

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### *A Neglected Chronicler*

I read Michael Quinn's "LDS Church Authority and New Plural Marriages, 1890-1904" when it appeared (*Dialogue* 18, no. 1, [Spring 1985]: 9-105). I also found interesting Julie Hemming Savage's "Hannah Grocer Hegsted and Post-Manifesto Plural Marriage" (*Dialogue* 26, no. 3 [Fall 1993]: 101-18).

In a day when the world press is expounding on the polygamous ancestry of presidential candidate Mitt Romney, I thought *Dialogue* readers might be interested in the following thoughts penned twenty years ago after reading Quinn's and Savage's only partially informed articles on the subject of post-Manifesto plural marriages.

I am constantly amazed how the current generation is rediscovering matters that never were a mystery. Frank J. Cannon, son of George Q. Cannon (first counselor to Brigham Young, John Taylor, and Wilford Woodruff), and half-brother of Apostle Abraham H. Cannon, wrote all anyone ever needed to know about the Church's continued practice of plural marriage, not only in Canada and Mexico, but here in the United States. And Samuel W. Taylor, a frequent *Dialogue* contributor also told the story of his own apostle-father's (John W. Taylor) several plural marriages well after the 1890 Manifesto.

Cannon, an attorney, attended to Church business in Washington, D.C., for many years, being instrumental in mediating between the U.S. Senate and

Church authorities to obtain statehood. Here is an interesting sidebar for political scientists and historians. Cannon had all but achieved his objective when Grover Cleveland was defeated for a second term. As some may remember, Cleveland became the only U.S. president reelected after an interval of four years out of office. He needed no further convincing that Utah should become a state when he resumed office and saw Utah's admission to the union as one of his administration's first items of business. Cleveland was a Democrat; and for many years, Utah voted Democratic in gratitude for Cleveland's understanding and in retaliation against the Republican Party which, with the exception of the two Cleveland administrations, had ruled the United States since the Civil War and had deliberately kept Utah out of the union, lumping Mormonism's polygamy with the slavery of the South as one of "the twin relics of barbarism."

Frank Cannon was thereupon named by the new state legislature as Utah's first senator to Washington. (This was before the Constitutional amendment providing for direct election of senators.)

Neither Cannon nor his book, *Under the Prophet in Utah* (1909; rpt., Boston: C. M. Clark Co., 1911), are cited in either Quinn's or Savage's articles, leaving the impression that it remained for contemporary scholars to reveal the fascinating story of polygamy's having continued (with the approval of high Church authorities) for

another thirty years following the Manifesto. For goodness sake, I remember that, when I was a child, men in good standing visited plural wives up and down the street where I was reared. And these weren't "Fundamentalist" types, either. I daresay many others can remember similar events.

In *Under the Prophet in Utah*, ex-Senator Cannon, by then publisher of a newspaper in Boulder, Colorado (he had been a newspaper publisher in Ogden until life in Utah became too uncomfortable) tells the intriguing secular side of the Woodruff Manifesto story (now canonized as Official Declaration 1 in the Doctrine and Covenants).

It has often been stated by enemies of the Church (and super-sophisticated scholar members) that the Manifesto was drafted by outside lawyers with no inspiration whatever and foisted on an elderly President Woodruff as an act of desperation to save the properties and temples of the Church. (Some have charged Cannon himself with having drafted the Manifesto as a sop to Congress). Cannon assures us in his book that this just wasn't so. He says that he talked with President Woodruff personally shortly after the Manifesto was read in October 1890 general conference. He had been close to the president since childhood and characterizes him as a sweet, if naive soul, of towering integrity. As history has it, the Lord said, in effect, "Enough, my good and faithful servant. What has been done will be counted as righteousness, and my Church will continue on a slightly different track."

According to Cannon, the entire

original redaction, which he was shown, was in President Woodruff's own handwriting, with which Cannon was familiar. This is the best ammunition I have ever seen against Fundamentalist pretensions that the Manifesto is nothing more than a political document conjured up by lawyers and foisted on a senile Church leader.

The sad part is Cannon's assertion that it was Joseph F. Smith and his Smith kin who insisted on reinterpreting the Woodruff Manifesto as not affecting continued, underground plural marriages during the next fourteen years (until the Second Manifesto of 1904) in defiance of the U.S. government and the pledged word of previous Church leaders. (Today, most interpreters curiously place the blame on John Taylor, who was dead before the Manifesto was received.) This is sad because the successors of these leaders were eventually compelled to return to the original pledge of giving up the practice absolutely, an eventuality which Cannon asserts President Woodruff originally intended.

He also tells in passing the fascinating, and eventually tragic, tale of how his brother Abraham, while an apostle, was among the first to be called to take a plural wife following the death of Presidents Woodruff and Snow, only to die of typhoid fever at age thirty-seven, in 1896.

Frank Cannon maintains, and it isn't difficult to accept, that if we had acted in good faith as originally agreed, we wouldn't be plagued by Fundamentalism today. Indeed, it has been argued that Fundamentalism came into being during the next few