for Europe to avoid cohabitation charges that had been drawn to embarrass the Church and Smoot just prior to the Senate hearings. Now the press used the matter for lurid suggestion. And with newspapers selling, still more imaginative stories were
published. One supposedly told of an English girl’s conversion to Mormonism and her subsequent life in Utah. According to the narrative, when she arrived in Utah she had been shackled, stripped, and displayed before the wife-hunting Church authorities, who “treated [her] worse than the coes on the farm.” Forced to work the fields under the flogging watch of the first wife, the woman toiled “harder than the brutes which drew the plow.” Then there was a fortunate turn of events. The “monster to whom she was married” died, a victim of appetite and overindulgence. Back in England where her tale could be told, the heroine later learned of the fate of her sister, who had also joined the Church. This woman had been found dead, broken by similar brutalities, with a lifeless babe pressed to her breast.35

In other times the fanciful melodrama might have been allowed to die of its own weight. But with emotions running high, Grant determined that the story and others like it had to be checked. Counseling with his youthful staff, he decided to visit the London editors immediately and engaged a railroad berth for that evening. At the editorial office of one of the most active anti-Mormon newspapers, he asked for a single column to rebut the ten or twelve stories already published. To buttress his position, Grant laid before the editor several letters of recommendation and asked the newspaper to get similar certificates from those attacking the Church.

“It does not make any difference what you have,” was the response. “We will not publish anything that you have to say.”

Grant started for the door, then paused. “The young man who ushered me upstairs told me your name was Robinson. Is that correct?” he said.

“It is.”

“Do you know Phil Robinson?”

“Everybody knows Phil Robinson.”

“Did he represent the London Telegraph, one of the two greatest . . . London newspapers during the Boer War?”

Grant’s questions had less to do with establishing Robinson’s credentials than drawing a distinction between the Telegraph and the editor’s own newspaper. He then produced a copy of Robinson’s kindly treatment of the Church, Sinners and Saints, and challenged the editor to buy the book and to read it, commenting, “You will
find everything in your paper is a lie pure and simple. It will only cost you two shillings, and if that is too expensive I will be very glad to purchase it and present it to you with my compliments." Grant’s efforts, however, brought no results. Though Robinson promised Church leaders a half column, the editor returned the proposed article two or three months later, claiming that he had been unable to find space.  

British fair play was not always so muted, and Grant, with several of his talented elders providing copy, managed to place several items with the press. But the tide flowed strongly against them. During the height of the anti-Mormon crusade, a “howling” and rock-throwing mob gathered outside the London headquarters. At a Church meeting in Finsbury, an agitator grabbed the podium, harangued for two hours, and then concluded by putting on a large belt and slouch hat (he apologized for not carrying a revolver) and proclaimed himself a Mormon “Danite.” Outside the hall, two thoroughly incensed ladies, each representing the Mormon and anti-Mormon view, had to be pulled apart by their husbands. Following the incident, the Church was refused further use of the building, despite their record of almost ten years of responsible use.  

Tensions were almost as high in other parts of Europe. “The papers are full of the Mormon question,” Grant’s subordinate, President Hugh J. Cannon of the German Mission, reported, “and almost without exception the reports are unfavorable.” Four elders were banished from Saxony, and Prussian officials made ominous inquiries about the missionaries’ day-to-day activities. The city of Dresden forbade any Church meetings and threatened the Saints with a fine of three hundred marks and six months’ imprisonment if they ignored the ordinance. Scurrying to maintain their presence in Germany, the missionaries quietly changed their passport registration from clerical to student status, a maneuver that Grant’s conscience admitted was “somewhat underhanded,” though seemingly necessary.  

In Britain the tumult was over within three weeks, but for the rest of Grant’s presidency, harassment and difficulty continued as a matter of course. During one two-week period, police at both Swindon and Sunderland advised the elders that they would be unable to protect their proselyting, citing overwhelmingly adverse
public opinion. At Bristol, Watford, and Southampton, Church services were broken up by sectarian opponents. In Southampton, small boys were given candy to encourage rowdyism. Opponents at Bedford used a similar scheme. Conditions were peaceful until the elders mentioned the name of Joseph Smith. Then Protestant Sunday School children, well coached and imported for the occasion, interrupted the service with songs and shouting. Eventually the adult leaders of the disturbance were marched off by the town’s constabulary.

