

On Mormonism, Moral Epidemics, Homeopathy and Death from Natural Causes

THESE THREE BRIEF REPRINTS provide interesting insights into early Mormon medicine. The first piece, from an essay entitled "Millerism" in *The American Journal of Insanity* (January 1845), although not directed at Mormons is relevant to the context in which they preached and converted.

The second piece, the first medical journal article to discuss Mormons in more than a sentence or two, is from London's prestigious *The Lancet* (September 1858). In it a "missionary approach" is again debunked by the medically learned. History has played an ironic twist on the analogist, however. Homeopathic medicine, irrational though it seemed—and was—at the time, generally proved safer and no less effective (or equally ineffective) than the orthodox medicine espoused by *The Lancet*.

The third article, reprinted from *Times and Seasons* (1 March 1842), is a short extract from a London newspaper to which the Mormons have appended a redundant, yet revealing reply, setting forth their own perspective on religion and mid-nineteenth century health care.

MORAL EPIDEMICS

By looking at the Reports of the Lunatic Hospitals in the northern States, we notice that into three of them, *thirty-two* patients were received during the last year, whose insanity was attributed to *Millerism*.

Allowing something for exaggeration and mistakes in the accounts of the evils that have resulted from the inculcation of this doctrine, it must be evident to all, that they are alarming. But in our opinion the country has as yet seen only a small part of the evils this doctrine has produced. Thousands

who have not yet become deranged, have had their health impaired to such a degree as to unfit them for the duties of life forever; and especially is this the case with females. The nervous system of many of those who have been kept in a state of excitement and alarm for months, has received a shock that will predispose them to all the various and distressing forms of nervous disease and to insanity, and will also render their offspring born hereafter, liable to the same.

We have no hesitation in saying that, in our opinion, the prevalence of the yellow fever or of the cholera has never proved so great a calamity to this country as will the doctrine alluded to.

This doctrine for the present, we presume is dead, and probably will not soon be revived;—but let us inquire if there is no *improvement* to be made of it, and if there can not be some measures adopted to prevent the spread of equally injurious though dissimilar delusions hereafter.

The prevalence of one such delusion prepares the way for others. We must therefore expect them, and those who wish well to the community ought to strive to prevent their being extensively injurious.

Such delusions many have hoped and believed, belonged only to the dark ages of the world, or spread only among the illiterate and ignorant. But such is not exactly correct, for many intelligent and well-disposed persons embraced Millerism. In fact, we believe for the most part, the promulgators and believers of this doctrine were sincere and pious people. We entirely acquit them of any bad intentions. In fact, such *moral epidemics* appear always to spread, as was remarked in the last number of this journal, "without aid from any of the vices that degrade our social nature, and independent of any ideas of temporal interest."

But what can be done to prevent the occasional recurrence and spread of these *epidemic or contagious monomanias*?—for such they in fact are.

Reasoning with those thus affected is of no use. In fact, we are assured by one of the believers in the late delusions, that according to his observation, it but tended to confirm them. They are monomaniacs, and the more their attention is directed to the subject of their delusions by reasoning with them, the more is their *diseased faith* increased. We do not believe that much, if any, good has resulted from the numerous sermons and tracts that have been published exhibiting most clearly the calculations and predictions of Mr. Miller to be erroneous.

We therefore recommend the following course; and we address ourselves to the heads of families, and to the religious portion of the community.

1st. Do not go to *hear* any new, absurd and exciting doctrine taught, and keep away all those over whom you have influence. This need not and should not hinder you from obtaining a knowledge of all new truths and new doctrines; for such are in this country immediately published. Read about them if you wish, but do not go to *see* and *hear*—to *swell the throng of gazers and listeners*, for as has been said, such things spread chiefly by *contagion* and *imitation*.

You would keep yourselves and would keep others under your control from hearing lectures of an irreligious character, and directly intended to

inculcate vice, or to injure the health. Take the same course as regards new, absurd, and exciting doctrines. Read about them, as we have said, if you choose, but do not run after them, nor make them the subject of conversation.

Thousands of printed tracts upon Millerism, scattered through the country, would have done no harm, if there had been no *preaching* of the doctrine,—*no nightly meetings and collecting in crowds to hear and see*.

In connection with this subject, we beg very respectfully, to suggest to all religious denominations, the propriety of lessening the number and frequency of protracted religious meetings, and especially of those held in the evening and night. We are confident, that although some good results from them, that very much evil does also. They prepare many to entertain the delusions referred to, by creating an excitement bordering on disease, and unfitting the mind to contemplate important subjects calmly. They also seriously impair the health of the clergy, and unfit them for other duties. We ourselves may be more sensitive upon this subject than others, as we live in the midst of many, who, a few years since, were among the most worthy and pious of the land, and who are now and probably will be while they live, tenants of a Lunatic Asylum. According to our observation, the greatest number of such cases occur among those who have long been pious, but who having become excited, agitated, and worn down by attendance, week after week, on nightly religious meetings, until their health became impaired; they then began to doubt their own salvation, and finally despaired of it, and becoming decidedly deranged, were conveyed by their beloved friends to our care, and often to prevent self-destruction.

