Helen Mar Kimball Whitney (1828–96), Salt Lake City. (Courtesy of Church History Library, Salt Lake City.)

J. Spencer Fluhman

"A SUBJECT THAT CAN BEAR INVESTIGATION"

Anguish, Faith, and Joseph Smith's Youngest Plural Wife

Perhaps no other aspect of Joseph Smith's life has stirred controversy like the practice of plural marriage. Since its inception, both Latter-day Saints and members of other faiths have puzzled over polygamy and its complicated beginnings. Though the Church discontinued the practice over a century ago, polygamy continues to invite criticism from outside and questions from within the Latter-day Saint community. The fact that Joseph Smith was sealed to several younger women adds another layer of intrigue to an already difficult story. In this essay, the experience of one Latter-day Saint woman illuminates the spiritual world of the 1840s and provides insight into this complex topic.

In the single month of May 1843, Joseph Smith married four brides under the age of twenty. The youngest, Helen Mar Kimball, was fourteen.[1] Of Joseph Smith's plural wives, in fact, at least nine or ten were what would now be called "teenage" (the term was not widely used until the twentieth century) when they married the Prophet.[2] Since evidence for physical intimacy between Joseph Smith and some of his wives is compelling, the question of sexual contact with the youngest wives ignites controversy in print and across the Internet. Further complicating the picture of Joseph Smith's relationship with his young wives is the fact that Helen Mar Kimball Whitney experienced considerable pressure to consent to the marriage from both the Prophet and her own father, Elder Heber C. Kimball; she understood that her salvation and that of her family's depended on her acquiescence. Because the most pertinent documents for the

Whitney case were penned by Whitney herself, critics charge on the basis of the Saints' own documentary record that Joseph Smith used his religious position to impose himself on innocent teens.[3]

While a clear picture of these earliest plural marriages eludes historians—Joseph Smith never offered any rationale for his plural marriages beyond Doctrine and Covenants 132—it is possible to reconstruct some of what the Nauvoo Saints experienced in those tumultuous years.[4] Such a reconstruction will not reconcile every questioner of early Latter-day Saint polygamy, but the Saints' accounts help modern Church members comprehend the emotional and spiritual passages that defined the nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint experience. This essay uses the youngest wife's experience as a window on those passages. Fortunately, the plural wife who probably stirs the strongest modern reactions is also perhaps the best documented. Helen Mar Kimball Whitney (1828–96) not only penned reminiscences of her Nauvoo experiences for the Relief Society's *Woman's Exponent* (1880–86) but also authored a candid autobiographical sketch for her family in 1881, published two extended defenses of polygamy, and left a memorable diary of her later years.[5] Her words offer an unmatched view of Nauvoo plural marriage and her own spiritual and emotional path, which by her own account lay somewhere between sacrifice and certainty. Even years afterward, she was still challenged by her marriage to Joseph Smith, but she balanced those emotions with her conviction that the principle of plural marriage came from God and with her sense that she had passed an Abrahamic test.

While marriage proposals at age fourteen were not unheard of in the 1840s, they were unusual. Nineteenth-century women married on average earlier than today; early American legal understandings of youthful marriage might baffle modern readers. Borrowing from English common law traditions, American law during the 1840s set the legal age for marriage at twelve for females and fourteen for males.[6] Similarly, pre–Civil War "age of consent" laws set a

low standard; not until the 1880s did states begin raising the age of female consent from ten or twelve to sixteen.[7] In rural communities where marriageable women could be scarce, marriage age could dip well below modern conventions—for instance, Martin Harris married his wife Lucy in 1808 when she was fifteen. These cases notwithstanding, the period's census data reveal that, generally, age seventeen or eighteen marked the younger end of the typical range of female marital eligibility.[8] So, while the rest of Joseph Smith's plural wives' ages more or less met contemporary expectations, Helen stands out as a possible, but not unheard of, exception.[9]