The Church often won support by its good behavior. The Daily Mail noted members’ “quiet conviction” and “apparent absence of enthusiasm,” even as the cries of protesters disrupted their meeting. When agitators seized control of a meeting at Bradford, the elders quietly passed out tracts and then left the scene, thereby earning police praise for “the proper Christian spirit” and the promise of future protection. In Liverpool, Detective Inspector Yates, first dispatched to investigate the Mormons, later became a friend. The gap between the Mormons’ actual behavior and their public caricature was so wide as to be disarming.

Grant’s presidency reflected the prevailing persecution. Though he had little hope of securing popular acceptance for his people, his sermons repeatedly spoke of Christian burden. “His faith will not be shaken by the wave of persecution that is spreading over the country,” he declared. “Persecution is the heritage of every faithful follower of Christ.” Opposition carried virtue. It strengthened and refined, making the Latter-day Saints, whatever their public image, a growing “factor for good in the earth.”

His sermons also emphasized the Church’s uniqueness, speaking less of the Bible than of the Book of Mormon, and often less of Jesus Christ than of Joseph Smith, for the Church’s founding prophet conveyed for Grant the whole gospel. Outward observance, such as the payment of tithing or compliance with the Word of Wisdom, also drew his attention. In a time of siege, external manifestations of discipleship were important. His most frequent speaking device was to comment item by item on Joseph Smith’s thirteen Articles of Faith, sprinkled with illustrative stories and personal anecdotes. Invariably, the allotted time proved insufficient for his rapid-fire delivery.
It was while he was behind the pulpit that some thought him at his best. Here he could give range to his conviction and personality—testifying, admonishing, rebuking, persuading, assuring, sometimes all in a single torrent. He was not given to precision or forethought, for like his father, Jedediah M. Grant, he was not an intellectual. He was an exhorter. Words were meant to motivate, not just to inform. The result was often successful. "I have never [since] doubted that you are a servant of the Lord," wrote one missionary after hearing one of Grant's impassioned sermons. "You spoke . . . as one having authority, and you spoke with power."47

Behind his forceful public words, a softer view often prevailed. When he was questioned about his Word of Wisdom proscriptions, his response was pliant: preferably, the Saints should drink cocoa or a beverage such as "hot water milk and sugar." But for the life long English tea drinker, he counseled patience. "I have not felt to keep after them to that extent that they would feel that they were not worthy of being counted as good saints," he said. On another occasion he acknowledged the superior virtue of many who had been unable to keep the health code. Indeed, he thought the struggling nonobserver might be considered for Church office as the "Spirit of the Lord should direct" when more worthy candidates could not be found.48

Grant was seldom content with the status quo. To the First Presidency, he dispatched unwelcome suggestions aimed at improving Salt Lake City office procedures.49 He was convinced that Great Britain should have a small Latter-day Saint temple to administer the higher ordinances. "This may be a day dream," he conceded, "but I can't quite get it out of my head."50 To burnish the Church's public image, he asked young Church members studying music in Europe to perform at missionary conferences and even staged a favorably reviewed but scantly attended concert at Hull. The program featured three Utah artists: Arvilla Clark, Willard Andelin, and Martha Read.51

He was constantly on the move, traveling third-class on British rail. He once joked, "People ask why 'Mormons' always travel third class, and the answer is, 'Because there is no fourth class.'"52 During one eight-month period, he was in Liverpool only one Sunday. He hoped to go to South Africa, Turkey, and India, and perhaps to
revisit Japan, but for the time being he was preoccupied with western Europe. Not quite halfway through his mission, he had toured each of the British conferences three times. By 1905 he had visited Holland five times, Scandinavia and Germany three times, Switzerland twice, and France at least once. “I have been kept very busy,” he said. Far from a lament, especially after his ordeal in Japan, his words carried satisfaction.53

There was a private life to these years, centering on Emily. When Grant was called to Japan in 1901, the seniority of his wife Augusta gave her claim to that exotic and exciting experience. But his typical fair dealing with his wives reasserted itself when, after returning from Japan, he received the European Mission assignment. Augusta had accompanied him to Japan, now it was Emily’s turn to be with him.54

Had the choice of the two tours been hers, Emily certainly would have selected Europe. European tradition and culture had fascinated her from childhood, and now she was eager to experience Europe’s sites and sounds. She traveled often with her husband on his preaching assignments, leaving the younger children with Fia Wahlgren, the family’s nanny. This gave her the opportunity to sightsee while her husband conducted meetings and interviews. At first, when time and business permitted, he joined her, but as his mission progressed he was content to attend to duty and grant Emily her leave. Her pace was indefatigable, testing the limits of even the older Grant children, who sometimes accompanied her.55

