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“As a Bird Sings”
Hannah Tapfield King, Poetess and Pioneer

Leonard Reed

“I write as a bird sings, free as the air and untrammelled; I care not who blames or praises, I sing my song for love of singing.”

Hannah Tapfield King was an intimate of many of the prominent early leaders—both men and women—of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Utah in the nineteenth century. She was one of the most popular LDS poetesses and writers of her time and the last woman sealed to LDS President Brigham Young in his lifetime—and yet relatively little is written or commonly known about her today. King made an important literary contribution to early Utah society and was also one of a small percentage of English converts who were of middle-class status; she emigrated to Utah with her husband and children even though her husband was not a Mormon.

King’s writings earned her many friends and enlarged her reputation in Utah as a poetess, author, and woman of sensitivity, refinement, and learning. Her work educated and informed her readers, touched deep emotional chords, and engendered a feeling of intimate personal address. Verse poured from her pen in all manner of poetic forms and rhyming schemes. Her prose included articles on practical subjects as diverse as good manners, speech, procreation, political comment, and historical material (although the latter was never her forte), plus reviews of the lives and works of famous novelists, playwrights, and poets. She wrote a beautifully crafted, intimate, and comprehensive life story in the late 1850s, and her poems and articles appeared regularly in many of the Utah newspapers and magazines of the period: the Salt Lake Telegraph, Deseret News, the Woman’s Exponent, the Juvenile Instructor, Tullidge’s Quarterly Magazine, the Mountaineer, the Contributor, and the Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star.
She received many letters of support and gratitude during her lifetime, a number of poems were composed and published in her honor, and upon her death she was eulogized by her friends. Her gift of expression along with her own personal charisma endeared her to many, particularly the women of the LDS Church. A group of women including Emmeline B. Wells, Rachel Grant, Helen M. Whitney, Louise L. Richards, Emily H. Woodmansee, M. Isabella Horne, and Zina D. Young, as well as King’s daughter Louisa Spencer, met to memorialize her in an annual social gathering for a decade or more after her death in September 1886.

Life in England

King was born Hannah Tapfield in the university town of Cambridge, England, March 16, 1807, the third of four siblings (two older sisters and a younger brother, Samuel). Her father was the trusted land steward and house agent to Baron Francis Godolphin Osborne, second son of the fifth duke of Leeds, and when Hannah was very young the family moved a few miles south of Cambridge to live within the grounds of his country mansion, Gog Magog House in Stapleford, Cambridgeshire.

King’s autobiographical description of her early years and upbringing provide a useful insight into the development of her character. Although she had very little formal schooling, having been largely tutored at home by an intelligent mother, she was well read for a woman of her time and able to express her ideas and feelings extremely adeptly on paper, both
in prose and poetry, from a young age. One of her poems, *Letter to My Younger Brother*, written when she was thirteen, demonstrates an excellent command and use of language and meter, and a maturity of thought—particularly of moral and religious ideas—that one would not automatically associate with a girl of her age. One of her earliest books of poetry, *Poetic Flowerets*, was published when she was twenty. She was an avid diarist throughout the majority of her life and a prolific, almost compulsive letter writer: “At nine and ten I became a letter writer, and the thousands I have written in my long life would form a towering paper pillar.”

She was of a particularly sensitive, devoutly religious nature, and although given a thorough grounding by her parents from an early age in the doctrines and practices of High Anglicanism, she took such teachings very much more to heart than one might consider typical, even to her detriment during her adolescence. When a clergyman preached about “Hell and its concomitants,” Hannah wrote, “I feared I might be one of those lost proscribed beings! . . . Often would I arise in the night & kneeling by my bed Entreat the Lord.” This religious fear along with a natural tendency for “pensive melancholy feelings” led to a lengthy bout of severe depression during her teenage years.

