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Defending Zion

Roger Ekins

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Roger Ekins, a fifth-generation member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was born in Salt Lake City, Utah. After serving a mission in Argentina and a four-year hitch in the U. S. Army Reserves, he graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Utah in 1970 with an Honors Baccalaureate of Arts in English and in 1972 with a Master's in Creative Writing. In 1976 he earned his Ph.D. in Higher Education from the Union Graduate School (Union Institute and University). Dr. Ekins has served in a series of administrative and teaching positions. These include Director of the Open Community Learning Center and Assistant Professor of English at Staten Island Community College, City University of New York; Dean of Student life and Faculty Fellow in English and Education at Johnston College, University of Redlands; Dean of Student Development and Director of the Honors Program at the University of Maine at Augusta; and Dean of Instruction at Butte College in Oroville, California, where he is currently chair of the Honors Program and teaches literature, writing and the history of ideas. Ecclesiastical responsibilities in the Church have included callings as bishop, gospel doctrine teacher and stake seminary supervisor. He is currently serving as a member of the Chico California Stake high council.

A President Emeritus of the California Humanities Association, which awarded him the Charles D. Perlee Award, Ekins serves on the National Honors Advisory Committee of the University of Utah and on the editorial board of his local newspaper, the Paradise Post. His previous publications include poetry, fiction, and essays. *Defending Zion: George Q. Cannon and the California Mormon Newspaper Wars of 1856-1857* marks his first book-length venture as well as his first publication in Mormon Studies, long a topic of deep interest. He lives and fly-fishes in Paradise, California, with his wife, the former Helen Kaye Leonard, also a graduate of the University of Utah. (She will be assisting him in his presentation.) They are the parents of three children: Sarah, Adam, and Rachael.

ROGER EKINS: Following years of secret practice and public denial the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints finally admitted to the practice of polygamy in 1852. Following that public acknowledgement increasingly vehement criticism of the Utah Mormons became a significant preoccupation of the national press.

In an effort to defend the Church against such criticism, while also helping to provide additional organs for proselyting the Gentile world, Brigham Young established four new periodicals. Apostle Orson Pratt was sent to Washington, D.C., to publish *The Seer*, a journal specifically designed to advocate and defend polygamy. Apostle and future president of the Church John Taylor was selected as the publisher-editor of *The Mormon* based in New York City. Apostle Erastus Snow was assigned to the *St. Louis Luminary* and George Q. Cannon, destined to serve as First Counselor to four Church presidents and the man who arguably would become the most powerful voice for 19th century Mormonism after Joseph

Smith and Brigham Young, was assigned at the tender age of 28 to edit and publish a newspaper in San Francisco, California.

By the way I can't prove it but I suspect that George Q. Cannon may have been the first person to coin the phrase 'the Sodom of the Pacific' for San Francisco—he used that phrase a lot.

Of these four periodicals *The Western Standard* was clearly the most interesting. Cannon pulled no punches as he played the role of LDS apologist taking on one journalistic enemy after another. Perhaps it was the courage and even recklessness that comes with youth that made Cannon so bold in his attacks. Perhaps it was because he had not yet been saddled with the sober responsibilities of the apostleship that made him more feisty than Pratt, Snow or even his uncle John Taylor.

Whatever the reason George Q. Cannon successfully started and more often than not ended a number of newspaper wars that are still fascinating to read or hear today.

This presentation is extracted from my book *Defending Zion: George Q. Cannon and the California Mormon Newspaper Wars of 1856-1857*. It was published about six months ago by the Arthur H. Clark Company as vol. 5 in its "Kingdom in the West" series.

Actually Scott suggested I not do this but I'm going to go into it anyway because I know what's going to happen; some of you are going to pick this book up and you're going to see a certain name connected with this book and it will have basically the same effect as garlic to vampires—that name of course is none other than Will Bagley.

Will is the general editor of this series and certainly Will and I disagree on a lot of things, most emphatically some of the conclusions he drew in his recent book on the [Mountain Meadows] Massacre. But I want to just say this on behalf of Will, that throughout this editorial process he continually reminded me that this was my book not his and that the final editorial decisions were mine, the final interpretations were mine. And I want to thank Will for that approach that he took to this book and I must acknowledge that it's a much more interesting book than it would have been without his contributions so don't let his association with this series scare you away.