Although graying with middle age, Emily remained very much alive. Her energy stemmed not only from the legendary curiosity she had inherited from her Wells ancestors but also from a sense of liberation. The days of clandestine living on the underground were behind her. For half a dozen years she had lived openly in Salt Lake City society; yet, whatever her improving station, England offered emotional release. For the first time, polygamy was not an overriding concern. She and Heber had each other to themselves, and they both felt a new intimacy. “I am getting better acquainted with Emily,” he confided in a letter home.56 It was as if the couple were honeymooning instead of beginning the nineteenth year of their marriage. They both later remembered their English experience as idyllic, a time of “perfect home life.”57 For Emily, these were certainly her
Illus. 12-1. Group of missionaries in England in 1906 with Joseph F. Smith (center, with beard) and members of Heber J. Grant’s family, including (back row, third from left) Deseret (Dessie) Grant; (back row, sixth from left) Emily Grant; (middle row, third from left) Charles W. Nibley (middle row, far right) Heber J. Grant; (front row, third from left) Grace Grant.
happiest years. “Mamma did so thoroughly enjoy every minute of the time there,” Dessie wrote to her father many years later. “She said she had enjoyed being with you more than anyone on earth could possibly know.”

It was also an exciting time for the Grant children. Without formal or higher schooling himself, their father nevertheless prized education and hoped that his family could make the best of his calling by encountering Europe firsthand. Within weeks of his arrival in England, he had sent Dessie and Grace to London for vocal training. He later enrolled two of his daughters in schools in Berlin, and always, especially under Emily’s enthusiastic prodding, the children were encouraged to see historic sites and attend concerts. There was, however, a limit to Grant’s enthusiasm for culture. When Edith’s voice teacher in Liverpool recommended that she get advanced study for a possible professional career, the churchman wanted none of it. Instead of a professional career, he hoped that his daughter might use her talent in a more conventional role, singing “lullabies to her own babies.” He was unmistakably relieved when Edith, who no doubt sensed her father’s feelings, decided to forgo advanced training.

Not wishing to limit Europe’s advantages to just Emily’s children, Grant at first hoped that all ten of his daughters might join him, and he even considered having Augusta cross the Atlantic as well. But with Church officials in Salt Lake City expressing growing misgiving about his family’s activities, he finally imposed a limit on the number of his children who could be in Europe at a single moment, giving each a turn by rotating them in and out of the Liverpool mission home (illus. 12-1). New arrivals brought excitement. “Have been counting the hours all day,” he once wrote in his diary. “Day moved like the gait of a snail. My daughters Anna and Mary will be here this evening.”

Grant later conceded the wisdom of the warnings he received about limiting the number of his children in the mission field, as even his diminished involvement in his family’s activities brought criticism from some impoverished Saints who saw them as extravagant. Others assumed that the family’s expenses were met by the Church. Grant, however, prided himself that he had paid every mite and farthing himself, including the children’s boarding costs while
they lived at Holly Road. These and other expenses were substantial. The final cost of the family’s European experience was some ten thousand dollars.63

There were interludes that were biographically revealing. Emily, bright and confident in private relationships, sometimes faltered in her new setting. While visiting London with some of the girls, she was approached by a young man selling strawberries. At two shillings a box, the berries were expensive but attractive. The elders would certainly enjoy them. Surrendering a ten-shilling gold piece, she waited while the vendor went to a nearby store to make change. Minutes passed. Finally Grace went to learn the reason for the delay. “Yes, I saw the boy come in,” the man behind the counter said, “but he didn’t buy anything. He just walked through the store and out the back door.” To make matters worse, Emily learned that the box of berries had a single layer of fruit. The boy had propped up a few strawberries on several layers of leaves.64

Grant had his own embarrassment. Shortly after the family arrived in Liverpool, six-year-old Frances proved herself an able mimic of Liverpool’s accents and street talk. “My dear,” her father corrected, “those are not nice words and I don’t want you to use them. I’ll have to wash out your mouth.”

At breakfast several days later, Grant, always a spirited raconteur, told a story containing a few words of colorful dialogue. Little Frances overheard and commented, “Papa, you washed my mouth out for saying those words, and now you’re saying them.”

Wondering how he might explain to the little child the distinction of using words as opposed to recounting them, her father pled guilty. “So I did, my dear,” he said, “and I shouldn’t say them any more than you should. Would you like to wash my mouth out?”