Hannah became engaged at the young age of fourteen and was married in 1824 at age seventeen. This marriage put her comfortably in the middle class: her husband, Thomas Owen King, was the only son of a wealthy tenant farmer. The marriage was as much the product of the planning and contrivance of an ambitious mother as Hannah’s own desire for material security and an advantageous match. Hannah married despite her own serious reservations about her personal incompatibility with Thomas, who was seven years her senior. She later wrote:

> I think now that had I been associating with One I could have opened my Soul to, & he could have understood something of my feelings what a blessing—what an Eternal cement would have been such communion! But no—he never sought such communications, & I felt he could not understand them should I declare them unto him—so we were two in the regions of the Soul—& so we have Ever remained! yet he was as Kind to me as he Knew how to be, & got everything for me that could be got to do me good—had I asked for the moon I believe he would have made an attempt to get it!!! if looking at it and desiring it could have caused possession!—but I never had a desire that way!! I never thought of telling him my sorrows or my feelings! how strange! & he my Lover!—could I have done so I should have been saved years of suffering & agony & been bound to him by Eternal ties!

Thomas took over the running of his family’s 220-acre farm at Sawston, Cambridgeshire, on the death of his father in 1833. Thomas employed agricultural labourers, a shepherd, a gardener, and house servants. Hannah was
financially comfortable but suffered greatly when her first pregnancy ended in a stillbirth after a very difficult labor. She next had a baby girl who died at age fourteen months. Her next child was a girl who also died, and Hannah wrote of that experience:

My next accouchment brought the same struggle for life—but Mother & child lived—she was a splendid infant & was called Charlotte—she died at 4 months in all her beauty, of an affection of the brain—sad, sad was the desolation of my heart at her loss—it seemed torture to give me children & then take them thus—I was doubly Alone—but one may sip poison till it becomes a Kind of nutriment & cannot Kill?

King eventually had nine live births, but only four children—three daughters and a son—survived beyond their early youth. She taught them at home when they were small, objecting to boarding schools for ones so young; she hired a governess to take charge of the girls’ education when they were old enough for higher studies. King had progressive educational ideas for her daughters, and besides the girls learning to manage a household, they and their brother were taught dancing, drawing, music, French, and a number of scholastic subjects, the whole described by King in one of her life sketches as “a liberal education with accomplishments.” Her pride over her children’s educational achievements is reflected in her writings, and she noted particular strengths and weaknesses they exhibited. In time, King’s children entered boarding schools to complete their education.

While raising her children she did not set aside her literary interests and talent for writing, which were lifelong passions. She became a published author: “After some years of my married life I became a writer for the local papers and also wrote two books, one for my girls and the other for the boys. The Toilet\(^9\) and the Three Eras,\(^10\) dedicating them to each. These books were patronized by the aristocracy of England. I also wrote considerable poetry.”\(^11\) She also had a substantial correspondence with the English poetess Eliza Cook.

In her personal writings, King described social occasions and functions in her rural environment and the nearby ancient borough of Cambridge. Her brother was a professor of music and church organist in the town, and she reported on concerts and musical events she attended; of agricultural shows in central Cambridge; of a two-day visit to the town in 1847 of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and the celebrated Duke of Wellington; of a visit to Trinity College Library, designed by Sir Christopher Wren, to view a statue of her favorite poet, Lord Byron (“the tout ensemble is very beautiful, I thought it breathed, but I might have been mistaken!!”\(^12\); and of numerous other social and cultural events. Her literary interests included enjoyment of a whole variety of reading matter, including novels by popular...
authors of the day, and storing her mind with knowledge of the arts, history, and the lives of famous men and women, ancient and modern. In addition to reading Byron, she was a great admirer of Milton, Burns, Shakespeare, and Eliza Cook. Being in good financial circumstances, she was able to indulge her literary tastes in full.

During these years, Hannah came to accept her relationship with Thomas, writing, “The first year of my married life was the most unhappy to me—after that I philosophized & Cultivated happiness as a duty, and an imperative necessity, that my nature demanded, and in time I succeeded in a mighty degree!” But the couple remained deeply incompatible with regard to religion: Hannah with intensely devout feelings, and Thomas with a casual attitude—perhaps allied to a practical, down-to-earth turn of mind concentrating more on things of the here and now—that was much too deeply rooted to change. In later years, King commented in one of her letters to her son that for twenty years she had “left not a stone unturned to get him [Thomas] to be one with me in the Church of England,” albeit in this matter he had been “as immoveable as the hills!” King’s retrospective comment in her autobiography that “we were two in the regions of the Soul” could not have been more aptly expressed.

