

**A Modern Acts of the Apostles,
1840: Mormon Literature in the
Making**

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Literature has a powerful and perennial hold on human attention and a central place in human life. We value it, I believe, because it gives unusually moving and memorable expression to our most significant experiences, including experiences in the mind. And we value most those expressions in language which most fully combine effective form and important content: we value significant events and feelings and ideas that are significantly expressed, that is, expressed so as to affect our feelings, including our moral response to those important events, feelings, and ideas.

Among both writers and critics, one of our most admired and continually influential works of literature is the Bible. People from all nations and ways of life—people of all degrees of education and wealth and social class—have loved it and had their lives transformed by it. The Bible is one of a rather small group of books appreciated by both the literary establishment and the common people. Some of the most appreciated parts of the Bible have been the acts and letters of the Apostles, which give us the crucial story, movingly expressed, of the remarkable adventures and teachings of those who established the foundations of Christianity and thus profoundly influenced the ideas, the feelings—the lives—of a large portion of the people on earth who lived after them.

In 1839–40 eight modern Apostles, claiming the same authority and purpose as Peter, Paul, James, and John, embarked on a mission to carry the restored gospel of Jesus Christ across the sea to the most advanced and powerful nation in the Western world—much as the ancient Apostles had done in their journeys to Greece and Rome. And the modern Apostles, like the ancient, gave sermons and wrote diaries and letters. In other words, they produced literature. I believe it is good literature; and though, as with the ancient texts, it will take some time before that literature is collected and its chaff winnowed away and the rest properly appreciated, I believe that literature will eventually stand as a modern Acts of the Apostles—a valued part of Mormon literature that will be increasingly valuable to the world.

The process of selection and evaluation has begun, but so far mainly historians have taken up the task. Ronald Esplin, Scott Kenney, Elden Watson, Ronald Walker, and others have published some letters and diaries, while James Allen, Malcolm Thorp, Thomas Alexander, Richard Jensen,

and others have helped us understand the cultural and historical context for understanding and appreciating this literature. Under Allen's leadership, a volume of the writings is now being prepared as part of the activities of the sesquicentennial celebration of the first modern apostolic journey to England in 1837. It is time to begin to appreciate these writings critically.

I will concentrate here on the letters and diaries of four of the Apostles who went on the second apostolic journey to England, literature written mainly in 1840. I have chosen passages that give some idea of the quality that occurs in writers of a great variety of skills and educational backgrounds, who use a minimal variety of genres—formal and informal letters, daily-kept diaries, reflective reminiscences, and remembered sermons. I will need to try to develop some critical principles in the process, because we still are handicapped for want of language and theory to deal with literature other than *belles lettres*. We generally know what makes a short story or poem good, but what about a letter or sermon that moves us? Can we say why? Is it the form or the content? Our usual categories of form—texture, cohesion of imagery, mythic and symbolic power, subtlety of point of view—do not seem to apply, and the content has an unusual relation to reality compared to the purely imaginative, fictive modes. Does the account of a death, or a courageous decision, or a visitation of angels affect us differently, seem even more powerful though less “beautifully” expressed, than a play or poem, because it is represented as actually happening to a fellow human being, perhaps one of our ancestors? And is that difference simply sentimentality, which we have all learned to despise? Perhaps some examples can help us approach these difficult and important questions.

The first apostolic mission was a remarkable success, producing approximately fifteen hundred converts in less than a year. But after Elders Heber C. Kimball and Orson Hyde returned to America, there was not much developing vitality and, by conscious design, no emigration. With surprising audacity, Joseph Smith had sent those two Apostles during a time of trouble in Kirtland when common sense would have suggested keeping his strongest supporters close. But again in 1839, just after the Church had been forcibly expelled from Missouri and was lying exhausted on the malarial banks of the Mississippi, Joseph, in what must have looked like folly, sent his closest and strongest leaders to England. I believe he did so because of his prophetic expectation of a transfusion of British blood, an inpouring of people with faith and skills that would save the Church and send it on its way to build a kingdom in the West.

The mission did not begin well. In early August, John Taylor departed, leaving his wife, Leonora, and three small children in a derelict log cabin that was part of old Fort Des Moines in Montrose, across the Mississippi from the future Nauvoo. He and Wilford Woodruff were the only Apostles

able to start on time. Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball were still too ill to walk when they left a month later, just a few days after Leonora wrote to John on 9 September. I include part of her letter because of its qualities (especially its detailed directness of emotion and fearless honesty) and the reminder it provides that the Apostles were matched by great and articulate women in the eternal partnerships that were their marriages:

This has been a distressed place since you left, with Sickness. Almost evry individual in evry Family sick; . . . My poor little Joseph has had chills and fever twice; this is his well day. Sister Orson Prat[’s] Baby is dead. She died on Sunday. The day following we were expecting Joseph would die but the Lord spard my dear Child in answer to Prayer. Mary Anne is well and I keep upon my Feet grunting about. . . .

