

# THE ELIZA ENIGMA

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"Poetess," "prophetess," "priestess," "presidentess," are terms which her contemporaries applied with reverent awe to Eliza Roxey Snow. This woman, this "captain of Utah's woman host," commanded such respect among the Mormon women of Utah that they celebrated her birthday whether or not she was among them; they took up a collection to pay her fare on a jaunt to the Holy Land; they turned out in numbers whenever and wherever she spoke on her many visits throughout the Great Basin kingdom; they listened to her, quoted her, obeyed her, and found in her "the president of the female portion of the human race."<sup>1</sup> She was a legend before half her effective life was done, and lived that legend for the rest of it. She was aware of her position, and both played upon it, and was plagued by it: "Sisters," she told an audience, "I occupy an honorable position, but the great responsibility attending it prevents my feeling proud."<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult to catalog the public accomplishments of Eliza Snow. There is hardly an auxiliary organization in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints which does not bear her imprint: The women's Relief Society, which she helped found and then directed through its strongest stages; Mormon Church youth groups, initiated with her support as Retrenchment Associations; the children's Primary Association, carried by her from its birthplace in Farmington to nearly every settlement of the LDS Church in the West. And there are her published works: nine volumes extant, plus another tome of separately published pieces. Those are tangible reminders. Less obvious are the events now slid into history: the 1876 centennial territorial fair, the women's commission store; courses in medicine for women; the Deseret Hospital. And a long-enduring tradition of thought about women's place in church and society. Her contemporaries, and ours, have assessed her as a great woman. But then, as she saw it herself, "true greatness" is merely "usefulness."

What is elusive about Eliza—enigmatic, if you will—is the woman herself, the person within, the interior sources for the exterior strength. Or is it more appropriate, or accurate, to see her accomplishment in terms of the times and the needs of a band of Israel wandering their forty years—or was it forty months?—in the wilderness and then wresting from a desert Canaan their promised Zion? Whether the circumstances changed the woman, or whether

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the woman altered the circumstances is a question to be left hanging while we dissect the life and the times into bits small enough for present scrutiny.

For that closer examination, let us take those four alliterative titles one by one: "poetess," "prophetess," "priestess," "presidentess." They are useful divisions of the areas of Eliza's activities; even more conveniently, they fit as chronological emphases in her life pattern. Each concern rises during its own period, reaches its zenith, and declines to a lesser but still significant level as the next rises. The cumulative effect is a piling up of interests and abilities, characteristics of the one woman of Mormondom recognized by the present Mormon laity and the historical community alike as the eiptome of Latter-day Saint womanhood. The question, though, arises in this generation's assessment of those qualities. Therein lies the conflict of the life and the legend of Eliza R. Snow.

Her life began in Becket, in the Berkshire hills of Massachusetts, in January, 1804, but she was soon transplanted to the wild Ohio territory, then the Connecticut Western Reserve. The Snows, and their Ohio neighbors, brought New England with them: the same patriotic spirit which had a generation earlier inspired a revolution informed the attitudes of the Portage County society in which Eliza grew. Her family was loyal American, socially conscious (Oliver Snow, Eliza's father, was justice of the peace and county commissioner in Mantua, Ohio, where they lived), religious, educated (Oliver Snow had taught school back in Massachusetts, and did again for a term in Mantua), and intellectually liberal. They were also practical, industrious, and financially successful. Eliza grew from early childhood with a sense of family pride and a reflected awareness of personal worth.

School is easy for little girls with linguistic talents. And Eliza had these in superfluous amounts. Bored with writing simple prose accounts of Mediterranean geography or the battle of Hastings, she would compose her homework assignments in verse, mimicking the patterns and themes of the poets she read with insatiable appetite. It is not difficult to see her as the pet of her teachers; her sisters who followed seem to have paled in comparison. None but her father seems to have filled her need for intellectual companionship until Lorenzo, her brother born when she was ten, who, like Eliza, was often "shut up with his book." The two developed a closeness which lasted to her death.

But to return to the poetry. There seem to have been examples enough for Eliza to follow in her own attempts at versifying. Shakespeare was commonplace in the United States by this time, and Milton. The romantic poets had not yet been discovered in America, but the styles and themes of the eighteenth century Rationalists were available, and the renewed interest which that century felt in Greek and Roman classics had introduced the literate to the ancient myths and the epic forms. And every newspaper had its poetry column, filled with verses of all varieties.