**Conversion and Emigration**

It was Hannah’s decisions with regard to religion that ultimately determined the whole course and direction of their family’s life, when in 1849 she began to manifest an interest in the generally vilified creed of Mormonism. The initial catalyst for her change of religious orientation from High Anglicanism to Mormonism—a monumental, truly radical shift of direction in belief and worship—was a discussion one evening in September 1849 with her dressmaker, Lois Bailey, a working-class Cambridge woman:

*She [Lois Bailey] requested me to read one of the books, which I did with much prayer. She brought me “Spencer’s Letters”, the Book of Mormon, Pratt’s “Voice of Warning” and “Divine Authenticity”. I read with the spirit and the understanding. I rejoiced daily. She alone was my teacher, my priestess. All went on in this way for fifteen months. At last in September 1850, I met through her agency Elder Joseph W. Johnson, missionary from America. I talked with him in my own house, one whole day. I thought he was the first minister I had ever seen who came up to my idea of a man of God.*

King and her daughter Georgiana were baptized on November 4, 1850, an act that brought upon them the immediate and entire opposition of the rest of their family and subsequently of most others who knew them. Daughter Louisa later wrote, “My Father nearly broken-hearted and our connections shamed and filled with grief—our old associates in life said ‘that the most
merciful verdict they could give was that Mrs. King and my sister had gone insane.”¹⁷ King’s parents were equally shocked, as King’s journal was not slow to report:

[Undated—latter part of November 1850] Had a letter from My Mother full of complaints about changing my religion, “had I become a roman Catholic she could have forgiven me—but these low people!—Was not the Savior and His disciples [sic] what the world would call low people no matter, he was the Son of God—and our Elder B[e] and Redeemer!—What can you say to that mother.¹⁸

Despite this opposition, in the next few years all four of King’s children became convinced and joined her in her new faith.

With regard to the pressing imperative for nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints to leave home and emigrate to the new Zion in Utah territory, King’s situation differed somewhat from most LDS converts of the time. The vast majority of them—80 to 90 percent—were poorer, working-class people¹⁹ who hoped for an improved standard of living once they arrived in the New World. By contrast, the King family were well-to-do, with a capacious farmhouse, land, an elevated position in society, and a well-established economic base generating an adequate income to provide many of the luxuries of life. In addition, King came from a particularly affectionate, close-knit family and had aged parents to whom she had extremely strong filial ties. Her brother was appalled by his sister’s change of faith and completely severed their formerly close relationship. Any move to emigrate would likely entail considerable financial loss and emotional upheaval, and Thomas King was entirely opposed to giving up the tenancy his family had farmed for generations. King, her children, and other Saints fasted and prayed that he would agree to emigrate. Under pressure from his wife and children to relinquish his farm and then being stricken with a serious illness, Thomas was “humbled and weakened as a child and gave consent to sell out and move to Utah.”²⁰

When King informed her parents of her plan, she noted their reaction:
April 8th [1852]. . . . My Father and Mother are apprized of our intended emigration, and my mother wrote to me this morning about it—such a letter!!!—Heighho! these letters cloud my Soul!—tho’ they do not bow me down quite as much as they used to do—that shews I am stronger—well I must leave all in the Hands of God—it is His business—I Know I mean to be right, and Know that Right is the motto of my Soul!—and ever has been—tho’ of course I am not perfect.21

The family uprooted and embarked in 1853 (with King then age forty-five) on the hazardous and lengthy journey to Utah, and hardship, sickness, and death dogged their path: the trip took the best part of a year of continuous travel; the vessel on which they made their transatlantic crossing was nearly shipwrecked midocean; Thomas and Hannah’s thirteen-year-old son was reduced by illness to a near-death state while crossing the plains; and their eldest daughter died of mountain fever eight days after their arrival in Salt Lake City. Both of King’s parents passed away in England within two years of her arrival in Utah—her mother reportedly of a broken heart—and, as far as can be ascertained, the breach with her brother never was repaired.