Brother [Brigham] Young Family are all sick, him and all. The[y] could not get a drop of watter. I feched them several Pails. Brother [Alanson] Ripley and I were there the other day [and] Brother Young said it was a Greivous imposition that the[y] could not have the Room I was in. I made answer I did not know where to go. I did not like to intrude upon a Family and I was tired of it. He said he would lie in the Street if he was me before a Family should be situated as theres was, that Mrs. Young was Sick. The first I heard of it, I immediately got a strange Man that was here to move my things into Sister [Sarah] Prats Room where I now am. . . .

Pray write soon and often to me My Dear John. I never needed more grace, patience or your prayers than I do at present. . . . I am waiting for Brother W. Smith . . . to make his House more comfortable and then I shall move there until my place is prepared, if I get anny. If I dont Sister Woodruff says I shall live with her, I believe her House is not up. If I do we can croak together. I do feel thankfull to the Lord my health is as good as it is. . . .

I walked below Mr. Bissels to Night, looking for the Cow where you used to go with me and felt that I was alone. But if we suffer to promote the cause of our Blessed Lord it will end in J[oy] which no Man taketh from us. We are separated for a short time but I hope we shall yet meet to part no more for ever.

Dear little Joseph saw Brother [Abraham?] Smoot on Sunday and thought it was you. He Jumpt of[f] my knee, ran to him, and clung to his Legs with so much delight you would have pitt’y’d the dear Lamb. . . . I found rest, comfort and delight in Praying with my dear little ones before we left our house, but now that is over for the pressent. Brother Ripley is very kind and says I shall have a house but he cannot make one and it is hard to get one. I spoke to him about what B. Young said. He told me he dreaded it worse than death his speaking to me but I must not mind it, he was sick and fretful. I tell evry one I left the Room on account of Sister Young’s confinement that speaks of it. I leave him to settle that business with my Father who has promised to take care of me and mine.¹

As Ronald K. Esplin has noted, about three weeks later, still without hearing from her husband, Leonora turned the letter sideways and wrote an addition at right angles across the original letter, including the following:

My darling Joseph has been at the point of Death, he has had Fever and Bowel complaint and brought so low that I did not hear the sound of his voice for four days. Yesterday his Fever left him. He is better to day but very sick. Still no one expected he could live. Bless the Lord I begin to hope he may be spard. I have not had my Clothes of[f] for five nights. I have watcht by him alone all the time. I cannot tell the sorrow of my Heart at the thoughts of loseing my sweet Child.²

In the meantime, Elder Taylor had become extremely sick on the journey across Indiana, so ill his companions had to leave him at a tavern, where after three weeks he wrote Leonora on 19 September, detailing his attempts to travel while violently ill and his eventual succumbing to rest and a doctor's care. He concludes:

I have got clear of my fever and am fast recovering—i[t] brought me however to the gates of death several times. It laid hold of me like a strong man armed and I was led to quail beneath the power of the adversary for I believe his hand was in it—You may ask me how I am going to prosecute my journey, with my trunk a distance of 300 miles or upwards by land, without means. I do not know, but one thing I do know, that there is a being who clothes the lillies of the valley and feeds the ravens and he has given me to understand that all these things shall be added and that is all I want to know. He laid me on a bed of sickness and I was satisfied. He has raised me from it again and I am thankful. He stopped me on my road and I am content. When my way is open to proceed I shall go on my way rejoicing. If he took me I felt that it would be well. He has spared me and it is better. The Lord does all things well. Bless his holy name Oh my soul and forget not all his mercies.³

These letters, between two people deeply in love with each other, and deeply devoted to their children and their faith, reveal the most basic and important human qualities—not always, though sometimes, in the most elegant language, but always with moving honesty, humor, and clear-sighted vision and fresh expression. And those, I believe, are the universal qualities of good literature.

John Taylor recovered enough to proceed to Kirtland, where Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball caught up with him. Brother Brigham, who was apparently not told how much he had offended Leonora, records in his journal that the Brethren met in the temple:

Brother Kimball opened the meeting by prayer; I then annointed brother Taylor with pure sweet oil, and pronounced such blessings as the Spirit gave utterance. Brother Taylor then arose and prayed for himself. Brother Turley, one of the Seventies, was annointed by D. S. Miles, one of the Presidents of Seventies which was sealed by loud shouts of hosanna; then their feet were washed and the meeting closed.⁴

Brigham Young's growing self-confidence as an apostolic leader, though still mixed with his sense of his roughness as a divine instrument and his need for further polishing, is revealed in another entry from his journal as the group proceeded across Lake Erie toward New York:

The lake was so rough that no boat came into port until the 26th, when we went on board the steamboat Columbus. . . . The wind rose about one o'clock in the morning. I went upon deck and felt impressed in spirit to pray to the Father, in the name of Jesus, for a forgiveness of sins, and then I felt to command the winds to cease, and let us go safe on our journey. The winds abated, and I felt to give the glory and honor and praise to that God who rules all things.⁵

In New York the Apostles pooled their resources so that some could go on while Elders Young and Kimball stayed for a while to raise money for their passage. Elders Taylor and Woodruff arrived in Liverpool in early January, met with the mission presidency in Preston, then immediately separated to begin their ministries—Elder Woodruff going into the Potteries, an area of central England, and Elder Taylor returning to Liverpool with Joseph Fielding. John Taylor was thirty-one, a native Englishman and former Methodist preacher, with a direct spiritual and emotional clarity and power similar to the other Apostles, but gifted (as the letter I have quoted indicates) with a rather urbane articulateness. Except for a few months' teaching in Ireland and on his wife's native Isle of Man, he spent 1840 in Liverpool, building a strong body of Saints and a support system for what became the center for Mormon emigration and printing and eventually the administration of the British Mission.