She would—and did. “From that moment I knew that my father would be absolutely fair in all his dealings with me,” she later remembered. Heber also learned a lesson. When telling future stories, he invariably substituted the phrase “with emphasis” for any objectionable four-letter words.65

Grant often fretted about his health. Though his tensions eased while he was in England, as his mission progressed he found himself unable to sleep past three or four in the morning. He learned to live with this disability, reading and writing during the early morning...
hours and then taking a compensating nap after lunch. This
unheard-of allowance was part of a new health-care program that
apparently had begun with a prescription from Francis M. Lyman.
Before dressing, Grant accordingly took breathing exercises—one
hundred deep breaths. Then he kneaded his stomach for five minutes,
followed by fifteen minutes of “physical culture,” mild calisthenics
that stretched and toned his muscles. He would continue these
exercises the rest of his life.

Later in the afternoon, if he felt tired, he might sit at the mission
home piano and pick out a few hymns with his index finger.
After a refreshing thirty or forty-five minutes, he would then return
to work. Clearly, he wished to slow his pace. “I try to eat slow and
think slow and walk deliberately,” he declared. “These things are all
new to my way of living.”

As always, Grant measured his health by the ebbs and flows of
his waistline. At first he thought he might put on weight by sheer
perseverance, by strictly maintaining his exercise and tension-reducing
program. He was rewarded by a quick twenty-pound gain. But as his
mission continued, he slimmed down to his former 137 pounds and
found, to his disappointment, that he could once more wear the
clothes he had brought from America. There was, however, one
important byproduct to his efforts. Now feeling rested and stronger,
he could, for the first time since his physical breakdown in Tooele
almost twenty years earlier, pass a couch or chair without wanting to
rest. For years he had pushed himself onward through the force of
his strong will.

He had thought that his European mission might allow him to
continue a long-postponed study program he had started in Japan.
During the early months, he tried to navigate ten pages a day in such
faith-promoting books as Heber C. Kimball’s Journal and George Q.
Cannon’s My First Mission. He augmented these selections with five
pages in the Doctrine and Covenants and by memorizing one verse
daily. But like his weight-increasing program, he found that the
longer he remained in Liverpool, the less successful he was. He
increasingly allowed other priorities to crowd out his studies.

While in England, Grant encountered another book that had
great influence on him, not only because of its contents but also for
the practice it began. Pausing one day in the editorial office of the
Millennial Star, he casually thumbed through a slender volume, The Power of Truth by William George Jordan, a former editor of the Saturday Evening Post. Grant found himself captured by the author’s simple phrases and practical lessons. He read the volume seven times and began to liberally salt his sermons with its messages. “I know of no book of the same size, that has made a more profound impression upon my mind,” he wrote enthusiastically to Jordan, “and whose teachings I consider of greater value.”

Grant decided the book deserved wide circulation. Inquiring of the publishers, he learned that of the original five thousand copies printed, only a few hundred had been sold. The rest of the copies were scheduled for the incinerator. Grant immediately purchased these as well as the book’s copyright and began to mark and inscribe copies for friends. Before leaving Europe he ordered another one thousand copies printed. Due to his constant and impassioned boosting, the book eventually gained popularity in Utah.

Thus began one of Grant’s characteristic hobbies: buying hundreds and sometimes thousands of copies of books for distribution to friends (illus. 12-2). More than simple book-giving on a grand scale, the activity fit into his view of what a man of his interests and standing should do. Despite his ecclesiastical calling, he continued to dress, act, and conform to the best standards of the Gilded Age’s entrepreneurs, standards which meant, at least in his eyes, employing personal means for social and cultural betterment. He had long shown an interest in the paintings of Utah naturalist John Hafen, and while in Europe Grant’s patronage continued with the promising mezzo-soprano Arvill Clark and with two Utah artists studying in Paris, Mahonri Young and Leo Fairbanks.

Grant’s dealings with Fairbanks showed how strong his sense of social obligation was. The Apostle did not enjoy Fairbanks’s technique and chided him for his frequent violation of Victorian mood and sensibility. “The height of art in the estimation of most men is to me the height of that which all modest people should resent,” Grant said. Yet he was repeatedly supportive, attempting to find Salt Lake City buyers for Fairbanks’s work and personally subsidizing it. “You do not need to worry about not having enough money to take you home [from France],” he assured the artist. “You can spend all of your money [for study], and I promise to let you have money to take you home.”
Grant’s sightseeing activities bore little of the small-town cant and forced obligation that characterized some *nouveau riche* of the period. He clearly took pleasure in cultural affairs, though his descriptive comments sometimes betrayed the eye of a beginner. He noted that he “enjoyed . . . very much” *Much Ado about Nothing* at His Majesty’s Theatre and used the same phrase a week later to describe *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. He found an unnamed opera at Covent Gardens to be “too classical” and to lack “sweet music,” but he had a decidedly warmer reaction to his introduction to Wagner’s *Lohengrin*. He labeled the singing of world-renowned contralto Clara Butt “splendid entertainment”; and after hearing Handel’s oratorio *Elijah*, he enthusiastically resolved to “get something of this kind” performed by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