Settling in Utah

Thomas bought a small house in Salt Lake City and started building a larger one; he also invested in farmland, but their funds dwindled over the years, and Thomas was unsuccessful in generating much income from farming in the challenging, arid climate. Throughout these upheavals and a complete reversal of fortunes in her life, King remained firm to the course she had chosen, uncomplaining and thankful for her lot:

Janry 7th 1855 I have Journalized but little the past year—Time being at a premium with me here in this place, but I bear my testimony here in writing that I am rejoicing as Ever in the work of the Lord—I feel indeed and in truth that He has been my Father and my God, and never has the thought crossed my mind, that I wish I had not Given up my Home & come here or a regret that I have entered into covenant with him—no I rejoice that I had so much of His Spirit that I was enabled to see truth & embrace it, and tho’ I have daily laid upon the Altar of Sacrifice yet “All is well”—and tho’ I have been afflicted in many ways & have lost those who were formally around & about me & who aided in making my Heaven yet He has surrounded me with the purest & truest friendships that have been my solace—& has made a “silver lining” to the Clouds that have hovered over me.22

Her dedication is evident in an incident during the Utah famine in 1856, when a failed harvest the previous year led to a severe dearth and a general shortage of food for settlers in the territory. Although King was suffering privations that only a few years before would have seemed impossible (“On
my birthday 16th of March 1856—I had no breakfast, nor supper the previous night having no flour or bread”23), she donated most of her inheritance from her late father’s will: “Apl 14th 56 Went to Br Young—and gave the Legacy my Father left me to the Church reserving a small portion to make presents to my children—he was a good man and his money had a blessing in it to all.”24 It is certain that King and her family needed this money desperately at this time. But in the same spirit of self-sacrifice for the latter-day gospel that had led her to leave her affluent situation in England, King, now in the days of her extreme poverty, demonstrated once more that she was willing to lay her all on the altar of her religious faith.

**Personal Relationships**

King’s commitment to her beliefs led to friendship with Church leaders who provided practical assistance and moral support. Brigham Young took a particular interest in her well-being and sent supplies to help ameliorate her situation. On one of several such occasions, King wrote, “The Early part of this month (June 1856) B’ Young sent me 30 lbs of flour by his daughter Alice . . . she came lugging it in saying ‘Father had sent it.’”25 And in 1860, Young intervened on their behalf when the return on Thomas’s farming was not enough to cover his tax bills.26

Heber C. Kimball provided moral and spiritual support to lift King’s spirits and sense of self-worth, which she particularly appreciated in absence of a devout husband:

Monday May 5th 1856 Went quite unexpectedly to B: Kimball’s with Sister Spiking . . . B: Kimball talked Good and Kind to me. . . . I then rose . . . and was walking towards the door but he called me back—he stood in the middle of the room, and as I returned to him when he called me—he said in his Earnest way fixing those Eyes of his upon me, and slightly raising his Voice “Sister King, You shall walk right strait [sic] into the Celestial Kingdom—you shall wear a Celestial Crown, and I will be there and see it on your head”!!! Of course I was struck, and melted.27

Kimball also reassured her about the situation of her late father, with whom she had enjoyed a particularly close and loving relationship:

Saturday Aug.t 1st 1857—B.r Kimball sent for me to Sister Groesbecks, and spent 2 & ½ hours with me & her—we had a great talk he told me I was a daughter of Abraham and that my Father must have been a noble Man—I told him he was one of the nobles of the Earth—a good and pure man asked him if he thought my Father would be where I would be—he considered a few moments and then said—“Sister King, Your Father will Embrace the Gospel in the spirit world, and will be where you are, his words came with
power, and I burst into tears—he told me to dry my tears everything would be right, he was Very Kind, even polite.  