In a letter to Leonora on 30 January 1840, in which he copied part of his diary and reported on his impressions of English life in the great Victorian industrial city of Liverpool, Elder Taylor also reveals the nature and quality of his preaching and the response the Apostles were beginning to receive. As he visited the Saints still remaining from the 1837 mission, he says he was "much pleased and edified at the kindness and love manifested by the brethren and sisters and with their simple unadorned manner." But he also writes of his

peculiar feeling at seeing [member's] wife after dinner leave the house her husband (a shoemaker) and children to work in a factory (a practice very prevalent in this and other manufacturing towns) thus breaking up those social endearments that unite the family. It makes my heart bleed to see these things. When will the earth cease to mourn.⁶

On Sunday, 26 January, Elder Taylor had gone with Joseph Fielding to a chapel of "Aitkenites," where Fielding's brother-in-law was the preacher. But that relative was away, and so instead they "heard a young man preach who seemed very devoted, lamented over the state of the professing Church, prayed for the blessing of the Holy Ghost and looked for the coming Kingdom of Christ." These were obviously what were called "seekers," dissenters from the official Anglican church, or in turn from one of the dissenting groups, who had turned back to the New Testament and to basic, primitive Christian beliefs and practices and hopes—and who thus were

remarkably well prepared to receive the restored gospel. Elder Taylor felt a great desire to share “the glorious things of the Gospel” in response to the young man’s expressed hope and asked if he could address a group of this sect’s class leaders and preachers after the service. Following is his sermon as he later remembered it:

Gentlemen friends & bretheren—I have listened with deep interest to the things that I have heard this morning. I have observed with peculiar emotions the deep anxiety the fervent prayer and the strong solicitude that is manifested by you for the obtaining of the Gift of the Holy Ghost. I have been pleased with the correct views that you entertain in regard to the situation of the Church & of the World & as you believe in baptism & laying on of hands . . .—so do we—Bretheren & friends we are humble followers of Jesus Christ & are from America. I have lately arrived in this place have come a distance of 2000 miles without purse or scrip and testify to you bretheren that the Lord has revealed himself from Heaven & put us in possession of those things that you are so anxiously looking for & praying that you may receive (Glory to God was shouted by many present & great emotion manifested) that thing has taken place which is spoken of by John in the revelations & I saw another angel flying in the midst of Heaven having the everlasting gospel to preach &c. Reve. 14. This gospel has got to be proclaimed to every nation kindred people & tongue & we the Servants of God are come to this City to warn the inhabitants of their approaching danger & to call upon them to repent & be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins & they shall receive the Gift of the Holy Ghost.—Brethern & Friends I feel an anxious desire to deliver this testimony—I feel the word of the Lord like fire in my bones & am desirous to have an oppertunity of proclaiming to you these blessings that you are looking for—that you may rejoice with us in those great & glorious things which God has revealed for the salvation of the world in these last days & if it would be consistent with your feeling I should be glad of an oppertunity of speaking in your Chapel this afternoon next week or any time when it would be convenient for you—Many present rejoiced, others wept, some were jealous & angry.⁷

Elder Taylor then added this fascinating report to Leonora of the speech he arranged to give the next Sunday to a congregation of three hundred:

I preached from Jude upon the faith that was once delivered to the Saints. I spoke upon the desire that had been manifested by men in different ages to reform—that Luther, Malancthon, Calvin, Wesley, Whitfield & others since them had tried to bring about the ancient order of things & that however laudible their attempt might have been they had failed—that there was neither love, unity, power, nor any blessings now in existence that existed among the Ancient Saints that many had it in their hearts to pray for the ancient order & wished they had ancient Methodism Presbyterianism &c., but we would now see what kind of Gospel that Ancient Saints had & be governed by it.—I then shewed what the gospel was as presented by Peter, Paul, Phillip &c.—began the day of Pentecost &c. spoke of the Order, Spirit, Doctrine, Ordinances, Gifts, Blessings &c. of the gospel and shewed that if it was true then, it was the privilege to enjoy these things. It was ours now to possess as great blessings through the same gospel—that as many of them had been

praying for the ancient faith the Lord had answered their prayers & sent us his servants to testify to them that God had restored these things— . . . that the Lord had sent us to baptize and called upon them to repent & be baptized they may make it known to us after the congregation was dismissed. There was great emotion in the meeting, many wept, others rejoiced & praised the Lord. The spirit of the Lord indeed was with us & bore testimony to what we said & I plainly saw that it was the power of God & not the wisdom of man—that I could do nothing unless the spirit of God bore testimony to that word. After meeting a young man came to me and told me that the Lord had showed these things to him in a vision. He rejoiced & said that he would be baptized. A young woman came to me & wept & said that she knew it was the truth, the power of God & the word of God.—Several said that they believe we were Servants of God & wanted to obey the Gospel.⁸