Whatever her own expectations for marriage, fourteen-year-old Helen Kimball was stunned to learn of plural marriage. According to her reminiscences, she was introduced to the principle by her father. Her first reaction was anger, having considered rumors of the practice to be lies hatched by Latter-day Saint dissenters. She thought the suggestion "improper and unnatural" and worried over the twenty-four hours Heber Kimball gave her to consider marriage to Joseph Smith. Helen remembered vacillating between faith and doubt that first night, in the end becoming open to a doctrine "so repugnant and so contrary to all of our former ideas and traditions" only because of her trust in her father's love and commitment to God.[10] After that initial "sudden shock of a small earthquake," Helen met with her parents and Joseph Smith the following morning and agreed to be sealed to the Prophet.[11] Adding to her bewilderment, not long thereafter she learned from her father that her close friend Sarah Ann Whitney had been sealed to the Prophet months before.[12]

Readers concerned about whether or not the marriage was consummated are left without conclusive evidence for or against. In all her reminiscing, Helen neither confirmed nor denied a physical relationship. This was not the case with all the plural wives, however. After the Civil War, when Reorganized Church critics charged that Joseph Smith's relationships with other women were purely spiritual unions, Latter-day Saints marshaled convincing evidence that at least

some of the plural marriages had been consummated.[13] While the question of sexuality thus remains open, there is no documentary evidence that such was the case with Helen. In fact, her reminiscences convey little social interaction with Joseph Smith after the marriage, let alone an intimate physical relationship. In a retrospective poem written to convey her feelings about her youthful sealing, Helen described nothing of a close bond—she even wrote that the "step" she took was "for eternity alone," convincing some historians that the marriage was unconsummated.[14] What does emerge powerfully from the poem, though, is a sense of her dashed dreams of romantic love and missed social opportunities: "Thy sicken'd heart will brood and imagine future woes, / And like a fetter'd bird with wild and longing heart, / Thou'lt dayly pine for freedom and murmur at thy lot." The poem ended where her reminiscences did, with a statement of trust in her father.[15] For his part, Heber Kimball wrote to Helen just weeks after her sealing: "My child, remember the care that your dear father and mother have for your welfare in this life, that all may be done well, and that in view of eternal worlds, for that will depend on what we do here, and how we do it; for all things are sacred."[16]

Helen's emphasis on "eternity alone" and her father's underscoring of the "view of eternal worlds" points to the otherworldly significance each attached to her marriage. Viewed from any angle, Nauvoo plural marriages contradict modern expectations. Helen's marriage was not rooted in romantic feelings, mutual attraction, or an emotional bond. To the contrary, she sensed that her marriage provided spiritual benefits for her and her family. Looking back across the years, she wrote that those benefits had constituted a large share of her motivation to enter into the marriage: "Joseph . . . came next morning & with my parents I heard him teach & explain the principle of Celestial marrage—after which he said to me, 'If you will take this step, it will ensure your eternal salvation and exaltation & that of your father's household & all of your kindred. This promise was so great that I willingly gave myself to purchase so glorious

a reward."[17] Neither a starry-eyed nor love-struck proposal, Joseph Smith's to Helen resembles others recorded by the Prophet's wives; each reported that he couched his proposal in the language of revelation, obedience to God's law, and the promise of eternal rewards.[18] Joseph Smith's proposals, in other words, mirrored the 1843 revelation on celestial marriage (see D&C 132), which highlighted law (see vv. 3–7, 11–12, 15–19, 21, 24–28, 31–34, 37, 48, 54, 58–66), obedience (see vv. 3–5, 53–55, 64–66), and afterlife blessings (see vv. 19–24, 55, 63).[19]

According to Helen, her father was similarly motivated. The argument that Joseph Smith initiated plural marriages for his own lustful purposes fails to account for the fact that, in Helen's case at least, it was her own father who proposed the marriage. Her father taught her "the principle of Celestial marrage," Helen wrote in 1881, "& having a great desire to be connected with the Prophet, Joseph, he offered me to him; this I afterwards learned from the Prophet's own mouth."[20] Kimball's desire to be "connected" to Joseph Smith, curious as it may be to modern Saints, somewhat reorients the marriage away from questions of Joseph Smith's motivations. What did Elder Kimball hope to achieve by "offering" Helen? Why would a marriage to Joseph Smith have been preferred over one to a man closer to Helen's own age? Why the urgency about marrying her off so young?