He explored the wonders of the continent with equal gusto (illus. 12-3). Seeing Rembrandt’s *Night Drill* in Rotterdam so impressed Grant that he wanted a copy. In Paris he thought the Sacré Coeur “the most magnificent architectural structure I have ever seen,” and the Louvre left him literally speechless. “The painting and sculpture must be seen to be appreciated—I shall attempt no description of what I saw,” he wrote. In France he also visited the Cluny Museum, Sainte Chapelle, the Palace of Justice, Les Invalides, Versailles, the Eiffel Tower (going to the top), and the Tuilleries. In Dresden, Germany, he attended the Royal Opera House, the circus, and the beer gardens. The latter afforded “some beautiful music by one of the finest bands in Germany,” but of course no transgressing alcohol. He did, however, ruefully concede that the spectacle of “apostle Grant” spending a Sunday evening at a German beer garden would be enough, if the news leaked to Salt Lake City, to make some Saints faint.
Illus. 12-3: Cities that Heber J. Grant visited while on his European mission, November 1903 to August 1906.
With Emily at his side, he noted that at times “sight seeing is about the hardest work I have ever done.” But there were other moments of almost boyish romp. On his fourth tour of the Scandinavian branches, he asked his companions how they wished to celebrate the Fourth of July. He answered his own question by announcing an intention to call on King Oscar of Sweden. When they arrived at Rosendal Palace, the king’s summer residence, Grant and his group noted how scanty security seemed. Grant waited until the guard in front of the palace reached the edge of his prescribed back-and-forth march and pivoted to return. Taking a single Swedish-speaking elder with him, he fell quickly behind the guard for a few steps and then hastily made for the door.

“I wish to see the king,” Grant told the startled chamberlain. To buttress his case, Grant quickly penciled a note: “To His Majesty King Oscar. I am here with a party from Utah, U.S.A.—fifteen in number. If you will allow us the pleasure of shaking hands with you on this day we Americans celebrate we shall feel highly honored and duly grateful.” He enclosed a letter of introduction from Heber Wells, Governor of Utah, and mentioned additional letters from both Utah senators, if needed.

Grant’s daring paid off. To the surprise of everyone in the party, with the possible exception of their leader, the king soon appeared—“a magnificent specimen of humanity,” Grant thought. He first spoke in Swedish, but graciously switched to English on learning that the majority of the Americans could not understand him.

The interview consisted largely of pleasantries, but there was one subject that the Americans found reassuring. Thanking His Majesty for the religious liberty they enjoyed in his Norwegian and Swedish realms, the party received a forceful reply. “Liberty! yes, that is best,” Oscar responded. “I do not desire in any way to hinder any from worshiping God as their conscience leads them.” He then added a statement that perhaps explained his willingness to meet with them. “I have representatives traveling in various sections of the United States,” the party in later years remembered him saying, “and the reports I receive indicate that my former subjects in Utah are happier and more prosperous, and getting along better [there] than in any other part of the United States.” With this, he broke off the ten-minute exchange with a “God be with you all” and an “adieu,” then stepped back into his residence.
Near the end of his mission, Grant received permission from President Joseph F. Smith for a final sightseeing foray into Italy. Surviving photographs show Emily and Heber exploring the wonders of Venice’s St. Mark’s and the ruins of Pompeii. “The day has been one of the most intensely interesting of my life,” he noted (illus. 12-4). They also explored the catacombs and toured St. Peter’s Cathedral in the Vatican. Heber declared St. Peter’s Cathedral to be “more wonderful than any building I have ever seen.” Even the weather smiled benediction, with the sky bright and crystal blue. If the European Mission years were the crème of their marriage, their twenty-three-day trip to Italy was the crème de la crème.

Grant returned from his Italian travels sobered by news of his deteriorating finances. With Philippine sugar steadily dominating American markets, his portfolio of intermountain sugar stocks had badly slumped. He attempted to be philosophical. “I am now worse off than when I came on this mission. . . . Such is life.”