This paper will focus on some especially engaging exchanges between Cannon's *Western Standard* and two other California newspapers. The first will be *The Pacific*—a self-proclaimed weekly journal devoted to religion, education and

useful intelligence. The second combatant will be *The Daily California American,* the precursor to today's very prominent *Sacrament Bee*.

As the presentation proceeds I'll be reading the righteously indignant editorials written by Cannon as my wife Helen, without whom this book would never have been possible, gives morally superior voice to the editors of *The Pacific* and *The Daily California American* both of which so often found themselves under unrelenting fire by the young Cannon.

"Hang 'em up - like pirates: the Mormons, saints or sinners?"

Though they call themselves Saints, the Mormons never thought of themselves as perfect. Many of Joseph Smith's revelations reminded them of their individual and collective shortcomings. Nonetheless they considered themselves God's chosen people and firmly believed it would be through their efforts that the Lord's Second Coming would soon become reality.

Their enemies old as well as new accused the Latter-day Saints of every foul deed imaginable. There was nothing new about the crimes attributed to the Mormons by the California newspapers. Witness the following list compiled by the infamous John C. Bennett, formerly mayor of Nauvoo, major general of the Nauvoo Legion and assistant president of the Church in his 1842 attack on his erstwhile brethren:

HELEN EKINS (Narrator):

> **John C. Bennett, *History of the Saints*:** "It appears from the mass of evidence in this Exposé, that the Mormon Hierarchy are guilty of infidelity, deism, atheism; lying, deception, blasphemy; debauchery, lasciviousness, bestiality; madness, fraud, plunder; larceny, burglary, robbery, perjury; fornication, adultery, rape, incest; arson, treason, and murder; and they have out-heroded Herod, and out-deviled the devil."

ROGER EKINS: Given his own questionable character, Bennett's charges are highly suspect. Whether a fallen believer or a conniving opportunist, Bennett had been excommunicated for many of the moral lapses he denounced and his objections to Joseph Smith's polygamous relations were less the result of moral outrage than of personal jealousy.

Still the depredations allegedly committed by Joseph Smith's Danites and Brigham Young's Destroying Angels provided plenty of smoke if not fire to blacken the name of early Mormonism.

By 1856, there was no lack of controversial topics useful in attacking the young religion as the voice of the LDS Church in California, Cannon had to fend off charges involving the character of Joseph Smith; Utah theocracy under Brigham Young; the Willie and Martin handcart disaster; and of course scandalous tales of young women abducted into sexual slavery by the crafty elders of Salt Lake.

When the San Francisco *Pacific* reprinted the richly imaginative story about the crimes of moral degeneracy reigning in Utah Territory, George Q. Cannon immediately responded launching a lengthy newspaper battle that eventually drew in *The Daily California American*. The episode affords a glimpse into the psyche of Americans in general and Californians in particular at they tried to make sense of the theocratic, communalistic and polygamic system known as Mormonism.

Westerners, especially those living on the borders of Utah Territory, perceived this encounter with the "other" as a clear and present danger as is obvious from the unrelenting editorial (inaudible) California newspapers hurled at the Saints.

Whether Cannon truly believed he could deflect such criticism by pointing out the logical fallacies of his opponents while often returning their vituperation is an open question but he did not shrink from his mission as a Church apologist to portray his people as more sinned against than sinning.

HELEN EKINS:

"Mormonism"
***The Pacific*. 6 November 1856.**

> Among a party of 900 Mormons who recently left comfortable homes in England to surrender to the sway of Brigham Young and his hopeful associates came two girls whose transfer to the Utah land of abominations has very much the character of a kidnapping. The story of their flight as related in the English papers is as follows:
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> Their father was a man in middle life well to do and industrious. His labors had placed his family, consisting of a wife and several children, in a state of decent competence and happiness. Satan came among them in the guise of a Mormon emissary and beguiled the eldest son who made a pilgrimage to the land of rogues. True to their instinct the crafty elders of Salt Lake made Mormonism so delightful to the neophyte and advanced him so very rapidly in their fraternity that he returned to England as a preacher of the delusion. The father, whose employment took him away from his family for periods of a week at a time, returned to the house one