Many modern Latter-day Saints find it difficult to make sense of the spiritual blessings their nineteenth-century counterparts attached to plural marriage. Comprehensive answers elude Saints and historians alike, but attempts at understanding bring one into a period of intense spiritual activity in which Joseph Smith's sermons, revelations, and instructions literally remade the cosmos for his followers. Parts of his teachings persist in the modern Church; beloved doctrines like the eternity of the marriage covenant and vicarious ordinance work received their first articulation in these years. Some aspects of Joseph Smith's teachings have been modified or deemphasized in later years at the discretion of later Church leaders. Some

ideas, such as plural marriage, were explosive enough that Joseph Smith kept them relatively quiet, sharing them only with trusted companions. Others the Prophet offered in embryonic form only; it fell to future leaders to elaborate on and contemporize them.[21]

At the heart of his Nauvoo teachings was the Prophet's emphasis on creating binding links that would join the Saints as God's extended family. Writing to the Church in 1842, Joseph Smith stressed that baptisms for the dead would function as a "welding" link (see D&C 128:18). Certainly, celestial marriage would function as another.[22] Not yet a part of Latter-day Saint understanding, though, was a sense that families could be sealed together through ordinances across generations of the dead. No Saint of the 1840s was sealed to his or her own ancestors through vicarious ordinances; later Church Presidents would add intergenerational sealing to temple practice. Their absence in Nauvoo helps explain Heber Kimball's actions with regard to his daughter.[23]

Convinced that sealing was God's plan for his people, the Nauvoo Saints in effect created extended eternal families by sealing living Saints of no blood relation—through plural marriages and adult "adoptions"—rather than through sealing to one's own progenitors via proxy work. (Through what the Saints called the "law of adoption," adult men without faithful Latter-day Saint parents were sealed to other adult men as their adopted sons.)[24] Lucy Walker, for instance, who married Joseph Smith days before Helen did in 1843, remembered the Prophet explaining that their sealing would help "form a chain that could never be broken, worlds without end."[25] Since endowments and sealings for the dead were not yet part of Latter-day Saint temple practice, the Nauvoo Saints' sealing work bore a marked sense of urgency. In other words, whatever was to be done in terms of ordinance work beyond baptism was to be done here and now and only for the living. Speaking in 1859, Elder Orson Pratt put it bluntly: "All these things have to be attended to here."[26] Saints like Heber Kimball thus yearned to be linked or welded into an extended

celestial family. Viewed in this light, Elder Kimball and the Prophet Joseph Smith seem to have been collecting kin as much as wives. In the words of one historian, "Joseph did not marry women to form a warm, human companionship, but to create a network of related wives, children, and kinsmen that would endure into the eternities. . . . Like Abraham of old, Joseph yearned for familial plentitude."[27]

Complicated though they may be, these doctrinal points help make Heber Kimball's "offering" of Helen more comprehensible. In the Kimball family narratives—from Heber, Helen Mar, and finally her son, Elder Orson F. Whitney—Helen Mar's marriage bound the Smith and Kimball families together. In the logic of those narratives, an earthly relationship between Joseph Smith and Helen Mar Kimball was almost beside the point. Given the evident lack of a meaningful earthly relationship in their case, one historian with an eye on these wider connections being made between Joseph Smith and close associate's families opted for the word "dynastic" to describe their marriage.[28]

This is not to say that it was easy for Helen to function as what her son would call the "golden link . . . whereby the houses of Heber and Joseph were indissolubly and forever joined."[29] In a particularly poignant line in her reminiscence, Helen cast herself as a modern sacrificial offering. "My father had but one Ewe Lamb," she wrote, "but willingly laid her upon the alter."[30] Her evident pain at having so momentous a decision forced on her before she could fully grasp its significance was matched by her mother's. Helen wrote, "How cruel this [marriage] seamed to the mother whose heartstrings were already stretched until they were ready to snap asunder." Her mother, Vilate Kimball, who had been tried mightily by Heber's polygamous marriage to Sarah Noon not long before, responded to the Prophet's request for consent to marry Helen with resignation: "If Helen is willing I have nothing more to say." Helen continued, "She had witnessed the sufferings of others, who were older & who better understood the step they were taking, & to see her child, who had scarcely seen her

fifteenth summer, following in the same thorny path, in her mind she saw the misery which was as sure to come as the sun was to rise and set; but it was all hidden to me."[31] In the Kimball family narratives, Helen's offering was thus marked by anguish and faith, the twin inheritances of any redemptive sacrifice in Latter-day Saint theology.