As Elder Taylor reminded this group, many across England were looking for the ancient order of things, even an “ancient Methodism Presbyterianism &c.” The Apostles had their most remarkable success in 1840 among a group who in that search had broken away to become “Primitive Methodists” and then again splintered off into the “United Brethren,” centered one hundred miles south of Liverpool in Herefordshire.

Wilford Woodruff, as he recorded in his journal and testified throughout his life, was “led by the Spirit of the Lord,” to the United Brethren of Herefordshire.⁹ He began his work in January in the heavily industrialized area between Liverpool and Herefordshire that produced English china and pottery for the world and was therefore called “The Potteries.” The area also produced a hellish landscape and way of life for the English laborers who left their farms to find a better life but found a worse. Later in 1840 Elder George A. Smith described this area in a letter, thus:

About 70,000 persons obtain a good living when there is employment but vast numbers are now out of work, in consequence of the depression in trade; consequently, in a state of starvation. I have seen more beggars here in one day than I saw in all my life in America. I have seen delicate females gathering manure to get a living for their famishing children.¹⁰

Elder Woodruff saw and later described the same area as he traveled from the Potteries through Birmingham on the way to Herefordshire:

I never saw any thing that comes so near the description of the Lake of fire & Brimstone Spoken of by the Revelator John as several miles of that country for it is one universal mass of coal pits & Iron mines & while thousands of human beings are under ground at work in the midst of tim, Brimston, sulpher, Gas & cole &c. the whole face of the earth & heavens air & horizon men, women & houses, are filled & covered with the composition of fire, cinders, Gas, sut [soot], & smooke of their misery & labours that assended up out of their piles, firmnesses, & pitts from day to day & from year to year.¹¹

The Spirit led Elder Woodruff out of this hell to the lovely hills west of Ledbury and to “Hill Farm,” home of John Benbow, brother of a member

of the Church Elder Woodruff had met back in the Potteries when he first arrived in January. John and his wife Jane were well-to-do tenant farmers and respected members, probably the founders, of the United Brethren, who had formed two conferences of hundreds of families within walking distance of Ledbury. These “seekers” were already careful Bible readers, committed to fundamental New Testament principles of personal piety and individual religious choice and lay leadership, and they were open to new revelation and the announcement of divine authority the Apostles brought. The Benbows were baptized; then the group’s leader, Thomas Kington; then many of its lay preachers, who immediately began to spread the word to others of the group. Soon hundreds were ready for baptism, and Wilford Woodruff was overwhelmed by the administrative, and even the basic physical, problems: “I cannot do the work alone,” he wrote Willard Richards, and a few days later added, “It has put me at times to my wits end to know what to do with so many places of preaching and preachers.”¹² But his journal, kept faithfully, reveals a wonderfully sensitive and balanced, as well as committed and harried, missionary. He is an intense observer of detail and a self-conscious reflector on the meaning of things. He includes whole chapters of background history of the places he visits, measures the buildings exhaustively, and reads history and travel accounts (Mosheim, Reverend Joseph Wolff). In the midst of the pressure and excitement of his success in Herefordshire, he takes time out for an afternoon spent meditating on top of a prominent hill, capped by Roman fortifications and overlooking five shires, that stands just north of Ledbury and about four miles from Benbow’s farm, where he was staying:

[May] 11. A visit on the Herefordshire Beacon which is the South part of Malvern Hill.

After having my mind prepared for a lonely walk & meditation by reading P. P. Pratts remarks upon the “eternal duration of matter,” I commenced assending this noted hill upon the south side of it & after arising several hundred feet I came to the top of an old ancient entrenchment about one mile in length reaching round all of this part of the hill & meeting together. Then after rising another hundred feet I entered another Intrenchment like the one below & after this another & thus Intrenchment lay above Intrenchment untill I reached the top of the hill . . . from 10 to 1500 feet in highth & while surveighing the surrounding Country I could also behold the deep Intrenchments below me which it is supposed were flung up nearly a thousand years since & was capable of holding hunderds of thousands of persons which was the resort of the Romans in the times of their wars. These hills are altogether bare without timber but covered with grass which is grazed by sheep & asses. But I soon drew my thoughts from the busy rabbit, sheep, & asses to the solemn reflections which the ravages of time presented before me. O! Malvern thy lofty Hill bares up my feet while mine eyes take a survey of thy deep intrenchments. Thy mighty bulwarks, which have trembled by the roar of cannon, the clash of arms, & din of war has reeched around thy brow & died

away in the vale beneath, while the blood of many a roman & Englishman too, have washed thy brow & soaked thy soil while they have fallen to rise no more. They sleep in death & time has earth'd them all & they are forgotten and blotted from the history & memory of man. Notwithstanding O! Malvern thou has been the Ark or refuge for thousands in the time of trouble or war.