Saturday from a business excursion to find it deserted. His whole family had disappeared with whatever portables they could lay their hands upon and his wife had stolen his money to no inconsiderable amount, all that she collect or pilfer. He traced the fugitives to Liverpool and reached that place to discover that they had embarked under the persuasions of his Mormon son in an immigrant ship the "Enoch Train." The distracted father chartered a steam tug and taking with him a police officer overtook the vessel. After an infinite deal of persuasion aided by the Master of the Ship and opposed by the Mormon leaders, he succeeded in inducing his wife to go back with him. He also, as a matter of great favor, obtained the surrender of his infant children but his two eldest daughters refused to return with their parents and the heartbroken father went without them. Their fate going thus unprotected to Utah may well cause a shudder.

A community thus replenished is maturing measures to apply for admission as one of the states of this Confederacy. We were never among those who calculated the value of the union or who dreamed that the possibility of its being sundered was among contingencies to be considered in any case. But the possibility that our fathers may have fought to establish a shield for a community of adulterers and bigamists and their progeny makes us pause; that all which we hold sacred in religion or virtuous in social and family relations may be trampled under foot by a state represented on equal terms with those founded by pen and the pilgrims, by Oglethorpe and the cavaliers that the old Dominion and the land of the Puritans may be allied with a fraternity of licentious and debauched rogues. These possibilities, should they become facts, will leave no value to the Union for anybody to calculate. Nothing has cast so great a doubt over the future of this country as the Mormon plague spot and if the state of Utah is to be admitted into our constellation the sign will lose its present proud significance and stand as stars sometimes do in equivoque the representatives of something too foul to be spoken or written and all this evil, if it be consummated, will be fairly chargeable upon the absurdity of squatter sovereignty, a demagogue's figment to serve a party purpose carried to its legitimate deductions by knaves operating through the instrumentality of zealots, fanatics, fools and lechers. We have no patience with the Mormons and as little with temporizers who leave the evil to increase until at last literal and bloody war may be forced upon us to crush what common sense and a just idea of the power of the general government might have averted. The contact with the Mormons of such settlers of the West as have just ideas of purity and decency will be terrible whenever the tide of immigration reaches

them and if the descendants of the wretches now wallowing in Mormonism, modern vermin perpetuating their kind in a disgusting ratio of other loathsome creatures, if we say these children of such paternity do not form a pariah race in our country it will be because this bad leaven taints the whole moral mass.

Extremes meet. We have enjoyed a high order of social virtue in this Republican country because no corrupt royalty and nobility have made illegitimacy tolerable and recommended the Bend Sinister as a badge of honor provided that the blood, no matter by what questionable vein it descends, be honorable. But if squatter sovereignty and liberty deteriorating into licentiousness produce the same results we have only FitzYoungs and FitzMormons for Fitzjames' and Fitzclarence's and certainly have not gained much by the exchange.

ROGER EKINS: Apparently that editor disliked Mormons almost as much as he disliked the Irish.

Pacific, Post and "Mormonism"
Western Standard. 15 November 1856.

The *Pacific* of last week and the *Pathfinder* and *Post* of the 12th instant contain an article on "Mormonism" extracted from the Philadelphia *American* which exceeds in bitterness, vituperation and filthy epithets anything we have seen upon the subject for a long time and which exhibits the deep corruption of the heart and brain of the writer. The language it contains would be much more becoming frequenters of the Five Points in New York or Billingsgate in London than the mouth of an American editor and we are surprised to see any paper in the state disgrace its columns by its insertion. We can only account for its appearance on the supposition that some of the California editorial fraternity, being destitute of the necessary amount of brains to concoct stories about the "Mormons", have been compelled to have recourse to foreign aid and in order to gratify their malicious propensities towards us. We do not profess to be so expert in the use of slang phrases and low vulgarisms as the editor of the *American* nor do we wish to degrade ourselves to his level by adopting his course for says the wise man, "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him." (Proverbs 26:4)

There is one thing however which we would remind gentlemen of and that is that selecting all the scurrilous and abusive words from a dictionary and arranging them in consecutive order