Not all of King’s feelings toward Church leaders were as positive as those for Young and Kimball, however: she wrote thinly veiled criticism of Young’s other counselor, Salt Lake City Mayor Jedediah M. Grant. Grant, a straight-speaking, often openly judgmental man, provided the main momentum for the Mormon “Reformation” in 1856–1857. King wrote:

B: Grant has done some strong preaching lately. . . . After this Conference—“The reformation” was instituted—principally by B: Grant thinking the people had become adulterous—Thieves, &c&c—it fairly raged—every Bishop had the “cue” given to him—and he rose up and lashed the people as with a Cato nine tails, the people shrunk—shivered—wept. groaned like whipt children—they were told to Get up in meeting & confess their Sins—they did so till it was sickening—and brought disease! . . . in the midst of it B: Grant was seized with a fearful sickness[,] [An] evil spirit seemed to be let loose upon him and had the Mastery—the Priesthood seemed powerless when they administered to him—he raved—had Visions, &c&c and at last “passed to that bourn from whence no traveller Returns”  

I do believe many in those times were frightened into praying & confessing sins they never committed—it was a fearful time for all—whether it did Good—or was instituted by the spirit of God is not for me to Judge I leave an open Verdict even in my heart of hearts—Only I Know it was a fearful Ordeal—and Fear is a slavish passion & is not begotten by the Spirit of God!—

In the midst of this period of reformation, Thomas King was finally baptized, on March 14, 1857, and Hannah was rebaptized on March 21. But little in Thomas’s life changed: he did not attend many meetings and evidently was not ordained to the priesthood. Over the following years, Hannah recorded relatively little of his personal and business activities, being more concerned with her children, Church, and social activities.
King was not by nature a critical person, although she was impatient at times with some people, particularly women, whom she saw as social aspirants trying unsuccessfully to ape the ways of the English upper classes. She was proud of her English middle-class credentials and felt that some of the people were attempting a subterfuge they could not sustain. On one occasion she revealed her prejudices:

[There is] of course a little Vanity and Folly—and that one sees in the Tabernacle and every where—for the bulk of this people have been raised in poverty and ignorance they Emigrate here—and having [sic] been the Servants—and working people of the lands they came out of—they can begin on the first step of the Ladder—for that is where they have always stood—they gain wealth—and being ignorant—they are filled with Vanity & foolishness . . . yet they are perhaps not wicked—but they “feel their Oats” as the Grooms say—and they think dress & money makes Men & Women Ladies and Gentleman [sic]—out of such a stock grows a “shoddy” aristocracy—no more like the true one “than I to Hercules.”

King’s strong feelings about such matters were demonstrated again one afternoon during a social visit where she encountered two women who were critical of her native countrymen, giving rise to further observations about English Latter-day Saint immigrants in Utah:

Ap.l 22nd [1857] Spent the afternoon at Sister Orson Spencers’—met there, Sisters Benson and Sarah Pratt . . . but did not like the feeling of these Women—they want to be something—if they would be content to be what they are, or might be, they might be intelligent agreeable Women—They seem to hate the English but I felt, I was a check upon them—they dared not come out on that strain before me—so they Kept hinting—and dabbing—Silly Women they only exposed their ignorance, and ill-manners—and what do they Know of the English—or English society—One has never been in England—and the other—from her very position as a Mormon Elder’s wife could not move in that society that develops the National character—and the mass of the English that come here do not represent the Nation—they feel I am different and are rather in awe of me.

King retained more than a vestige of the class-consciousness of her native land and culture, a situation that led a number of her contemporaries to view her as “aristocratic” in bearing and disposition, although King was not a member of the aristocracy in England. Whatever her prejudices with regard to class, this in no way limited her ability to form friendships with people of every social status. She was by nature gregarious and warm-hearted, and for her the principle of friendship—especially with an inner circle of close confidantes—was one of the main supports and joys of her life.
One of many articles that Hannah Tapfield King wrote for her fellow Saints. This appeared in Woman’s Exponent 11 (November 15, 1882): 89.

MEMORY THE CURSE OR BLESSING OF EXISTENCE.

BY HANNAH T. KING.