Yet Willford is the ownly solitary soul that treads thy soil this day, & he alone bends his knee upon the highth of thy summit in the midst of the Clouds to offer up the gratitude of his heart unto that God who will soon level all hills exhalt all valies & redeem the earth from the curse of sin & prepare it for the abode of the Saints of the Most High.

I retired from the hill into the vale reflecting upon the rise, progress, decline, & fall of the empires of the earth, & the revolutions which must still transpire before the winding up scene & the comeing of Christ.

I preached at Candle light at Brother John Allard at Windpoint & had the spirit of God & Baptized 4 & confirmed them. I spent the night at Mr Joseph Symons. Distance 5 mil.¹³

Elder Woodruff's journal reveals a person who is engaging, even boyish, in his astonishment at his own success and joyous directness about himself. He comments often, "I had the Spirit of God & a good time."¹⁴ He shares his dreams, which are almost humorous—they are so often about catching fish, an obvious symbol of the work of his ministry. But once, while still in the Potteries, he reports, "I dreamed that I saw men & children killed to be eat because of the soreness of a famine."¹⁵ While in Herefordshire he tells of a boy of fifteen who is becoming notorious for running barefoot behind the stage each day, over eighty miles in twelve hours, "to get a living by receiving what money the passengers saw fit to give him about one shilling per day."¹⁶

Such images and sympathies—sharply reminiscent of Charles Dickens, who was writing his devastating accounts of Victorian England at this very time—appear in the other letters and diaries. All these Apostles were young (most in their early thirties), deep-feeling, and somewhat impulsive; and most came from working-class backgrounds, which made them extremely sympathetic to the plight of the English lower classes during this time of great economic stress in England's "hungry forties." They were not at all impressed with the distant, wealthy Anglican clergy nor the apparently unfeeling English royalty. George A. Smith, while working in London, tells in his diary of the "stupendous and beautiful structures" of St. Paul's Cathedral, etc., and the "gold and silver of the rich exposed to view" on Regent Street. But he reflects that "the day is not far distant when the riches and glory of the Gentiles would flee away."¹⁷ After visiting Queen Victoria's stables and seeing twenty-four beautifully matched cream-colored horses, he writes: "the beds they lie on are better than those which

half the people in London sleep upon.”¹⁸ Heber C. Kimball, in a letter to his wife, Vilate, describing this same visit to the queen’s palace and stables, is even more caustic: “You would be astonished to see the stir there is made over a little queen at the same time thousands Starving to deth fore a littel Bread.”¹⁹

But the most extensive and insightful critique was made by Brigham Young and Willard Richards, in a letter to Joseph Smith, 5 September 1840. Elder Young, at thirty-eight, was the oldest Apostle, and when he arrived in England in early April, he gathered the group together in a general conference. He ordained Elder Richards (who had been called and sustained earlier in America by Joseph Smith) and was in turn sustained as the quorum’s president, bringing it to nearly full strength and to organized condition for the first time in nearly two years. The next year was, I believe, the crucial year in the development of Brigham Young as the future successor to Joseph and also in the development of the quorum as a truly apostolic body, ready to take its scriptural place next to the First Presidency—a place, in fact, finally confirmed by Joseph for the quorum soon after it returned to Nauvoo.

Brigham Young was still the brash, tough, impetuous, uneducated, self-conscious frontiersman, but under the press of his great responsibilities and the experiences that followed as he fulfilled them, he changed rapidly. After hearing Woodruff’s report at the April conference, Brigham assigned the other Apostles various fields and responsibilities. Then, rather than remaining desk-bound at headquarters in Manchester, he immediately went to survey the remarkable harvest of converts in Herefordshire. As one result, after one month there he was able to borrow sufficient money to finance the projects the Apostles had approved, with much faith but no money, in April conference: publishing the Book of Mormon, a hymn book, and a magazine, and eventually beginning the emigration of Saints to Nauvoo that fall. The money was provided by two remarkable women prominent among the United Brethren, Jane Holmes Benbow and Hannah Pitt Kington, who lent their inherited dowries. Jane Benbow provided £250, over \$50,000 in our currency, and when Brigham later tried to repay her told him to use it to help others emigrate. The emigration, of course, started a stream that would eventually provide the labor and skill to build Nauvoo, the City of Joseph, and then to transport and rebuild it in the Salt Lake Valley—fifty thousand European Saints by the end of the century. Heber C. Kimball described this remarkable result in his colorful and original style: “We have witnessed the flowing of the Saints towards Zion; the stream has begun, and we expect to see it continue running until it shall have drained the salt, or the light, from Babylon, when we hope to shout hosanna home.”²⁰

Brigham did not go to Herefordshire simply to check things out as an administrator. He began immediately to experience what seems to have been crucial to his flowering as an Apostle and prophet, confirmation from the Lord of spiritual success and then the unique confidence that results from daring and successful venture in faith across a spectrum of supremely important life activities. The literature of those activities, when well expressed, is good and important. For instance, here are Elder Woodruff's accounts of some of the results that came from Brigham's involvement fully in the preaching, with all its risks and rewards:

May 14. I walked to Ledbury with Elder Young. From thence to Keysend Street and preached but amid much disturbance & as the meeting was about breaking up the congregation was besmeared with rotten eggs. . . .