It was to the local newspaper that Eliza sent her first public poem, an epic-styled celebration of the romantically poignant "Battle of Missolonghi."

Arise my infant muse, awake my lyre,  
To plaintive strains; but sing with cautious fear  
Lest thou profane . . .

she writes, choosing a poetic mode a cut above that of the usual poetry column offerings. Gaining confidence, she continues:

. . . Ye favor'd daughters, ye  
Who nurs'd on blest Columbia's happy soil  
Where the pure flag of liberty shall wave  
Till virtue's laurels wither on your breasts:<sup>4</sup>

The lines scan well, in the formal iambic pentameter of Shakespeare. And the diction is as high flown as could be expected from a fledgling Milton. All told, this, and the similarly high-toned elegaic ode on the deaths of Adams and Jefferson which followed in the same newspaper two weeks later, demonstrate a literary sensitivity and a craftsmanship which augured well for a developing poet.<sup>5</sup> One would hope for the innovative, imaginative thrust to come to match the developing skill. A search through subsequent writings is disappointing. The two early odes, published in 1826 when Eliza was twenty-two, built in her a confidence which led, not to greater imagination, but to a popularizing of her style into form and subject matter more in keeping with what her contemporaries were submitting to the local papers:

If there's a smile on nature's face  
It is the farmer's dwelling place

she writes in a homey poem called "The Farmer's Wife." The strict four-foot pattern rhymed in unerring couplets, winds down to a simplistic conclusion:

If you would make the best of life,  
Be, (if you can) the farmer's wife.<sup>6</sup>

One would like to imagine this as a sarcastic toying with both the genre and the society's simple mores—it would be about this time that Eliza received offers of marriage, probably from young men from neighboring farms. But, alas, the verses which follow leave us no recourse but to assume she had slipped easily, effortlessly, into the popular style of her times.

This is not to say the poetry is bad. On the contrary, some of it reads quite well, and the suggestion made in a later biographical sketch, that Eliza sacrificed a promising literary career to cast her lot with the Mormons, may not be far from wrong. Certainly the neighboring Cary sisters, Alice and Phoebe, wrote no better, and they, some twenty-five years behind Eliza, left their Ohio farm and moved to New York where they made adequate living from their verses.

Eliza, however, had interests too diverse to devote her whole attention to poetry. Her life paced rapidly through the subsequent years from Mantua, to Mormon Kirtland, and on to Missouri in company with her adopted people. It was not until she found a period of relatively settled external circumstances, coupled with a disruptive emotional life, that the poetic gift reasserted itself with new promise. The place was Nauvoo, a seven-year stopover in the hegira of the Mormons, and the disruptive stimulus was the internal turmoil occasioned by her secret marriage to the prophet Joseph Smith whom she later designated "the choice of my heart, the crown of my life."<sup>7</sup> That event proved the fulcrum on which her life balanced itself. Her diary entry for that day, June 29, 1842, reads: "This is a day of much interest to my feelings," and continues in a similar vein of ambiguous prose which ascends towards

poetry as the emotion finds itself later "recalled in tranquility." Her next several poems in the diary deal with her Joseph and her secret polygamous relationship with him.<sup>8</sup>

Among the usual verses, many of which found themselves, with or without her permission, in the *Times and Seasons* and the *Millennial Star*, are some confessional poems which approach the poetic standards from which present critics judge. In her retirement, "Where there's nobody here but Eliza and I," she could loose the reins, give her mind its soul, and compose such lines as these "Saturday Evening Thoughts":

My heart is fix'd—I know in whom I trust.  
'Twas not for wealth—'twas not to gather heaps  
Of perishable things—'twas not to twine  
Around my brow a transitory wreath,  
A garland deck'd with gems of mortal praise,  
That I foresook the home of childhood: that  
I left the lap of ease . . .<sup>9</sup>

In these times, though, she felt a responsibility beyond art and her own emotions. There were Saints to be cheered, and doctrines to be taught. "Zion's poetess," for so Joseph had named her, must turn her talents to the cause. The confessional writings extant from her Illinois period are far overshadowed numerically by such works as the poems to the gentile *Quincy Whig* pleading for aid and succor for the persecuted people; the hymns of encouragement to the distressed, that "though deep'ning trails throng [their] way," the Saints of God should "press on, press on"; and the doctrinally exciting "O My Father," written in this period as "Invocation, or the Eternal Father and Mother."