For a moment he wondered if his Italian trip had been wise. But the costs of his touring, whether in Italy or elsewhere, were easily justified. He had traveled widely in America as a businessman and
churchman, but his European experience was an important supplement to his education. It introduced him to European grandeur, history, and achievement. His travels also provided cultural balance and perspective. Perhaps as important, his travels also gave him a renewed appreciation for his own heritage. As he watched people in Italy genuflect before icons, he expressed quiet appreciation for the simple worship of his own faith. The socially conscious entrepreneur within him sensed something terribly disproportionate about Europe’s bejeweled shrines. Couldn’t the precious gems and obvious wealth of the cathedrals finance manufacturing institution after manufacturing institution to “furnish the poor people employment”?

With the exception of his Italian tour, most of Grant’s sightseeing and concert-going was at an end after his first three or four months in Europe. Following his initial excitement, he was surprised by how little the theater billboards interested him as he bore in on the demands of his mission. As his mission drew to a close, there was no looking back. “I shall be able to go home feeling that I have done about as well as I could have,” he wrote a friend. “I did not go home from Japan with this feeling.”

The mission ended with a spiritual crescendo. During his presidency, he found his meetings with mission leaders to be especially helpful. By summer 1906 he resolved to hold at Bradford the first modern assembly of all elders stationed in Britain. To supplement costs, he requested money from Utah donors; and when accommodations proved inadequate, the elders volunteered to sleep three in a bed if necessary. The results were Pentecostal. The conference was “the best and most spirited... I have ever attended,” remembered young Hugh B. Brown. “President Grant spoke with great power... Most every elder wept with joy.” Others confirmed the extraordinary spirit. “Some [missionaries] whose testimonies were weak said, ‘Now I know.’ Many even of the most energetic Elders were heard to say that they had received a great awakening touch.”

One elder thought Grant’s face glowed with special luminescence when he addressed the conference. Grant could never recall laboring under such a spiritual endowment. He struggled repeatedly to retain emotional control. “I do not know that I have ever felt my own insignificance and the magnitude of the work in which I am engaged,” he reported to his mother. The experience seemed to validate his
entire mission experience. “I can now realize more fully than I have ever done before that it is impossible to have greater joy than one experiences in the missionary field.”

Late in the evening one elder wondered if another spiritual event might be taking place. He awakened to hear what seemed like distant singing. Rising up on an elbow, he felt the reassuring hand of Grant, his bed companion, who confessed he had been trying to sing himself to sleep after the heavily charged conference. Indeed, for several days the excited leader found it hard to return to a normal routine. Instead, he walked through the mission home and repeatedly rejoiced with his office staff over their experience. The conference also stirred the missionaries. The total of distributed tracts jumped each month to an unprecedented 450,000, or more than five hundred for each missionary.

By the end of 1905, Grant was ready to return home to Utah. Except for two short intervals, and counting his service in Japan, he had been away from headquarters for four years. He had already served in England twice as long as the one-year mission that President Smith had first promised at the time of Grant’s call. “I have had about as much of...[missionary service] as I care for in one dose,” he admitted, “but I feel that I can and will be happy just as long as the Lord wants me here.” First he thought his release might come in the spring; then he hoped for the summer. But with the Smoot controversy continuing in America, Church authorities were in no hurry to disturb already troubled waters by releasing Grant with cohabitation charges against him still pending.

Finally, in October 1906, Grant learned that he would be permitted to return to Salt Lake City in time for Christmas. There were the usual farewell fêtes. The British missionaries presented him with a Rembrandt print and an engraved gold watch. There was also a party at the Holly Road meeting room with recitations, vocal and piano solos, speeches, and refreshments. As the Grant family drove to the Liverpool docks, rain and wind pushed against their omnibus. The seas would be heavy for their trip home.

In later years, there was an afterglow to Grant’s three years in Europe, in part, no doubt, because of the approaching death of Emily, who even as they sailed from Liverpool was ill with undiagnosed stomach cancer. England, finally, had been her time, a time when she
and her husband culminated their relationship. Grant also sensed a spiritual bequest. Over succeeding years, until his death almost forty years later, his judgment of his years in Europe never wavered. “I got nearer to the Lord, and accomplished more, and had more joy while in the mission field than ever before or since,” he said.98

Notes

This article was originally published in Journal of Mormon History 14 (1988): 16–33.

1. “President Grant’s Arrival,” Millennial Star 65 (December 3, 1903): 778–79. Because current Church Archive policy limits the access and use of materials, many footnote citations have not been verified. When citing material from the Heber J. Grant Papers, which are lodged at the Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, I have supplied box and folder information only in those cases where access cannot be established by using the Grant register.