June 3. A notable miracle was wrought by faith & the power of God in the person of Sister Mary Pitt of Dymok. She had been Confined 6 years to her bed, with the spine which mostly deprived her of the use of her feet & ankles, & had not walked for 11 years ownly with the use of cruches. Elders Young Richards & Woodruff lade hands upon her and rebuked her infirmity & her ankle bones received strength & she now walks without the aid of crutch or staff.²¹

Other than Brigham Young's longtime friend, Heber C. Kimball, the Apostle closest to Brigham was his own cousin, Willard Richards. Elder Richards had come with Elder Kimball on the first mission and had remained in England as part of the mission presidency. After he was ordained an Apostle, he accompanied Brigham and Wilford Woodruff down to Herefordshire, and later worked closely with him at headquarters in Manchester, coauthoring the excellent progress report sent to Joseph Smith in September as well as the essay "On Election and Reprobation," published in February 1841 in the *Millennial Star*. Brigham not only used Richards as his only coauthor but evidently felt more free to reveal his insecurities and sense of humor to him than any other Apostle. In a 10 June letter about mission business he intrudes with joking comments on current affairs and members they both know back in America, as well as comments like "Be careful not to lay this letter with the new testament writings. If you doe som body will take it for a text after the M[illennium] and contend about it." At the end he cautions, "Now my Dear Brother you must forgive all my nonsense and over look errors,"²² and in his next letter, 17 June, he ends, "Excuse erours, and mestakes. You must remember its from me."²³

In that 17 June letter, Brother Brigham moves with characteristic directness into an area that had caused Willard Richards some trouble before. After staying on in 1837, Willard had married an Englishwoman to whom he was much devoted, so much that he had been criticized by members of the Preston Branch for his wife's, as they supposed, too fancy dress and for his own solicitous attention to her, as they supposed at the neglect

of his ministry. Joseph Smith himself became involved in defending him.²⁴ Now, apparently in answer to a question about how the young Apostle, on a mission but, unlike the others, near to his home, could appropriately see the wife he sorely missed, Brigham writes,

Now as to the other question about Jennet thus saith the scripiter he that provideth not fore his own house hold has—but perhaps he has no house. Well has he got a family, yes he has got a wife. Then let him see that she is taken care of and her hart comforted—but stop say som why doe you not take care of your famely. I doe when circumstances doe not render it otherwise. There is a difference betwene 3 month jorny and a fue hours ride. Now I say to anser my own feelings com as soon as you can leve things there. This is not by revelation or commandment so put it not with the epistles of the new testament. But Brigham sayes come and see your wife.²⁵

The understanding and trust between Willard and Brigham made possible the long, strikingly insightful and articulate report they made on 5 September 1840. Brigham had been writing regularly to Joseph Smith, beginning with a report of his arrival and the first general conference, in his own hand and distinctive idiom, on 16 April. He had constantly asked for direction and approval of his reported actions, but he was not immobilized by the long mail delays. He had gone boldly ahead with decisions and the missionary work, and in the September letter he and Willard give an extended report of what the Apostles had learned:

The man who has only read the histories of the people of England, which we had seen before we left America, is liable to meet with some disappointments, at least, when he comes to make his introduction amongst them. This may in part be owing to the historian, for it is generally the case that what we find in history relates more particularly to the higher classes, in the nations, for England, unlike America, is divided into classes; many indeed, but they may all be comprised in three. . . . but the histories we refer to, have more generally treated of those of the higher order, or, at least, we find an acquaintance that those histories are now more applicable to the higher & middle classes than any other. But, perhaps a part may be owing to the great changes which have taken place in the nation, within a few years, with regard to money matters, which has caused a mighty revolution, in the affairs of the common people.

A few years since, and almost every family had their garden, their cow on the common & their pig in the sty, which added greatly to the comforts of the household; but now we seldom find either garden, cow or pig.

As we pass around among the country cottages & see the stone walls which are thrown down but more commonly the hedges in a decaying & mutilated state it is very naturally for us to inquire what have you here? & what the cause of this destruction? & we generally get but one answer, “a few years ago I had a flourishing garden on the spot you now see & it was surrounded with this hedge which was planted by my own hand; I had a cow of my own which fed on yonder common—I labored on my masters farm, & had plenty of time, morning and evenings, to till my garden, in which I raised scarce enough for my family, & every year I had a good pig, plenty to eat, &

we were happy, but our Lords & masters have become more avaricious, & are trying to get all they can themselves, & will hardly let the poor live. You see my landlord has made my garden into a meadow, & feeds his own cattle upon it; the Lord of the manor fenced in the common, so that I had no place to keep my cow & I was obliged to sell her; I killed my pig to prevent its starving. The small farms are united & made into large ones, so we could get nothing to do on the land. I have been obliged to go into the factory, with my wife & children, to get a morsel of bread;" or, "I have taken to handloom weaving, to keep my wife & little one from starvation." . . .