Eliza wrote on, nearly to her death 1,200 miles and forty-one years from Nauvoo. Her collected poetry tells, better than many prose accounts, the history of a faith in the building, a nation in the making. In her verses can be found the whole sweep of the Mormon story. But as poetry, it fails of greatness. Twentieth century critics find it superficial, maudlin, trite, and unimaginative. As a poet, had she made no other contribution, Eliza might have been to us as obscure as Hannah Tapfield King is. But to her own contemporaries, Hannah King among them, she was muse, mentor, kindred in spirit. As that lady wrote to her:

My Spirit bends instinctively to thine:  
At thy feet I fain would sit and learn  
Like Paul of old before Gamaliel.<sup>10</sup>

"Zion's poetess" to her literary disciples as to the rest of her Mormon contemporaries, was building the reputation which would evolve into legend.

The poetic and the prophetic gifts are so closely related that one finds them hard to separate. Nor, perhaps, should one try. The title "prophetess" had a meaning to Eliza's nineteenth century contemporaries which evades us now, in a church so strongly regimented that the prophetic calling is by custom restricted not only to males in general, but to a specific body of Church leaders in particular. In a looser sense, however, one can see some prophetic functions beginning early in the life of Eliza R. Snow, growing as she finds and embraces the revelatory gospel, and reaching a peak of spirituality in that most unlikely of places, Winter Quarters, the Nebraska shanty town where the Mormons regrouped for their final push to Utah.

Let us backtrack to the first few years of Eliza's poetry publishing in search for her prophetic beginnings. In the February 14, 1829, issue of the Ravenna, Ohio, *Western Courier*, Eliza published a poem which in retrospect is a little disconcerting. It contains what could almost automatically be interpreted as a prophecy of the Mormon restoration of the Christian gospel. The poem, dealing with the universal question of the transience of life, contains these hope-infusing stanzas:

But lo! a shining Seraph comes!  
Hark! 'tis the voice of sacred Truth;  
He smiles, and on his visage blooms,  
Eternal youth.

He speaks of things before untold,  
Reveals what men nor angels knew,  
The secret pages now unfold  
To human view.

So she wrote in Ohio in early 1829. Years after her acceptance of the Mormon gospel, Eliza altered the phrase "secret pages" to read "long seal'd pages," to make more explicit the reference to the coming of the "Seraph," the angel Moroni, with the partially sealed plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. With or without Eliza's later tamperings, we are left with the quandary: could she have heard, fully a year before its publication, of the book and its translator? Was she toying with a local rumor, carried, perhaps, by an itinerant preacher? Had she adopted the Campbellite hope of an angel coming to restore the true gospel? Or was there in her poetic imagination a kernel of true prophecy which prompted such a confident expression?

From the winter afternoon, sometime in late 1830 or early 1831, when Joseph Smith warmed himself in her father's friendly living room, until her baptism into the new faith nearly five years later Eliza struggled for direction. Her hesitation seems to have stemmed from a lack of spiritual confirmation. She yearned after the gifts of the spirit of which the New Testament spoke, and saw about her in the religions of the times, perhaps even somewhat in the new Mormon practices, either barren intellectualizing or, worse, sham perversions of the spiritual outpourings. Whatever led her to finally present herself for baptism at the hands of the Mormons, it was not the fiery pentacostal assurance she wanted. But that night, the night following her immersion into the waters of the new faith, began her new visionary life: she received witness which she read as ultimate and divine confirmation.

I had retired to bed, and as I was reflecting on the wonderful events transpiring around me, I felt an indescribable, tangible sensation . . . commencing at my head and enveloping my person and passing off at my feet, producing inexpressible happiness. Immediately following, I saw a beautiful candle with an unusual long, bright blaze directly over my feet. I sought to know the interpretation, and received the following, "The lamp of intelligence shall be lighted over your path." I was satisfied.<sup>11</sup>

The new faith led Eliza to Kirtland, where, despite the fact that she soon owned a house, she continued to live as governess in the home of the prophet Joseph Smith. Her descriptions of the pentacostal manifestations accompanying the dedication of the temple there suggest a growing appetite for such outpourings as the speaking in tongues which became a regular part of temple worship—so much a part, in fact, that they had to be restricted to

the last hour of the day-long Thursday fast meetings. We have no account of Eliza's participating then in this prophesying and praising in tongues, but it is fair to assume that she was growing in her spiritual abilities, if only by intense observation.