5. Heber J. Grant to Joseph Hyrum Grant, March 4, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 38:408.

6. Anthon H. Lund, Diary, October 8, 1903, Church Archives; Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October 9, 1903, Church Archives, microfilm copy in Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

7. First Presidency to Francis M. Lyman, November 12, 1903, First Presidency Letterbooks, Church Archives.

8. Heber J. Grant Remarks at the funeral of Henry M. O’Gorman, August 21, 1930, Grant Papers; Heber J. Grant, Typed Diary, January 17, 1904, Grant Papers.

9. Heber J. Grant to Anthon H. Lund, September 30, 1904, General Correspondence, Grant Papers; Heber J. Grant to Jesse N. Smith, December 8, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 39:177–78.

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12. Heber J. Grant to Jesse N. Smith, December 8, 1904; Heber J. Grant to Hamilton G. Park, June 16, 1905, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 39:867; Heber J. Grant to John T. Caine, November 28, 1905, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 40:574–75.
13. Grant, Typed Diary, January 1, 1904.
16. Rufus D. Johnson to Heber J. Grant, November 21, 1940, General Correspondence, Grant Papers.
18. Rufus Johnson to Heber J. Grant, November 22, 1937, incoming correspondence, Grant Papers; Heber J. Grant to Rufus Johnson, December 3, 1937, Grant Papers.
19. Rufus Johnson to Heber J. Grant, November 22, 1937; Heber J. Grant to Rachel Ivins Grant, October 11, 1905, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 40:365.
21. Heber J. Grant to Rachel Ivins Grant, October 17, 1905, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 40:400.
23. Grant, Typed Diary, May 6, 1905.
24. B. F. Grant to Heber J. Grant, August 5, 1905, General Correspondence.
26. Grant, Typed Diary, August 19, 1904.
27. Nicholas G. Smith to Heber J. Grant, February 19, 1917, General Correspondence.
29. Heber J. Grant to George Teasdale, January 18, 1906, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 40:818.
30. Heber J. Grant, in 78th Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1907), 36; Heber J. Grant to Hyrum S. Woolley, May 19, 1905, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 39:746; Heber J. Grant to Matthias F. Cowley, June 10, 1905, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 39:848.
31. Francis M. Lyman to Heber J. Grant, October 19, 1906, General Correspondence; for Grant’s reply, see October 31, 1906, Grant Letterpress
Grant had often made the same point to his missionaries. Without “the fire of the Spirit of the Lord,” their labor, he assured them, was nothing. “Report of Priesthood Meeting in Netherlands and Belgium,” in Grant, Typed Diary, February 10, 1906.


34. Grant, Typed Diary, April 3 and 11, 1904; Heber J. Grant to the First Presidency, April 19, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 38:556–57.

35. Copied in Grant, Typed Diary, April 11, 1904.

36. Grant recounted his experience several times: Salt Lake Tabernacle Address, April 13, 1930, in Grant Letterpress Copybook, 67:766–68; and “Elder Heber J. Grant,” in 79th Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1909), 115. See also Grant, Typed Diary, April 14, 1904; and Heber J. Grant to E. C. Branson, March 2, 1926, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 64:136–37.


38. Heber J. Grant to First Presidency, April 19, 1904, Joseph F. Smith Correspondence, Smith Papers, Church Archives; “Notes from the Mission Field,” Millennial Star 66 (June 2, 1904): 348.


40. Heber J. Grant to First Presidency, May 4, 1904, Joseph F. Smith Correspondence.


General Correspondence.


47. Ed. M. Rowe to Heber J. Grant, January 25, 1932, General Correspondence.

48. Heber J. Grant to H. J. Lilley, November 22, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 39:120; Heber J. Grant to Wilford Booth, February 10, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 38:279.

49. Heber J. Grant to the First Presidency, January 30, 1904, Joseph F. Smith Correspondence; Heber J. Grant to the First Presidency, September 28, 1904, Joseph F. Smith Correspondence.


52. “Elder Heber J. Grant,” in 82nd Semi-Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1911), 24.

53. Grant, Typed Diary, December 31, 1904; Heber J. Grant to Hyrum S. Woolley, May 19, 1905, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 39:746; Heber J. Grant to Marriner W. Merrill, November 3, 1905, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 40:467; Heber J. Grant to Anthony W. Ivins, August 2, 1906, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 42:484.


55. Heber J. Grant to Susan Noble, November 18, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 39:110; Heber J. Grant to Grace Grant Evans, April 24, 1910, Family Correspondence.

56. Grant to Noble, November 18, 1894.

57. Grant to Evans, April 24, 1910, Family Correspondence.

58. Dessie Grant Boyle to Heber J. Grant, January 1, 1911, Family Correspondence; see also Lyde Wells to Heber J. Grant, September 7, 1938, General Correspondence.