These few hints we have thrown out with all candor, and hope they will be so received. While we would carefully avoid saying any thing that might hinder the spread of the truths of the Bible, or the conversion of a single soul, we feel it to be our duty to call attention to methods of attempting to extend religious doctrines which we believe are not unfrequently productive of disease, madness, and death. (*American Journal of Insanity*, January 1845, p. 250–253)

MORMONISM AND HOMEOPATHY

We find by the *Plymouth Journal*, of August 19th, that the Mormons are increasing in the neighborhood, but are complaining along with the homeopathic quacks, that their doctrines are misrepresented and misunderstood—that the Book of Mormon and Hahnemann's Organon, the *Millennial Star* and the *Homeopathic Review* are not read so extensively as they used to be and should be, and that even when read, it is not with a view to enlightenment. Delightful and congruous union! Mormonism and homeopathy! *Arcades ambo*, truly may we say. Congenial spirits as they are, no wonder they both read the same journals, and patronize the same "reviews." But it seems the prospects of the *Millennial Star* once shone brighter, as also those of the *Homeopathic Review*, than they do now. Unexpected and

deplorable event! Even in the downfall of these literary humbugs it appears that their last and gasping supporters still hold on to them for other reason than their great "enlightenment!" What miserable duplicity of these recreant followers of Mormon Smith and his golden tablets, and homeopathic Hahnemann and his charcoal globules! From the controversy which has been going on in the Plymouth newspaper, we learn that a clergyman had been assailing a medical practitioner for his so-termed prejudices against the globulistic quackery, and for his objecting to waste his time in reading the rubbish of Hahnemann, Currie, Black &c. The latter, in reply, referred to Mormonism, to the spread it had made in this country and in America, to its disciples in many parts of the kingdom, and to their forming a new state (Utah), as proving it equally to be a verity. He asked the divine whether he had ever read the Mormon Bible, and other works on Mormonism to satisfy himself *truly* and *clearly* as to the truth or falsity of the new system of religion? He offered, if his reverence would peruse these delectable writings, himself to read the works relating to homeopathy, and to try and profit by their perusal; rightly enough maintaining, however, that the one task was no more required than was the other to convince each of the absurdity of the separate delusions. We need scarcely add, that the clergyman thought Mormonism to be an arrant imposture, denounced its converts as either knaves or fools, and did not think it at all necessary to wade through the Mormon Bible in order to be sure whether his convictions were true or false. The medical practitioner thereupon declared that *he* had a like surety for the humbuggery of globulism, and equally declined the delightful privilege of being compelled to bewilder himself with its cabalistic books of *hocus pocus*. The reverend parson seems to have caught a Tartar. (*The Lancet* 2:285, 11 September 1858)

SHE DIED A NATURAL DEATH

Extract from the "London Despatch":

On Wednesday an investigation was gone into before Mr. Baker, the coroner, at the Royal Oak, Galway-street, St. Luke's, on the body of Elizabeth Morgan, aged 55 years, whose death was alleged to have been caused through improper treatment by unqualified persons. Maria Watkins, of 31, Cross-street, Islington, said she had known the deceased about 12 months. For some time past she had suffered from a spasmodic affection, and on Tuesday week last witness was sent for to attend her. Witness found her very ill, but no medical gentleman was called in, it being against the religious tenets of the sect to which the deceased belonged to do so. The sect to which she belonged styled themselves "The Church of Jesus Christ, and Latter-Day Saints," their place of meeting being in Castle-street. Cow-cross. They dated their origin from the Apostles, and treated their sick according to the following text, taken from the last chapter of the Epistle of St. James: "If there be any illness amongst you ye shall call for the elders of the Church,

and anoint yourselves with oil in the name of the Lord." She (witness) had known cases of healing under such circumstances, but the deceased sank and died on Saturday last. Mary Ana Albin, Spencer-place, Goswell-road, wife of one of the elders of this foolish sect, said she was called to see the deceased on Tuesday morning, and from her appearance thought she was suffering from inflammation of the bowels. No surgeon was sent for. Witness administered some "sage tea with Cayenne pepper" in it; leeches and other remedies were also applied. Everything was prayed over before it was given. The Coroner said the remedy appeared to him to be worse than the disease, and he hardly knew how to deal with the case, as he had his doubts whether it was not one of manslaughter. In his opinion the case was not strong enough to warrant a verdict of manslaughter being returned, but he trusted the publication of it in the papers would act as a caution to the members of this strange sect, and that they would see the necessity of calling in medical aid. The jury, after some deliberation returned a verdict of "Natural death," with a hope that the present inquiry would act as a caution to that body how they acted in such cases for the future.