From Kirtland, where Eliza was joined by her now-converted parents, her sister, Leonora, and her brother, Lorenzo, the family moved to Missouri, to the newly founded community of Adam-ondi-Ahman. The Snows traveled with, and settled near, the Huntington family, and undoubtedly in the move cemented the long-enduring friendship between Zina Diantha Huntington and Eliza R. Snow. Of Eliza's spiritual activity in the Missouri settlement there is no record, but we are told that Zina was practiced then in the gift of tongues,<sup>12</sup> and it is fair to assume that Eliza learned that communication, too. Until their deaths in Utah, Zina and Eliza practiced the prophetic speaking in and interpretation of tongues throughout the Church.

Expelled from Missouri, the two families, along with their coreligionists, moved to Illinois, aided in the building of Nauvoo, suffered the indignities of persecution, and found themselves in 1846 refugees crossing Iowa. Privation and sickness create strife, even among the faithful, and Eliza details in her diary the bitterness which even she felt, she who had grown so emotionally strong and independent. Bickerings would have, could have, multiplied through the long winter of waiting for spring and the rest of the journey west. But there was something stronger than mutual privation to weld these people together, and Eliza was in the forefront of the practice. The women would gather in each other's tents for what might normally have been elite and cruelly cutting gossip sessions. But not so. Eliza records a series of gatherings:

Spent the aft[er]n[oon] with Lucy in com[pany] of Zina, Loisa and Emily. E[mily] and myself spoke in the gift of tongues.<sup>13</sup>

And:

Sis[ter] Sess[ions], Kim[ball], Whit[ney] and myself spent the eve[ning] at Sarah Ann's—had a pow'rful time—deep things were brought forth which were not to be spoken.<sup>14</sup>

And:

. . . a time of blessing at sis[ter] K[imball]'s . . . Sis[ter] Sess[ions] and myself blest Helen. I spoke and she interpreted. I then blest the girls in a song, singing to each in rotation.<sup>15</sup>

Such gatherings were not infrequent throughout the winter, and by spring, Eliza seems to emerge as the leader in the blessing meetings. Patty Sessions records, on May 1, 1847:

Sylvia and I went to a meeting to Sister Leonards. None but females there. We had a good meeting. I presided. It was got up by E. R. Snow. They spoke in tongues; I interpreted. Some prophesied. It was a feast.<sup>16</sup>

The gatherings, interrupted by the trek west, began again in the valley when Eliza would collect the women together in their rude homes in the Old Fort, and again the blessings and the prophesyings would occur.

What was the nature of the prophecies and blessings uttered in the strange languages? Were they really prophetic, or were they the over-enthusiastic

imaginings of a spiritually excited people? Who can know? In a retrospective tally of accounts we come up with what is most likely an unfair gauge: about half the prophecies uttered by Eliza were fulfilled, about half were not. People to whom she promised the blessing of seeing the Savior return during their lifetime, or of standing in the temple to be built in Missouri, have died long since. But Heber J. Grant testified to his childhood memory of the prophecy uttered in tongues by Eliza, translated by Zina Huntington, that he would become an apostle. He did.<sup>17</sup> And Mary Ann Chadwick Hull, having buried two children in two years, was promised by Eliza that she would have a daughter (she was pregnant at the time) who would grow to womanhood.<sup>18</sup> The child, born healthy, was indeed a girl, and lived to age twenty. Two other daughters, one named after Eliza, outlived their mother.

But there are other prophetic gifts not so easily judged. There are understandings and awarenesses which are a more important expression of prophecy than any number of predictions. Eliza is credited in Mormon thought with such insights. The favorite example is the concept of a Heavenly Mother, first expressed as doctrine in her "O My Father." General authorities have differed on the source of the revelation. Joseph F. Smith announced in 1895 that, since God does not reveal his mind to a woman, Eliza was taught the doctrine by Joseph Smith;<sup>19</sup> Wilford Woodruff, just two years earlier, remarked the singular appropriateness of the Lord's revealing such a profound doctrine through one of his daughters.<sup>20</sup> The historical evidence available seems, however inconclusively, to favor the former interpretation: Joseph Smith had comforted Zina Huntington, Eliza's friend and confidant, with the Mother-in-Heaven doctrine near the time of her own mother's death, which occurred in 1839, six years before the poem was first published. Zina would doubtless have confided such revelation to her friend.