November the fourth, 1882. Evening—as usual I am alone, and yet, not by any means alone, or lonely; my brain is all alive with a vision of the past; memory by her mystical power draws back with soft and gentle hand a curtain, and a marvelous panorama opens to my view. I behold a river, yes the classic waters of the Cam roll at my feet; a group of kind and watchful friends are around me not the friends of my youth, not my blood relations, no, they are away; afar off in every sense of the word; they are not cognizant of the step I am about to take. 'Twould have been vain to apprise them, they would not have condescended even to listen to me; so after mature reflection, I decide to take the step that I feel will revolutionize my life.

Alone! Yet no, not all alone, one loving, clinging spirit—“bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh,” and far more still, twin spirit of my soul holds my hand and whispers, “let me go with you, I desire with all my heart to go with you.” I knew that request was not made lightly, or unadvisedly, and at that awfully grand moment of my life, when about to pass into the womb of waters it felt so sweet to have something of my own, on which to press even a finger, that I assented and we two entered the waters of baptism together. This is the scene that memory holds up to me this night; and all is as vivid to my mind, as when it actually took place. Every word, every look, the whole scene is as it were photographed upon my heart and brain, never to be erased.

An American Elder administered the rite of baptism by immersion, we were verily buried in the liquid grave, and came forth most certainly to a new life, temporally, spiritually and eternally! Then appeared the Holocaust, but strength was given, the sacrifice was laid upon the altar! and the ordeal was passed! Thirty-two years this day have revolved over me since these scenes were enacted, during which I have passed the “changes and chances” that inevitably follow:
dark days, privations, bereavements, sickness almost unto death, and all the ordeals that a true Latter-day Saint has to pass through. Yet I have never seen the first moment, that I regretted the step I then took or wished that I could recall the act, or go back to my former state or associations. My former life had decidedly been a happy and a prosperous one, yet through all there was a vacuum, but through all the reverse of scenes described above, I have never felt a vacuum! even when I could not help suffering under reverses, still there was no sigh, no groan of regret, or the least desire to return. The language of my soul was on! on! there is sunshine behind this cloud. I felt a power sustaining me, softening the rough path to me, raising up friends to comfort and support me, even to a romance; I met them on the ship, on the steamer, in the encampments, crossing the wild prairies, met them In the city, they walked and talked with, me, comforted and invigorated my weakened system, and were to me as “An angel in the way.” If one was taken, another came to supply the vacant place, and so life progressed till like a child learning to walk,—I walked out of “leading strings,” and felt I could stand alone with my God! Death took some of the most efficient, but I grasped “the rod of iron,” and found I was “coming up from the wilderness leaning on the arm of the Beloved.” Him, whose name I took upon me at the waters of baptism, and hence all was well—is well to-day. The kind and loving voices of other days are away in the eternities; but still kind friends are around me; and I am happy and contented. I have grown out of babyhood, childhood, and youth, and have attained a degree of maturity, being thirty-two years old at six o’clock this evening in the Church of Jesus Christ, and the embryo kingdom of God upon the earth. I rejoice in this grand Latter-day work, when “all things shall be gathered in one.” “One Lord, one faith, one baptism.” The Lord said, “gather me together a people who have made a covenant with me, by sacrifice.” Yes, sacrifice is the sign of the covenant, but “the oil of gladness” is ever round, and about the altar—and the Spirit of the living God sustains and animates the votary of Latter-days. There is through all, a peace, joy, a satisfaction that the religions of the world cannot give, or their recipients enjoy. Many that have come into the Church poor; have become rich, but if they still retain their “first love” of the Gospel of Christ, they would lay all down as dust on the
Friendship with Brigham Young

It is clear from King’s journal that once she learned of the LDS doctrine of sealing, she was concerned because her husband was not willing to meet the requirements for participation in a sealing ceremony. On October 7, 1855, she wrote:

I took a review of my situation—still linked with the Husband of my childish days—the Father of my children—One who has ever loved me—whose love brought him here with us—who in this Very sickness was my watchful Nurse procuring all for me—his limited means allowed him—performing many of the menial offices of the House—and doing all he could for my comfort—Can I forsake this Man? No—my heart, with all its feelings & sentiments answers No! . . . if need be I am ready to wait for his sake—till the way opens—I am ready to fulfill my Church of England covenant “till death us do part” then I am free as air—but I do not feel to lose one jot or tittle of my salvation! No I must make my calling and Election Sure—I must have the sealing ordinance abiding upon me—then I shall be at rest so far—but Who?—and when—and how shall these things be? “God will provide[”]—and I throw Myself into His Hands! 34

With this dilemma in the back of her mind, it is possible she looked to Church leaders for a solution from her early days in Utah, but it was not until 1872 that she was sealed to Brigham Young. 35 This sealing was to provide a connection in the next life only, and she never lived with Young, even after Thomas died. The sealing was probably known only to those
who were present at the ceremony in the Endowment House, and it is uncertain how much Thomas King knew about it.

King’s relationship with Brigham Young developed over the years from an initial friendship into mutual respect and affection. As noted above, King donated money to the Church, and Young helped the King family at times. Hannah recorded social events that she attended at which Young was present, for example:

July 4th [1856] Grand Celebration here—in the Evening a Ball & supper—I went with Claudius & Louisa—At supper B: Young arose, as we entered the supper room, and asked me to “honor him by sitting beside him”—I did so—and became “the observed of all observers” . . . I[n] the course of the Evening B: Young asked me to dance with him—of course I accepted—home at 1 OC—This day to be remembered as a happy One.

She wrote a considerable amount, mostly poetry, about Young during his life and continued with tributes on his death in 1877. A poem published in 1883 is likely a private reminiscence about Young:

**LORD THOU KNOWEST!**

There is a love that God may see,
But must be hid from mortal eyes,
Because it human law defies;
Because of earth it cannot be.

Wisdom, prudence, veneration too,
All mingled in that humble friend,
Whose sole appointment was to tend
His queen!—for such devotion love was due.

He served her husband, by reflection, he
Shone into her heart—until
He earned a niche that he himself should fill,
That by her gratitude unveiled should be.
For queenship, who would sigh! to be  
Watched and judged, the inner life to scan,  
And all within the court of erring man!  
Thou knowest Lord! we wait for thy decree.  

Latter Years

Over the next decades, King was busily involved with her children (including her son, Thomas Owen King, who was a Pony Express rider and served a mission to England), and she continued to write prolifically. Hannah's husband Thomas King died in 1874, and during the remaining twelve years of her life, King continued to write poetry and essays and also joined with others in defending polygamy. Among her better known works is a pamphlet, *The Women of the Scriptures*, which appeared in 1878; a book of poetry, *Songs of the Heart*, published a year later; and a long poem about the history of the Church, *An Epic Poem*, written in 1884, although by far the greatest bulk of her work that popularized her and so endeared her to people appeared in the pages of newspapers or magazines:

It has been my delight to write for the Saints since I have lived in Salt Lake City, and my reward has been their love and rich appreciations of my writings. I have been a constant writer for the *Woman's Exponent*, a paper got up and entirely carried on by the women of our people. President Young desired me to write for it and I have done so with pleasure to the best of my ability in prose and verse.

King died on September 25, 1886, at the age of seventy-nine. Although few would recognize the name of Hannah Tapfield King today, her life story is indeed one worth knowing. Her descriptions of her early years, conversion to the Latter-day Saint gospel, and subsequent events that were to revolutionize her life and thinking

Hannah Tapfield King, circa 1870. Courtesy Dorothy Brewerton and Carolyn Gorwill.
form a fascinating chronicle of an LDS convert willing to relinquish everything of worldly value and a life of relative comfort to emigrate to a distant and challenging environment in ardent pursuit of deeply held religious convictions.

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3. This gathering, held on the afternoon of August 15, 1898, was reported in “Hannah T. King Remembered,” Woman’s Exponent 27 (September 1, 1898): 34.


