

struggle with these moral dilemmas on an individual basis. After all, LDS theology suggests that this earth life was purposefully designed as a testing ground, a vale of joy and tears, a place of struggle and growth, where goodness and evil would co-abound and compete for our allegiance. This is still earth, not heaven.

Sisters Under the Skin

EDWARD GEARY

Dear Ellen: Two Mormon Women and Their Letters. By S. George Ellsworth. Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, University of Utah Library, 1974. 92 pp., \$12.00.

Ellen Spencer and Ellen Pratt were born in 1832 and moved to Nauvoo in 1841, where they became close friends. They both crossed the plains in the emigration of 1848 without their fathers. Orson Spencer was in England as president of the British Mission, and Addison Pratt was leading the first Mormon missionaries to the Society Islands. Ellen Spencer had the additional hardship of being without a mother; from the age of fourteen she was in charge of a household consisting of five younger brothers and sisters. The two Ellens died only a year apart, in 1895 and 1896, but in the intervening years their lives were very different and from the differences we can learn a good deal about Mormon life in the nineteenth century. Ellen Spencer remained in the Salt Lake Valley and married Hiram B. Clawson, a protégé of Brigham Young. Hiram married three additional wives, including two daughters of President Young, and fathered forty-two children, one of the most prominent families of Mormondom. Ellen Pratt accompanied her family on a second mission to the South Pacific, in 1850, where she learned Tahitian and became a great favorite with the natives. After her return she lived for the rest of her life in a succession of homes in various places in California and in Beaver and Ogden, Utah. At the relatively late age (for the time) of twenty-four, she married a mechanic named William McGary, a match which disappointed her friends. She bore four children of whom only one survived to adulthood. (One child died as a result of falling into a vat of hot lye.)

S. George Ellsworth has built the book around nine letters exchanged by the two women between May, 1856, and August, 1857. Ellen Pratt McGary was living in the Mormon colony at San Bernardino during this period, while Ellen Spencer Clawson belonged to a rapidly expanding family kingdom in Salt Lake City. It was a critical period in Mormon history, the time of the "Mormon Reformation," and shortly before the outbreak of the Utah War. It was also a critical time in the lives of the two correspondents, for during the fifteen months of the surviving correspondence Ellen Pratt married and bore her first child and Ellen Spencer's husband took his third wife. The two young women wrote candidly about their experiences. From Ellen Spencer we learn about the Twenty-fourth of July celebration in Big Cottonwood Canyon: "Oh! that was grand, and delightful, beyond any other pleasure excursion I ever participated in." We also learn that some of the Mormon girls in Salt Lake City got involved with the soldiers in Colonel Steptoe's command. The girls, Ellen Spencer Clawson wrote, "were so *wilful* that

they commenced flirting with the officers just out of spite, thinking they could resist all temptation and flattery, but they missed the mark in doing so, and repented when too late. We hear very bad stories about them, though I presume they are not all true, I hope not at least."

Perhaps the most significant insights, however, are those into polygamy. Years later, when Hiram Clawson was sent to prison for polygamy, the anti-Mormon *Salt Lake Tribune* paid him what Professor Ellsworth rightly terms "a remarkable tribute," declaring, "Bishop Clawson will have more sympathy than any polygamist who has ever gone to the penitentiary or any who ever may go in the future. His home ties are closer than those of most polygamists; his various families, so far as the outside world knows, are happier than those of other polygamists; he has done the best he could by his many children." Ellen Spencer Clawson's letters reveal something of the cost of that apparent harmony. On the occasion of Hiram's marriage to Alice Young, she confided to her friend that

my heart is rather heavy. I never thought I could care again if Hiram got a dozen wives, but it seems as though my affections return with double force, now that I feel as if I had lost him but I expect he thinks as much of me now as ever, only in a different way you know a new wife is a new thing, and I know it is impossible for him to feel any different towards her just at present, still it makes my heart ache to think I have not the same love, but I console myself with thinking it will subside into affection, the same as it is with me, for you know the honey-moon cannot always last. . . .

I think perhaps Margaret [wife number two] feels worse than I do for she was the last, and I suppose thought he would never get another, the same as I did, and "misery loves company" you know. "Well" Hiram is kinder than ever, if possible, to us, and I do *know* one thing certain, there never was a *better* husband in this world, and I know he means to do right, and I want to help him to do so all that lays in my power, I do not want him to think so much more of me that he cannot treat the rest as he ought, although it is womans nature to be jealous.

Professor Ellsworth also includes a fragment of a poem found among Ellen Spencer Clawson's papers. It begins "I loved thee once, but it was when/ I shared thy heart alone" and ends "I never thought that in thy smile/ A serpent lurked beneath." Evidently Ellen Spencer had reason to feel heavy-hearted at her husband's third marriage, for it marked the beginning of a decline in her status. Although she was the first wife, it appears that she always had to share a house with the second wife, Margaret Gay Judd, while Alice Young and Emily Young, the third and fourth wives, each had her own house. Moreover, it was almost always one of the other wives that Hiram took with him on his numerous business trips. It was not until 1880—and then only upon the insistence of Ellen's grown children—that she was allowed to accompany her husband to New York.

If Ellen Spencer Clawson's life reveals some problems of polygamy, the experience of Ellen Pratt McGary indicates that monogamy is not without its difficulties. Although Ellen Spencer warned in one of her letters that if Ellen Pratt's husband "is a true Saint, I might *possibly* be obliged to send the comforting words of 'grin and bear it' to you," it appears that William McGary was not interested in polygamy. Instead, he became involved with another woman outside of marriage, and the result was a divorce. Ellen Pratt married and divorced again before she finally remarried her first husband, who, in the interim, had had another wife. The domestic life of our great-grandparents was perhaps less simple and uncomplicated than we have been led to believe.