Other doctrines, less acceptable to modern Mormonism, worked themselves into Eliza's theology and found their way into her speeches and poems. One such was the theory which sent the ten tribes and the city of Enoch spinning off into outer space on detached particles of the earth. "Thou, Earth, wast once a glorious sphere," she wrote, consoling the globe for its loss.<sup>21</sup>

A study of the popular speculations of the times suggests that Eliza was seldom, if ever, the originator of the doctrines she accepted into her theology: Parley P. Pratt for one had expressed the spin-off idea in 1841; Eliza's poem is dated 1851. Eliza adopted ideas from whatever source she trusted—Joseph Smith's utterances would be received without question—and worked them meticulously into a neatly-packaged theology with the ends tucked in and the strings tied tight. So it was, for example, when she published her composition reconciling the doctrine of literal resurrection of the body with the disconcerting evidences of decay and the cycles of nature. She followed Heber C. Kimball's suggested format: there are two parts of the body, one of which disintegrates and returns to earth, the other of which remains pure and untouched, awaiting the resurrection. She expressed the concept so well, that her piece, first published in the *Woman's Exponent* in 1873, was reprinted in the *Millennial Star* in 1874, and again in the *Exponent* in 1875. At that time Brigham Young, prophet, president of the Church, and Eliza's husband since before the Nauvoo exodus, protested. A strict literalist, he was not for watering down scripture with such equivocating, and

proclaimed so in a biting editorial in the next issue of the *Exponent*. Six months later, in the *Deseret News*, appeared in a tiny box on a back page a carefully-worded retraction written and signed by Eliza R. Snow.<sup>22</sup> A doctrine, especially someone else's doctrine, was hardly worth defying the priesthood over. Still, one wonders what conversation passed between the two of them in the intervening six months as they met each evening in the family prayer service in the Beehive House.

But do such lapses indicate the absence of prophetic gifts? The testimony of her contemporaries would refute such denial. From St. George to Cache Valley they witnessed to her perceptive preaching, to her vast knowledge, and to her speaking in tongues—"Eve's tongue," as she termed the Adamic language—in their meetings, where she uttered such blessings as they were sure were prophetic. Men and women alike attested to her spiritual calling. We are again left with the enigma. Did her gifts include that of prophecy? Was she a prophetess in the present sense of the word? The life, and the legend, are a hundred years away from us.

Because of her involvement in the practice of the Mormon temple endowment Eliza R. Snow was called by the title "High Priestess." As early as Nauvoo, where she was recorder in the temple, and later in the Salt Lake Endowment House, where she presided over the women's section, she performed the high ordinances for the faithful of her sex, often blessing them with a special blessing beyond the scope of the ceremonies themselves. Her equivalent in a modern LDS temple would be the matron, who is by tradition the wife of the temple president.

It is understandable that Eliza's image would take on a special holiness in the eyes of the women of the Church, that the aura of sacred mystery which surrounds the secret ordinances of the temple should somehow cling to Eliza. It did indeed become a part of the legend, an addition to the sanctity which already clothed her in the eyes of her contemporaries. Added to the gifts of the spirit which she was practising, the temple calling was the official sanction, the title which justified the reverence which they would accord her.

Other functions she performed, now generally practised only by priesthood holders, were likewise in keeping with the title *priestess*. Blessing the sick, administering to those who requested it, and washing and anointing women about to be confined were frequent with her. Eliza was not the only woman to whom the sisters would appeal for these ministrations; often a community or group would have among its number some sister who seemed especially gifted for the purpose. But it was Eliza whose word gave the practice official sanction, who taught the proper forms, and who specified the qualifications of sisters who might minister.

That the practice was linked to Eliza's name is clear from a letter, dated 1901, in which a sister is questioning the quasi-official suggestion that the women no longer administer to the sick. "Eliza R. Snow taught us how to do it," is the sense of the letter; "Should we not continue to follow her directions?"<sup>23</sup> An official statement is recorded in two circular letters, one of indeterminate date, on stationery of the Relief Society, the other dated October 3, 1914, over the signatures of the First Presidency, Joseph F. Smith, President. Their intent is the same: women may indeed administer with consecrated oil, "confirming" rather than "sealing" the blessing, making no mention of authority. They may also continue the practice of washing and



anointing women about to give birth.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the practice promoted by Eliza Snow, following the approval of Joseph Smith, continued well into this century, and perpetuated the name of Eliza R. Snow as priestess to the women of the Church.