Though Helen returned to sacrificial metaphors throughout her writings, her voice in the 1880s rang with conviction regarding her decision. With other Saints then weathering a storm of federal prosecution and national opprobrium, she at times wrote about her life as though all her striving had brought her future blessings only: "The Latter-day Saints do not desire tribulation, but they look for little else in this life. . . . No earthly inducement could be held forth to the women who entered this order. It was to be a life-sacrifice for the sake of an everlasting glory and exaltation."[32] In other moments, though, she demanded that readers understand that it was all worth it. Responding to criticisms that Latter-day Saint women were coerced or cajoled into polygamy or that their lives were miserable, Helen maintained that Joseph Smith's revelation (D&C 132) contained "the words of the Lord." For her, that spiritual conviction was the key. "The Latter-day Saints would not enter into this holy order of matrimony unless they had received some stronger and more convincing proofs of its correctness than the testimony of a man, for in obeying this law it has cost them a sacrifice nearly equal to that of Abraham."[33] Latter-day Saint women, she wrote, bravely stood with Sarah, Rachel, Leah, and other godly women, "lawful and honored wives" in sacred history who had heard God's word and obeyed.[34]

For Helen, not all blessings of plural marriage blessings were held in waiting. "I have been a spectator and a participator in this order of matrimony for over thirty years, and being a first wife, I have had every opportunity for judging in regard to its merits," she wrote in 1882. "There are real and tangible blessings enjoyed under this system." Without downplaying the difficulties plural marriage entailed, Helen maintained that those who entered into the "principle" with "pure

motives" and "continued to practice it in righteousness" were fashioned into better Christians: "Their souls will be expanded, and in the place of selfishness, patience and charity will find place in their hearts." Thus oriented toward God and "the interests of others," she concluded, righteous polygamous men and women "are rising above our earthly idols, and find that we have easier access to the throne of grace."[35]

Helen admitted to contemplating different paths in her younger years. Looking back, though, she willingly made peace with the trial of plural marriage in order to have all that Mormonism provided her. "In my younger days, in the early scenes of trial and temptation, I thought that I would be perfectly happy if the plural system could be relinquished. I felt unwilling to sacrifice my earthly happiness for the promise of future reward. I thought I could content myself with a lesser glory. But I found that there was not real substance in any religious doctrine outside of 'Mormonism,' and I could not disbelieve one part (as many have professed to do) without rejecting it completely."[36] And, despite her youthful fears, Helen Whitney was not left without happiness in this world. Confident that even "the slightest glimpse" of future eternal glory would repay all the difficulty occasioned by the practice, Helen concluded her 1884 defense of polygamy with a statement of certainty—"of that pure and unalloyed bliss [to come] I solemnly testify that I have had a foretaste."[37] Intense sacrifice, earthly joy, and faith in the promise of eternal glory had come to define Helen's life as it had for so many of her fellow travelers. "The Latter-day Saints are reaching after those things that are durable," she wrote in 1882. "We do not want the shadow but the substance of what is hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen."[38]

Notes

The quote in the title comes from Helen Mar Whitney, *Plural Marriage, as Taught by the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor, 1882). This essay appeared in a slightly modified form as "'A Subject That Can Bear Investigation': Anguish, Faith, and Joseph Smith's Youngest Plural Wife," *Mormon Historical Studies* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 41–51; used by permission.