5. Hannah Tapfield King, “Autobiography of Hannah Tapfield King,” Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 11–12; King’s handwritten autobiography, completed in 1858, includes quotations from her numerous journals, letters, and other documents (extremely few of which have survived). Citations preserve the original’s spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Excerpts of the autobiography are published in Dorothy Brewerton, Carolyn Gorwill, and Leonard Reed, The Songstress of Dernford Dale: The Life of Poetess, Diarist and Latter-day Saint Pioneer Hannah Tapfield King (privately published), this one on page 29.


9. Hannah King, The Toilet; or a Dress Suitable for Every Station, Age, and Season (Sawston, Cambridgeshire: privately published, 1838). Among the names of subscribers listed at the front of the work are Lady Broadhead, Honorable Lady Catharine Palace, Honorable Miss Beresford, The Lady Godolphin, academics, several clergymen, and many others.

10. Hannah King, The Three Eras; or, a Mother’s Gift (Sawston, Cambridgeshire: privately published, 1846).
14. Quoted from a partially surviving letter, written c. 1862. The first page (perhaps others) is missing and the exact date unknown. It is currently in the possession of King’s great-great-granddaughter Dorothy Brewerton of Bountiful, Utah.
19. A statistical breakdown of British Latter-day Saints social status, based on LDS shipping records, is in Phillip A. M. Taylor, Expectations Westward: The Mormons and the Emigration of Their British Converts in the Nineteenth Century (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), 149–51. Taylor’s study found that approximately 11 percent of British LDS emigrants during the years 1840–69 were middle class; the remainder were mainly working class. Taylor’s study does not include every year during this time, however. He states that the “years usefully covered are 1841, 1843, 1848–57, 1859–69” (150).
24. Spencer, “Biography of Louisa King Spencer,” 283. The actual will of Peter Tapfield, Hannah King’s father, has never been found.
26. On March 16, 1860, Hannah wrote to Brigham Young that they were planning to sell their home to meet the tax bill and wondered if he would purchase it. Young arranged matters so that they could retain ownership in the home and continue to reside there. Brigham Young, Office Files 1832–1878, Incoming General Correspondence, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, cited in Brewerton, Gorwill, and Reed, Songstress of Dernford Dale, 119.
29. While touring the northern settlements of Utah preaching the Reformation message, Jedediah M. Grant contracted pneumonia and died on December 1, 1856. Grant was nicknamed “Brigham’s Sledgehammer” because of his fiery speeches during the Reformation, in which inordinately condemnatory language was used. Hannah’s negative feelings about him are somewhat reminiscent of her horror caused by the sermons of John Charles Williams, an Anglican low church curate who during her teenage years had petrified her and contributed significantly to a period of intense depression with his “hellfire and damnation” sermons. Grant may well have spirited up some of these fears again with the type of language he used, which would hardly have endeared him to Hannah.
33. A newspaper at the time of Hannah’s death referred to her “naturally aristocratic disposition.” “Obituary of Sister Hannah T. King,” Deseret News, September 29, 1886, 13. Other contemporaries viewed her similarly. In remarks made at Hannah’s funeral Orson F. Whitney stated that she was “possessed of a refined soul, a cultivated mind, and surrounded by the comforts and luxuries of life. . . . numbering among her acquaintances many in the upper walks of society in her native England.” “Sister King’s Funeral,” Woman’s Exponent 15 (October 15, 1886): 76.
35. Hannah recorded in her Book of Common Prayer and Bible the following: “Received my Second Endowments Sunday Decr 8th 1873 [probably 1872, since December 8, 1873, was a Monday]—Br Wells anointed & blest me President Young officiating—Sister Lucy D. and Sister Zina Young Present—Joseph F [initial uncertain] and Br WOODRUFF Present [—] Hannah Tapfield King.” She did not record her sealing to Brigham Young and only once in known extant documents used the name “Hannah T. K. Young”: in a letter to President Young on June 30, 1875. Brigham Young, Office files 1832–1878,Incoming General Correspondence, Church History Library, cited in Brewerton, Gorwill, and Reed, Songstress of Dernford Dale, 137. Hannah’s obituary makes no mention of her sealing to Brigham Young.