Manufacturing is the business of England. The cotton mills are the most numerous, the weavers will get from 6 to 10 shillings per week, the spinners something more. The handloom weavers have to work hard to get 6 shillings per week. Now after paying 2 or 3 shillings rent per week—1 shilling for coal, besides taxes of every kind, we might say, for smoke must not go up [the] chimney in England without a tax, light must not come in at the window without paying duties, many must pay from 1 penny to 6 pence per week for water, & if we should attempt to tell all we should want a government list, after paying all taxes what think you will a family have left for bread stuff?.

Add to this the tax on corn, which is a great share of the expense of the article, & what is left but starvation. . . . The poor are not able to keep dogs, & if they were they would have to pay from 8 shilling to 1£ per head per annum, tax. There are taxes for living and taxes for dying, insomuch that it is very difficult for the poor to get buried any how, & a man may emigrate to America & find a grave, for less money, than he can get a decent burial for, in Old England. We scarce recollect an article without tax except cats, mice and fleas.

After what we have written we scarce need tell you that England is filled with beggars. They call at our doors, from 1/2 a Dozen to a Dozen per day. If we go in the streets they gather round us and it is hard to get rid of them without a penny, indeed, we do not try, so long as we can get a penny by buying or begging, for we remember that the measure we meet shall be measured to us again. Hunger & Rags are no curiosity here, & while things remain as they are what can we expect but theft, robbery, murder which now fill the land—Leaving out of the account, both as cause & effect the drunkenness & gambling, swearing & debauching—which are common on every hand?—

It will readily be discovered that the people have enough to do, to keep from dying with hunger without taking much thought for the improvement of the mind. Many of the people cannot read, a great many cannot write, children are admitted into the factories at 8 years old, working a part of the day & attending school a part till they are 14 years old & then work continually, though as yet we have been able to discover but very little benefit from the factory school, it is by Parliament compulsion on the part of the masters, & not of free will, of course the easier got over the better, the cheaper the master, the more money remains in pocket.²⁶

The two Apostles describe the futility of strikes by the exploited workers, when there are thousands out of work and anxious to take their places, "so they continue to labor 12 hours in a day for almost nothing rather than starve at once."²⁷ The people have to live on "oatmeal & water boiled together . . . with sometimes a little Treacle, which is floor and molasses,

or a little rancid butter, or skim milk made of whiting & water . . . if we mistake not.²⁸ And the two young men are frequently moved by their descriptions to the strongest condemnations:

There is no scheme which can be devised left unimproved to grind the face of the poor & . . . we feel that the time has nearly come for the words of James to be fulfilled, go to now ye rich men weep & howl for the miseries which are come upon you &c.²⁹

The Mormon Apostles knew that the English workers were oppressed by others besides the industrialists and aristocracy. After commenting on the poor quality of learning available in the schools and the press, they note:

Neither have the priests much more information than the people, indeed there are many of the common people whom they dare not meet in argument, although they have their livings, thousands upon thousands, & some of them own whole townships or parishes & will tell their parishioners & tenants if they allow any one to preach in their houses they will [be] turned out of doors, or if they are baptized they will fare no better, & thus many simple souls who believe our message dare not be baptized, because they have not faith sufficient to screen them from the threats of an insolent priest or factory master, knowing they will worry them to the utmost if they displease him, our hearts mourn for such. It is apparently starvation on one hand & domination on the other. The Lord have mercy upon them.—Amen.³⁰

These young, now painfully experienced, Apostles ask for advice or confirmation on a number of important decisions and close their letter:

[we] are trying to do what we can to send forth the Gospel. One of our Elders has gone to South Australia, one to the East Indies & we expect one to start for Hamburgh in Holland this week.—We want council & wisdom, & any thing that is good. Our motto is go ahead. Go ahead.—& ahead we are determined to go—till we have conquered every foe. So come life or come death we'll go ahead, but tell us if we are going wrong & we will right it.—

Your Brethren in the Everlasting Lord.³¹

What have I been reading? Significant experience, ideas, feelings, significantly expressed—that is, forcefully, memorably. We have the kind of insight literature gives to important historical events—such as the enclosure of common lands, industrialization of English weaving and pottery making, the famous Corn Laws that subsidized the farmers somewhat but oppressed the growing urban population, the simony, multiple livings, and imperious distance that identified most of the clergy with the oppressive upper classes—all things which we admire Dickens and others for giving us so memorably in their fiction. But we have in these Apostles' voices something else as well—accounts of their real involvement, their actual experiences with poverty, hate, and injustice, but also with divine direction, healings, and the effects on others of holding out to them their visions of

temporal and spiritual salvation. And the people of England responded, not only out of their need but also to the spiritual authority which spoke to them from these men who became their true ministers.