1. Joseph Smith married Lucy Walker (age seventeen) on May 1 and Sarah Lawrence (age seventeen), Maria Lawrence (age nineteen), and Helen Mar Kimball sometime during the month. See Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 4–6. Nancy Winchester, whose possible marriage to Joseph Smith is not as well documented as Kimball's, could also have been as young as fourteen or fifteen. See Richard L. Anderson and Scott Faulring, "The Prophet Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives," *FARMS Review* 10, no. 2 (1998): 76–77; also Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 604–8. Original spelling and grammar is retained in quoted material.
2. Among the various ten-year age groupings for the wives, the teenage cohort was largest, nearly a full third of the total in Compton's calculation. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 11. The total number of wives ranges between twenty-nine and forty-eight in modern historians' accounts. See Anderson and Faulring, "Prophet Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives," 67–104; Danel W. Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith" (master's thesis, Purdue University, 1975); Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 437–46; Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1975), 457–88; Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 10–11; D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 587–88; George D. Smith, "Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841–46: A Preliminary Demographic Report," *Dialogue* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 1–72; George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy: "But We Called it Celestial Marriage"* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008), 36ff.
3. For an influential iteration of this charge, see Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), chapter 11.
4. Though not necessarily intended as a rationale for polygamy, Joseph Smith penned an 1842 letter to Nancy Rigdon with the question of polygamy in mind in which he offered a rationale for obeying God's commands regardless of one's preconceptions. The letter was originally published by Latter-day Saint dissident John C. Bennett in the Springfield, Illinois, *Sangamo Journal*, August 19, 1842, and is reprinted in *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Dean C. Jessee, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 538–40.
5. Helen Mar Whitney, *Plural Marriage, as Taught by the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor, 1882); Helen Mar Whitney, *Why We Practice Plural Marriage: By a "Mormon" Wife and Mother—Helen Mar Whitney* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor, 1884); *A Widow's Tale: The 1884–1896 Diary of Helen Mar Kimball Whitney*, ed. Charles M. Hatch and Todd M. Compton (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2003).

6. Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 105–6.
7. Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 9.
8. Todd M. Compton, "Truth, Honesty and Moderation in Mormon History: A Response to Anderson, Faulring and Bachman's Reviews of *In Sacred Loneliness*," updated July 2001, accessed November 2, 2010, http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/7207/rev.html.
9. For a thorough discussion of marriage-age patterns, see Todd M. Compton, "Early Marriage in the New England and Northeastern States, and in Mormon Polygamy: What Was the Norm?," in *The Persistence of Polygamy: Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormon Polygamy*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst and Craig L. Foster (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2010). Nancy Winchester, discussed above (note 1) would be another aberration, but her status as a wife is hardly settled. See Anderson and Faulring, "Prophet Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives," 78–79; Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 25–42. Flora Ann Woodworth was likely sixteen, as was Fanny Alger, though Alger's marriage date is debated, and she may have been eighteen or nineteen when she married Joseph Smith. (Joseph Smith's relationship with Alger is the subject of ongoing scholarly debate.) Other wives were Sarah Ann Whitney, Lucy Walker, Sarah Lawrence (age seventeen), or Emily Dow Partridge, Maria Lawrence, and Melissa Lott (age nineteen).
10. Helen's Nauvoo reminiscences, published originally in the *Woman's Exponent,* are republished in Jeni B. Holzapfel and Richard N. Holzapfel, eds., *A Woman's View: Helen Mar Whitney's Reminiscences of Early Church History* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1997). Quoted material appears on pages 196–97.
11. Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Woman's View*, 482. Helen's 1881 autobiographical sketch is transcribed in full in appendix 1, complete with images of Helen's holographic manuscript. Though in her published writings Helen politely obscured the fact that she had been sealed to Joseph Smith, she was forthright in her diary and private autobiography. See, for instance, her entry for July 11, 1886, in Hatch and Compton, *Widow's Tale*, 169.
12. Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Woman's View*, 252. Sarah Ann Whitney had married Joseph Smith the previous July. See Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 342–63. After Joseph Smith's death, Helen married Horace Whitney, son of Newel K. and Elizabeth A. Whitney and brother of Sarah Ann.
13. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 12–15.