By 1855, or thereabouts, when Brigham Young called Eliza to facilitate the reorganizing of the Relief Societies in some of the Salt Lake Stake wards, she had already been defined by the women over whom she would preside in the roles to which we have paid note. Already "poetess," "prophetess," and "priestess," she could well expect to bring to the function of "presidentess" the admiration and respect of the women, irrespective of whatever administrative skills she might possess.

Fortunately for Brigham Young and for the Church, she did have the ability to preside. As clerk to her father, who had been a public administrator during her Ohio youth, she would have learned something of matters of government. Later, when some Nauvoo women had decided in Sarah Kimball's sitting room to organize a women's benevolent society and needed a constitution, it was to Eliza they turned, evidence that her understanding of such matters was early recognized.

The Nauvoo Female Relief Society, organized not according to the constitution Eliza drew up, but rather under the priesthood direction of Joseph Smith, elected Eliza its secretary. Her minutes indicated a lively interest in the processes of government, and by the time Brigham Young had need of her abilities, she had learned about leadership. By 1867, when the ward Relief Societies in Utah demonstrated the need for an auxiliary direction, she was the logical head to the first general board. Her sense of stewardship led her throughout the existing Church, organizing groups where there had been none, and strengthening and directing existing societies. Her message was always, "We will do as we are directed by the Priesthood,"<sup>25</sup> but when a priesthood leader seemed about to thwart one of the Relief Society projects, her response was that he should be "reasoned" with. She was confident of her programs and of her ability, and that of her sisters, to facilitate them.

Eliza R. Snow, "Sister Snow," to him, was a plural wife to Brigham Young, their marriage having taken place in Nauvoo in early 1846. Far from the adoration with which she honored Joseph was the respect with which she followed Brigham. "Followed," I am persuaded, is the right word, for as independent as she seems in her activities in behalf of the women of the Church, she restricted her jurisdiction to the stewardship assigned her by him. This was not as constraining as it sounds: she and "President Young," as she always called him, saw eye to eye on most things. Most things, that is, remembering the incident of the paper on resurrection, and one homey little story about her having hidden away one of his daughter's silk sashes, deeming it inappropriate to the President's daughter in those times of needed retrenchment. Brigham made her give it back, but later, with Eliza's help, established the Retrenchment Society, with goals similar to Eliza's purpose in taking away the sash in the first place. They two, Eliza and Brigham, thought and worked together; only slight misunderstanding required discussion. Confirmation each of the other's projects was almost pro forma. More a counselor than a wife, Eliza seems to have carried as much authority as Brigham Young's counselors in the Presidency, at least in regard to women's activities.

In administering the affairs of the women—which included, as she defined them, responsibilities towards the children and young ladies, hence her involvement with Primary and Retrenchment association—Eliza seems to have been a paragon of administrative skill, and a dynamo of executive energy. She lacked but one quality, that same quality which inhibited her poetry and limited her doctrinal insight: she had little imagination, little creative spark. She was not an innovator. The story repeats itself in the history of every project with which her name is initially associated. It was Sarah Kimball, not Eliza, who sparked the founding of Relief Society in Salt Lake City as she had in Nauvoo; it was when Louisa Greene came to Eliza with the proposal for a magazine that the *Woman's Exponent* was founded; and it was Aurelia Rogers who expressed her idea of a Primary Association first to Eliza. In each case, Eliza was not the originator, but an initial executor of the project, not the agent, but the catalyst. Once she adopted a suggestion, however, Eliza changed roles. Codifying the concept into an organizational format, she would travel from one end of Mormon settlement to the other implementing it. In one remarkable jaunt to Southern Utah in 1880–1881 the seventy-six year old woman rode nearly two thousand miles by train and wagon to establish some thirty-five Primaries among the Saints there.

In one concern of high importance to the women of Utah, however, she was not the leader. Supportive, yes, but only peripherally so. That was the movement for women's rights, as active then as it is now. The Church was officially on the side of the crusading women, most of the time and on some of the issues. Suffrage for women had the official blessing of Church leaders. The Utah territorial legislature early gave the franchise to women, and Eliza's name headed the list of those who addressed their thanks to acting governor Stephen Mann for signing the bill into law. But the following year, aside from encouraging the women to vote, she predicted their passivity in the political arena:

Although invested with the right of suffrage, [she told a group in Ogden] we shall never have occasion to vote for lady legislators or for lady congressmen.<sup>26</sup>

One might wish we had reason in our time to trust her optimistic justification for the belief:

The kingdom of God, of which we are citizens [she explained], will never be deficient in a supply of good and wise men to fill governmental positions, and of brave men for warriors.<sup>27</sup>