After working with the growing Church in Herefordshire, Wilford Woodruff describes the pastoral role the Apostles came increasingly to play and the poignance of their parting from the English people:

21 Sept. 1840 [Having returned for a district conference after serving in London] After standing upon my feet 8 hours in Conference, Conversing much of the time, Ordaining about 30, confirming some, healing many that were Sick, Shaking hands with some 400 Saints, wa[]king 2 miles, and Preaching 4 hours in the Chimney Corner, I then lay down and dreamed of Ketching fish.

March 15, 1841 [During his last conference in Herefordshire, when he returned as the Apostles were preparing to leave for America] The Saints universally feel that the Judgements of God are near in this land & are anxious to gather with the Saints in Nauvoo as soon as possible. But many are vary poor and see no door open as yet, & some are placed in all the perplexing circumstances that possible can be, & are flocking around me by Scores at a time & asking council what to do.

As soon as meeting closed multitudes crouded around me, Many hands were presented on evry side to bid me farewell, many calling for me to bless them before I leave them, others crying out do lay hands on me & heal me before you go. Br Woodruff I am turned out of Doors for my religion. What shall I do. . . .

Many parted with me with tears in their eyes. Many of the Brethren and Sisters followed me to Turkey Hall whare I spent [t]he night, and filled the house untill a late hour Begging council & instruction at my hand.³²

Gordon Thomas has reviewed the literary context in England during the early nineteenth century, one that, because of disappointment over supposed ancient writings that turned out to be fraudulent, poisoned the atmosphere for the Book of Mormon among the better educated and the upper classes. He concludes that the missionaries therefore “found difficulty in making appeals based on either logic or tradition. . . . The only valid appeal was to the Spirit.”³³ Literature can appeal to the Spirit, as the Book of Mormon itself proved, but the English people who were able to respond to that were the ones—generally lower class and uneducated—who were not dissuaded by either disappointments or by prejudices about what literature should be. They knew nothing about such literature. They responded to the preaching, the pastoral counseling, the letters, the writings of the Apostles in the *Millennial Star*—all of this backed up by the *acts* of those same Apostles.

We have slowly begun to gather and edit and publish the accounts of those acts. In those accounts, I believe, there is literature which effectively conveys the spirit of those men and the quality of their remarkable experiences that converted hundreds and influenced directly the lives of thousands as

the light, the salt, drained out of England to Zion in the wilderness. Those acts in turn influenced the lives of millions as the Church, from the strong base built by those converts in the West, turned outward in the twentieth century to teach and build temples throughout the world. I have faith that those Apostles' influence, as they with remarkable courage and vision firmly believed, even as they landed, alone and unknown, on an alien shore, will eventually bless billions of the children of God on this planet. I hope we will have the ability, which the educated class of England did not have in 1840, to see the quality of their literature, as it becomes available to us, even though it comes wrapped in rough and surprising packages, in strange genres, inelegant phrasing, bad spelling, faulty grammar. I hope we will humble ourselves to hear their humble voices and thus be blessed by *all* the qualities of the good literature they produced—that is, the qualities of significant experience, significantly expressed.

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1. Ronald K. Esplin, "Sickness and Faith, Nauvoo Letters," *Brigham Young University Studies* 15 (Summer 1975): 427–29.

2. *Ibid.*, 430.

3. *Ibid.*, 433.

4. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801–1844*, comp. Elden J. Watson (Salt Lake City: N. p., 1967), 57–58.

5. *Ibid.*, 58–59.

6. John Taylor to Leonora Taylor, 30 January 1840, Library-Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Journal of Discourses* 15:342–43.

10. David J. Whitaker, "Harvest in Herefordshire," *Ensign* 17 (January 1987): 48.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Wilford Woodruff to Willard Richards, 3 April 1840, LDS Church Archives.

13. Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983–84), 1:446–48.

14. *Ibid.*, 450, 517.

15. *Ibid.*, 421.

16. *Ibid.*, 472.

17. George A. Smith, Diary, 21 October 1840, George A. Smith Papers, LDS Church Archives.

18. *Ibid.*, 17 September 1840.

19. Heber C. Kimball to Vilate Kimball, 19 September 1846, LDS Church Archives.

20. *History of the Church* 4:132.

21. Woodruff, *Journal* 1:449, 455.

22. Brigham Young to Willard Richards, 10 June 1840, LDS Church Archives.

23. Brigham Young to Willard Richards, 17 June 1840, LDS Church Archives.

24. *History of the Church* 3:276–77.
25. Young to Richards, 17 June 1840.
26. Ronald W. Walker, “The Willard Richards and Brigham Young 5 September 1840 Letter from England to Nauvoo,” *BYU Studies* 18 (Spring 1978): 469–71.
27. *Ibid.*, 471.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, 472.
31. *Ibid.*, 475.
32. Woodruff, *Journal* 1:520, 2:62–64.
33. Gordon K. Thomas, “The Book of Mormon in the English Literary Context of 1837,” *BYU Studies* 27 (Winter 1987): 44.