14. Stanley B. Kimball, *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 98; Anderson and Faulring, "Prophet Joseph Smith and His Plural Wives," 79–81.
15. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 499–500. In one reminiscence, Helen recalled her bitterness at having to miss a Nauvoo party because Joseph Smith had cautioned Heber C. Kimball against letting her attend. See Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Woman's View*, 224–25.
16. Heber C. Kimball to Helen Mar Kimball, July 10, 1843, in Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Woman's View*, 198.
17. Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Woman's View*, 482, 486.
18. Joseph Smith's proposal to Lucy Walker mirrors his proposal to Helen in significant ways. Lucy remembered that the Prophet "fully Explained to me the principle of plural or celestial marriage. Said this principle was again to be restored for the benefit of the human family. That it would prove an everlasting blessing to my father's house." Quoted in Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 491.
19. The idea that the purpose of plural marriage was essentially procreative, appearing in both the Book of Mormon (see Jacob 2:30) and the Doctrine and Covenants (see D&C 132:63), apparently did not figure in Joseph Smith's proposals. Saints in Utah routinely explained that plural marriage's significance was in the raising of a righteous posterity.
20. Holzapfel and Holzapfel, eds., *Woman's View*, 482.
21. For differing perspectives on Joseph Smith's Nauvoo theology, see Bachman, "Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage"; Danel W. Bachman, "Prologue to the Study of Joseph Smith's Marital Theology," *FARMS Review* 10, no. 2 (1998): 105–37; Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982); Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), chapters 9–10, 13; Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power*, chapters 3–4.
22. Generally, Latter-day Saints equated "celestial marriage" with "plural marriage" until the late nineteenth century. See B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 54, 297–98.
23. Endowments for the dead were initiated in 1877 under the direction of Brigham Young. Sealings for the dead followed thereafter. See Richard E. Bennett, "Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept: Reflections on the 1877 Commencement of the Performance of Endowments and Sealings for the Dead," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 3 (2005): 38–77. Interestingly, despite their absence from 1840s Latter-day Saint life, Joseph Smith predicted proxy sealings in Nauvoo. Wilford Woodruff reported a sermon given by the Prophet in March 1844: "I wish you to understand this subject for it is important & if you will receive it this is the spirit of

Elijah that we redeem our dead & connect ourselves with our fathers which are in heaven & seal up our dead to come forth in the first resurrection & here we want the power of Elijah to seal those who dwell on earth to those which dwell in heaven[.]" A month later, Woodruff reported another mention of vicarious temple ordinances beyond baptism by Joseph Smith: "When the House is done, Baptism font erected and finished & the worthy are washed, anointed, endowed & ordained kings & priests, which must be done in this life, when the place is prepared you must go through all the ordinances of the house of the Lord so that you who have any dead friends must go through all the ordinances for them the same as for yourselves." *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898, Typescript*, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983), 2:362, 388. The reasons for the considerable lag between Smith's prediction and the ceremony's introduction into Latter-day Saint practice are unclear. Speaking less than a year after Joseph Smith's death, Brigham Young taught that "Joseph in his life time did not receive every thing connected with the doctrine of redemption, but he has left the key with those who understand how to obtain and teach to this great people all that is necessary for their salvation and exaltation in the celestial kingdom of God." *Times and Seasons*, July 1, 1845, 955.

24. Adult adoptions were eventually discontinued in the 1890s after Church leaders initiated the practice of intergenerational proxy sealing. Contemporaneous with the cessation of both plural marriage and adoptions, Woodruff oversaw the creation of the Utah Genealogical Society in the mid-1890s, and Latter-day Saints began intergenerational proxy sealings in earnest. See Bennett, "Line upon Line," 62–67; Gordon Irving, "The Law of Adoption: One Phase of Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830–1900," *BYU Studies* 14, no. 3 (Spring 1974): 291–314. See also Samuel M. Brown, "Early Mormon Adoption Theology and the Mechanics of Salvation," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 3–52; Jonathan A. Stapley, "Adoptive Sealing Ritual in Mormonism," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 53–117.
25. Quoted in Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 491.
26. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–86), 6:359. A fuller quotation makes clear that Orson Pratt understood plural marriage to have resolved the seeming dilemma created in the command to be sealed and the fact that sealing was available, as of 1859, to the living only:

> I ask, Would it be right, with a view that marriage is to exist, not only in time, but in eternity, that this woman, who is a good, moral, virtuous woman, should remain without a husband through all eternity, because she did not have an opportunity of being married? If marriage be of any benefit in the eternal world, would it not be far more consistent with the law of God that she should have the privilege, by her own free, voluntary consent, to marry a good man,

> though he might have a family, and claim him for her husband, not only through time, but eternity?
>
> Jesus informs us that in the resurrection mankind are neither married nor given in marriage: all these things have to be attended to here.