With all the other responsibilities she carried, Eliza surely cannot be faulted for not adding the women's rights movement to her leadership load. The question is, however, less one of activity than one of doctrine.<sup>28</sup> She firmly believed that a woman's divinely appointed role bound her kindly but firmly to the home. The building of the kingdom, she admitted, required that some mothers make the sacrifice of leaving home to obtain medical training, or to be the telegraphers, sales clerks, bookkeepers, and typesetters that President Young needed. Woman's sphere, she affirmed, and with some justification, even from our point of view, was nowhere so wide as in Utah among the Mormons, especially guaranteeing as Mormons did, the most important right of women: the right of wedlock. Plural marriage, polygamy, was her answer to the feminists who pled the cause of women in Utah.

The logic may seem elusive, but typically for Eliza, it could all be made to fit. Justifying the status quo, the subjection in which most women found themselves vis-à-vis their male counterparts, she referred to the foreparents of the human race, and the original sin. Eve was the first to partake of the fruit, and so deserved her punishment:

She led in the transgression, and was plac'd  
By Eloheim's unchangeable decree  
In a subservient and a dependent sphere.<sup>29</sup>

And almost as though "whatever is, is right," Eliza accepted that judgment and built around it—with some doctrinal suggestions from such as Orson Hyde and George Q. Cannon—a theology which she could make consistent with the rest of her beliefs. Where there is organization, she insisted, there must be gradation. Eve having been the first to sin, her daughters were placed in the secondary position. God ordained it, and Eliza would not protest:

We stand in a different position from the ladies of the world [she told an audience in 1871]; we have made a covenant with God, we understand his order, and know that order requires submission on the part of woman.<sup>30</sup>

But the "curse of Eve," that her desire should be to her husband, and that he should rule over her, was not to last forever. As Adam had found redemption from his sins, so also would Eve from hers. In that same 1871 discourse she explained how the curse would be lifted:

The Lord has placed the means in our hands, in the Gospel, whereby we can regain our lost position. But how? Can it be done by rising, as women are doing in the world, to clamor for our rights? No. . . . It was through disobedience that woman came into her present position, and it is only by honoring God in all the institutions he has revealed to us, that we can come out from under that curse, regain the position originally occupied by Eve, and attain to a fulness of exaltation in the presence of God.<sup>31</sup>

The "institution" through which a woman could honor God and regain her lost equality with man was, ironically, plural marriage. Eve disobeyed, she reasoned; her daughters must obey. But in righteousness. Righteous men are less numerous than deserving women. Hence, polygamy. The inconsistent intervening steps in the syllogism seem not to have disturbed Eliza in her reasoning. Her pattern allowed for so many goods: order; the growth of the kingdom through large families; equality among women (theoretically, at least); and peace with the brethren. The day when women would receive "the power of reigning and the right to reign"<sup>32</sup> was far off in reality, but near enough to put a rosy cast over the whole question, and justify the status quo in which she found herself and her sisters, she assumed, to be quite fulfilled. Eliza, then, was not a feminist in the Elizabeth Cady Stanton mold any more than in the Gloria Steinem pattern. First things must come first, and in Eliza's view many concerns came before "women's rights" as the society at large interpreted them.

So in all her presiding she failed to lead out in what seems to some women today to have been the major issue. And in her definition of "What Is and What Is Not for Woman" sold short her sex, by today's lights. And so in much of her poetry she let ease and usefulness and dedication to her cause outweigh the finer poetic crafts. So some of her prophecies were inspired more by millennial enthusiasm than by divine witness, and so her priestly

functions have all but disappeared from Mormon practice. Those are only parts of the whole, a whole which, when we draw back far enough to see Eliza in the broader social landscape, takes on an aspect larger than the sum of its parts.

For there is no equivocating over the position she held, or the influence she wielded over the Mormon women of her time. The five thousands who filled the tabernacle to hear her defense of polygamy, or the one whom she warmly embraced for her faithfulness to her calling—all these attested, on whatever grounds, to her leadership.

If she was not the potter whose firm hand shaped the infant faith of the new society, Eliza was certainly the kilnsman who fired the newly-molded piece into a hard and solid form. And if the edges are chipping away under the pressures of this century's demands, that form still stands recognizably as she left it.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Woman's Exponent* 9(1 April 1881): 165.

<sup>2</sup>*Woman's Exponent* 4(15 August 1875): 42.