59. Francis M. Lyman to Joseph F. Smith, January 2, 1904, Joseph F. Smith Correspondence.

60. Grant, Typed Diary, June 2, 1932.

61. Francis M. Lyman to Heber J. Grant, June 29, 1905, First Presidency Letterbooks.

62. Grant, Typed Diary, May 5, 1905.


65. Frances Grant Bennett, “Interview by the Author,” Salt Lake City, August 6, 1981, typescript, Church Archives; Bennett, *Glimpses of a Mormon Family*, 15–16.


67. Heber J. Grant to Rachel Ivins Grant, January 8, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 38:110; Heber J. Grant to Joseph E. Taylor, January 25, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 38:218.

68. Heber J. Grant to Van Grant, December 30, 1919, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 55:320.

69. Heber J. Grant to Anthony W. Ivins, January 21, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 38:151–52.

70. Heber J. Grant to Joseph E. Taylor, January 25, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 38:218; Heber J. Grant to John B. Maiben, April 22, 1905, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 39:597; Heber J. Grant to George Albert Smith, September 16, 1905, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 40:190.

71. Heber J. Grant to Grace Grant Evans, April 12, 1925, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 63:146.

72. Grant, Typed Diary, March 9 and 11 and April 1, 1904; Heber J. Grant to Edward H. Anderson, October 20, 1906, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 42:865.

73. Heber J. Grant to William George Jordan, October 5, 1907, General Correspondence.

74. Grant, Typed Diary, January 1, 1906; Heber J. Grant to Rudger Clawson, August 14, 1911, General Correspondence; Heber J. Grant to Holman, March 25, 1939, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 77:568; Heber J. Grant to J. William Knight, December 19, 1940, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 79:502.

75. Grant, Typed Diary, May 29, 1905.

76. Heber J. Grant to J. Leo Fairbanks, September 27, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 38:754.

77. Heber J. Grant to J. Leo Fairbanks, January 24, 1905, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 39:282; Heber J. Grant to J. Leo Fairbanks, July 6, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 38:663.

78. Heber J. Grant to B. F. Grant, June 28, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 38:672.

79. Grant, Typed Diary, March 30, 1904; February 21 and 27 and March 7, 1905; Grant, Manuscript Diary, June 10 and May 13, 1905.

80. Grant, Typed Diary, February 12, 1904.

81. Grant, Typed Diary, May 13, 1904.

82. Grant, Typed Diary, June 5 and 11, 1904.

83. Grant, Typed Diary, May 13, 1904.

84. Neither Grant’s contemporary diary nor the *Millennial Star* report the conversation with Oscar’s statement about Scandinavian immigrants. It is preserved in reminiscent accounts by Grant and another Mormon.
who was present, Alex Nibley. For various accounts of the episode, see Grant, Typed Diary, July 4, 1906; “An Audience with King Oscar II: President Grant and Party Visit the Swedish Monarch at Stockholm,” *Millennial Star* 68 (July 19, 1906): 460–61; Heber J. Grant, Memorandum, n.d., box 145, fd. 4; Memorandum, n.d., in Grant Letterpress Copybook, 73:806–8; Alex Nibley to Heber J. Grant, July 22, 1926, General Correspondence; Heber J. Grant, “Remarks to a Boy Scout Convention, 1924,” in Grant Letterpress Copybook, 61:807–8; Lucy Grant Cannon, “The Log of a European Tour,” *Improvement Era* 40 (November 1937): 688.

86. Heber J. Grant to James Dwyer, April 18, 1906, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 41:2.
87. Grant, Typed Diary, March 1906.
88. Heber J. Grant to Mary Grant, December 28, 1904, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 39:216.
89. Heber J. Grant to John H. Taylor, October 5, 1906, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 42:783.
91. Heber J. Grant to Rachel Grant, July 25, 1906, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 42:469–70.
92. James R. Glenn to Heber J. Grant, December 16, 1944, General Correspondence.
94. Heber J. Grant to Francis M. Lyman, September 27, 1906, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 42:752.
95. Heber J. Grant to Rachel Grant, October 4, 1905, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 40:324.
96. Heber J. Grant to Emily Grant, June 27, 1906, General Correspondence; Heber J. Grant to John Henry Smith, August 1, 1906, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 42:465.
97. Heber J. Grant to First Presidency, November 30, 1906, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 43:43; Grant, Typed Diary, November 22, 1906; Charles W. Penrose, Diary, November 1906, Penrose Papers, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.