If we were not somewhat conversant with the follies and absurdity of men who profess to regulate religious affairs, and to give tone and energy to the multifarious creeds that are now extant, we could scarcely have believed that any men professing any degree of intelligence, or holding any office of importance, could be found to give birth unto, be connected with, or bear witness of such a bundle of nonsense; such sheer ignorance, and profound folly, as is manifested, in the above article. But as it is published by the "London Despatch," a journal that professes to rank among the foremost of the British Empire, and in other papers of importance in the professed metropolis of the world, as it has emanated from the emporium of learning, science, and divinity; the professed fountain of all true intelligence, the seat of bible societies, missionary societies, and tract societies; the place where nobles are instructed and kings learn wisdom, we of course must notice it. What then is the important thing that has attracted the attention of nearly all editors in the city of London! that has excited the deep interest, and careful investigation of a learned London jury, and a more profoundly learned coroner? something solemn, deep, and awful, something that must be published in the public journals of the day, and be heralded to all the world. Therefore listen ye nations and give ear ye kings of the earth, let all the world attend with respectful deference, for be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, that "ELIZABETH MORGAN, AGED 55 YEARS," IS DEAD. *Oh Tempore!!! Oh Mores!!!* Yes the solemn fact is announced by the "London Despatch"—*she is dead*—but what gives deep interest to the fact and adds solemnity to the scene is that she died a "*natural death!!!!*" she was not murdered in cold blood; she was not poisoned, nor drowned, nor burned to death, she did not die in a mad-house, nor cut her throat; neither had she the privilege of being killed through the administration of the learned medical faculty, nor through the nostrums of the more learned, but less popular Thompson; it was her fate to die a *natural death!* and therefore the learned

coroner "trusted the publication of it in the papers would act as a caution to the members of this strange sect, and that they would see the necessity of calling in medical aid." Therefore ye Latter Day Saints pay attention and live forever; for it would seem by this that the inhabitants of the city of London never die, because they have abundance of "medical aid" or if they do die they are assisted by the faculty to die, they do not die a natural death—for the coroner thought it necessary to warn this "foolish sect" lest they should be guilty of dying a natural death and no doubt (according to the statement of the coroner) if Elizabeth Morgan had still remained a citizen of London and not have joined that "strange sect," (who die naturally) but that she would either have lived forever or have had the privilege of dying an unnatural death through the assistance of medical aid.

But the Latter-Day Saints are a "strange sect" a "foolish sect" but why so? "they dated their origin from the apostles, and treated their sick according to the following text taken from the last chapter of the epistle of St. James: 'If there be any illness (is any sick) among you ye shall (let him) call for the elders of the church, and annoint yourselves with oil in the name of the Lord.' [and let them pray over him, annointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.]" The coroner seems to be ignorant of the doctrines of the Latter-Day Saints, or he never would have stated that they "dated their origin from the apostles." We believe in apostolic religion, but we do not date our origin from them—we believe that the religious world have all become corrupt long ago, and that it needed a revelation from heaven to restore apostolic religion, and that we have had such a communication; but we do not profess to have descended lineally from them. The learned coroner seems also to be ignorant of his bible, or he would have quoted the above passage a little more correctly than he has done. Respecting its being contrary to our religious tenets to employ "medical aid" we would remark that it is unqualifiedly false, and that we have no tenets prohibiting any such thing, but we think that sister Morgan had as much right to refuse medical aid and die a natural death if she thought proper, as a Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Universalist, or any other person; and that the coroner had no right to hinder her, nor to try other people for allowing her to do so.

But the people prayed for her "according to the text of St. James" "if any are sick &c." The thing has at last come out; the coroner did not think it right to follow the directions of "St. James," for he thinks them a "strange sect" a "foolish sect," and admonishes them to beware of such conduct, from which we must naturally infer that the coroner does not believe the epistle of James, nor do any of the sects in London, [for his profession must make him generally acquainted with the sects] and he thinks this is a 'strange' sect because they do, and that they are very 'foolish' for believing it. A man may be a Drunkard, a Shaker, a Methodist, a Southcatonian, a Presbyterian, or a Wilkinsonian; he may dance, or shake, or whirl around on his heel, or rend the heavens with his shouts, or sit still and say nothing; he may profess to be a mortal, or an immortal man; he may do any thing that is unscriptural, and it will be orthodox but to believe the bible, and to practice its precepts is

'foolish and strange' to this enlightened and Christian coroner, and to the inhabitants of London. But that they die after this administration is singular. The apostles however and the ancient churches used to administer in this ordinance, and yet they died. It is well for them that they did not live in the city of London, the seat of religion, and science, or the pious coroner and his coadjutors would have tried these ungodly men for practising contrary to their religion, and would have warned all the sect against their impositions and follies. (*Times and Seasons* 3:711-712, 1 March 1842, Joseph Smith, editor. Also appearing in this issue was a letter from Lorenzo Snow, who had preached Sister Morgan's funeral, which eulogized "our beloved sister" at some length.)