Benjamin Johnson, a friend of the Prophet in Nauvoo, underscored the sense of urgency with regard to sealing in this life when he wrote, "The Prophet taught us that Dominion & powr in the great Future would be Comensurate with the no of 'Wives Childin & Friends' that we inheret here and that our great mission to earth was to Organize a Neculi of Heaven to take with us." Benjamin F. Johnson to George F. Gibbs, 1903, quoted in Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 10.

27. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 440.
28. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 12, 347, 497. Joseph Smith's marriage to Sarah Ann Whitney seems to have been of a similar type.
29. Orson F. Whitney, *The Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992), 328.
30. Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Woman's View*, 482. In another agonizing line, Helen described women who had entered the practice as having "laid their willing but bleeding hearts upon the altar." Whitney, *Plural Marriage*, 47. For all her empathy for other plural wives, Helen was also sensitive to the demands on polygamous husbands: "But those who think that men have no trials in the plural order of marriage, are greatly deceived. The wives have far greater liberty than the husband, and they have the power to make him happy or very unhappy. . . . It certainly takes considerable religion and faith to stimulate a man who loves a quiet, easy-going life, to take up this cross, even with the hope of a future crown." Whitney, *Why We Practice*, 31.
31. Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Woman's View*, 486. Helen explained that her mother had navigated her challenge with plural marriage with "abiding faith in the principles that were advanced by the Prophet and Seer" and "confidence which she felt in her husband as a man of God." Without those, Helen wrote, "she could never have borne up under all the trials with which her life's path was filled." Whitney, *Plural Marriage*, 16.
32. Whitney, *Plural Marriage*, 7; Holzapfel and Holzapfel, *Woman's View*, 253.
33. Whitney, *Plural Marriage*, 11, 47. Helen was adamant on the question of coercion: "There has been no compulsion used in our marriage relations, but it is optional with every man or woman to act as he or she may feel to be right." Whitney, *Plural Marriage*, 50. Even so, some Latter-day Saint men and women felt considerable pressure to enter into the practice. See Kathryn M. Daynes, *More Wives Than One: The Transformation of the Mormon Marriage System, 1840–1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), chapters 1–2.

34. Whitney, *Plural Marriage*, 11–12, 15, 28.
35. Whitney, *Plural Marriage*, 27, 46; Whitney, *Why We Practice*, 65.
36. Whitney, *Plural Marriage*, 37. In another line, responding to Joseph Smith III's claims regarding the origins of plural marriage, Helen wrote, "I confess that I was too young or too 'foolish' to comprehend and appreciate all that I heard his father [Joseph Smith Jr.] teach, and if my parents at that early day had disagreed and my father been taken away by death, I am not able to decide what the consequences would have been to me." Whitney, *Plural Marriage*, 16. A hostile report from Catherine Lewis, who apparently lived with the Kimball family for a time in Nauvoo before abandoning Mormonism, wrote that Helen told her mother, "I would never have been sealed (married) to Joseph had I known it was anything more than ceremony. I was young, and they deceived me, by saying the salvation of our whole family depended on it." Some aspects of Lewis's account are not credible, but given Helen's admission of youthful rebelliousness against polygamy, the episode might constitute what she came to later regard as youthful "foolishness." Helen's final conversion to the principle came after a period of prolonged illness during the trek to Utah in 1848. See Catherine Lewis, *Narrative of Some of the Proceedings of the Mormons; Giving an Account of Their Iniquities. . . .* (Lynn, MA: printed by author, 1848), 19; Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness*, 510–11.
37. Whitney, *Why We Practice*, 66.
38. Whitney, *Plural Marriage*, 37.