<sup>3</sup>Orrin Harmon, "Historical Facts Appertaining to the Township of Mantua. . . , Portage Co. Ohio," MS handwritten, 1866, in the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio; see also *History of Portage County, Ohio* (Chicago, 1885), pp. 475-485, the chapter dealing with Mantua Township.

<sup>4</sup>*Western Courier* (Ravenna, Ohio), 22 July 1836; see also *Week-day Religious Education* 1(March 1937): 6-7.

<sup>5</sup>*Western Courier*, 5 August 1826.

<sup>6</sup>Eliza R. Snow, Diary and Notebook, photocopy of holograph, Church Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, hereinafter cited as LDS Church Archives. The diary has been edited by the present writer and published as "Eliza R. Snow's Nauvoo Journal," *BYU Studies* 15 (Summer 1975): 391-416.

<sup>7</sup>*Woman's Exponent* 15(1 August 1886): 37.

<sup>8</sup>Eliza R. Snow, Diary and Notebook, 29 June 1842 ff.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 16 November 1842; see also Eliza R. Snow, *Poems, Religious, Historical, and Political*, 2 vols. (Liverpool, 1856, and Salt Lake City, 1877), 1:3-6.

<sup>10</sup>Hannah Tapfield King, "Lines, Affectionately Addressed to Sister Eliza Snow," photocopy of MS, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>11</sup>Eliza R. Snow, *An Immortal: Selected Writings of Eliza R. Snow* (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1957), p. 6.

<sup>12</sup>Benjamin F. Johnson, "'Aunt Zina' as I Have Known Her from Youth," MS handwritten, Zina D. H. Young Collection, in private possession.

<sup>13</sup>Eliza R. Snow, Diary, 1 June 1846-16 August 1849, under date 2 June 1847, microfilm of holograph, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 3 June 1847.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 6 June 1847.

<sup>16</sup>Patty Sessions, Diary, 1 May 1847, holograph, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>17</sup>Heber J. Grant in *Conference Report of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, April 1927, pp. 17-18.

<sup>18</sup>"Sketch of the Life of Mary Ann Chadwick Hull," Library of Congress Diaries, microfilm of typescript, p. 4, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>19</sup>Joseph F. Smith, "Discourse," *Deseret Evening News*, 9 February 1895. This discourse was delivered 20 January 1895.

<sup>20</sup>Wilford Woodruff, "Discourse," *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 56 (9 April 1894): 229. The discourse was delivered 8 October 1893.

<sup>21</sup>Eliza R. Snow, "Address to Earth," *Poems*, p. 153. The verse was first published in the *Deseret News*, 31 May 1851.

<sup>22</sup>*Woman's Exponent* 2(1 December 1873): 99, and 4(1 September 1875): 54 Brigham Young's reprimand follows in 4(15 September 1875): 60. Eliza's retraction is in *Deseret News Weekly*, 5 April 1876.

<sup>23</sup>Louisa Lula Greene Richards to Lorenzo Snow, 9 April 1901, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>24</sup>James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City, 1970), 4:312–317.

<sup>25</sup>Eliza R. Snow to [Willmirth] East, 23 April 1883, Eliza R. Snow Papers, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>26</sup>*Deseret News*, 26 July 1871.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>Eliza Snow's stand on the whole question of woman's rights is discussed more fully in Jill Mulvay's "Eliza R. Snow and the Woman Question," *BYU Studies* 16 (Winter 1976): 250–64.

<sup>29</sup>Eliza R. Snow, "The New Year, 1852," *Deseret News*, 10 January 1852.

<sup>30</sup>"Miss E. R. Snow's Address to the Female Relief Societies of Weber County," *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 33 (12 September 1871): 578.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup>Eliza R. Snow, "Woman," *Poems*, 2:178.

*However much Mormons believe that the Holy Spirit converts, we do not hold that it annihilates the mind, but rather that it works through the thinking process.*

Richard L. Bushman  
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*For years I have taught that revelation usually, if not always, comes to the mind of the prophet and through him to mankind when man is aware of his need, when he thinks, struggles, searches, and somehow turns to God for help. This I still believe. Revelation is a teaching process, and an unwilling, a deaf and blind student cannot be taught. But what I have neither taught nor heard sufficiently is that God's response to man—His revelation of Himself, His Spirit, His mind and will—is not really earned but is born of love, of grace. Why else should He be concerned with man, to hear his plea, to touch his heart, to illuminate his mind?*

Lowell Bennion  
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