> though it may exhibit a certain degree of smartness is not argument. And though it may pander to and please the passions of the vulgar unthinking crowd it will not only fail to convince but will disgust every sensible and reflecting man and woman. There is not an objection raised in the article to which we allude but what could be easily and satisfactorily answered but we do not consider it worthy of a reply for it carries its own refutation on its face and the only reason we notice it is because it shows the mean, cowardly, underhanded course which certain editors in this city are determined to pursue towards us and our principles and because it is also a tolerably correct criterion of their taste—crows flock to carrion but its very scent is sufficient to drive away birds of cleaner tastes and purer instincts.
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> Why is it gentlemen that you are compelled to resort to such means to sustain your position? We are here to debate with you the principles of "Mormonism" on their own merits and to answer your objections against them if you have any. We invite discussion. We court inquiry. Bring forth your strong arguments. Show us our errors. Prove "Mormonism" to be false either from the Bible or nature. We are willing to meet you on these grounds. But no. Instead of pursuing this manly, consistent, straightforward course, you sneak away behind the invincible barrier of some absurd story that's been hatched up by charitable disinterested man as the editor of the *American* from three to 10,000 miles away and about which neither of us know as much as a monkey does of algebra and then you valiantly stick your heads out of your hiding places and then call upon us to refute these ridiculous offshoots of a diseased brain when you well know that it's impossible for us to obtain the necessary proof to do so. Shame on such a contemptible subterfuge.
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> We ask again why is it that you pursue such a course? We are compelled to conclude that it's either because you have learned by past experience that reason is not a weapon that can be used against "Mormonism", that no sound argument can be brought to bear against it, or else that you really do not know enough to conduct an argument on the subject. If the latter is the case we advise you not to open your mouths again until you have something to say but to remember the fable of the ass who when attired in the skin of a lion passed very well for that noble animal until he attempted to imitate his roar when his bray betrayed his true nature.

As one of the first propagators of Mormonism on the Sandwich Islands, the term then generally used for Hawaii, it's hardly surprising that Cannon responded

forcefully when the California press attacked Mormon missionary efforts in that island paradise.

As he often would, Cannon used an eloquent defense of American liberties to decry his opponents' ill-considered call to "Hang 'em up - like pirates" and to point out the unfortunate effects Protestant missionary efforts had on Polynesian culture and morals.

Taking the bait the editor of the *California American* tried to defend his somewhat exaggerated language providing Cannon with another opportunity to blast this intemperate burst of indignation.

"Mormonism" in the Sandwich Islands
***Western Standard*. 6 December 1856.**

HELEN EKINS:

> "The Mormons are preaching their accursed doctrines in the Sandwich Islands, of all places in the world needing the prevalence of just the opposite principles of social conduct. The great obstacle in the way of civilization in that quarter has always been the strong tendency of the people to licentiousness. It has been in some measure surmounted, and might soon be fully overcome, but for the advent of this new *ism* into that region. The propagators of such a monstrous evil as Mormonism . . . *ought to be hung up, like pirates*."

ROGER EKINS:

> The above is an editorial item from the columns of a Sacramento paper, (the *California American*) of Saturday last, and is strikingly indicative of the spirit of murder and bloodshed which dwells in the breasts of many who hold themselves up as guides of public opinion, and teachers of virtue, good order and peace. Every honest, peaceable and upright man must be disgusted with such sentiments, and cannot but execrate the spirit that would dictate their utterance. Men that will permit themselves to be actuated by such feelings, are unworthy of the society of their fellow-men, and should be shunned as enemies of their race. Had they lived in the days of Christ they would have been in the crowd who cried, "crucify him, crucify him;" or, had they been present at the execution of Stephen, they would doubtless have rubbed their hands in glee, should they have lacked the courage to throw the stones. Such men filled the cells of the Inquisition with victims, and caused the streets of Paris to flow with the blood of those who dared to think differently from

themselves; and, had they the power to-day, they would have another St. Bartholomew and the Latter-day Saints as their victims. If the Latter-day Saints are preaching "accursed doctrines" on the Sandwich Islands, they are preaching "accursed doctrines" in California; for we preach but the one doctrine wherever we go. And as, in the opinion of the editors of the *California American*, the penalty for propagating "Mormonism" there should be "*to be hung up like pirates*," if they would but express their feelings, they would advocate the visitation of the same penalty upon its propagators here; and, as its believers all become propagators the moment they become acquainted with it, the hanging process would have to be extended to every member of the society throughout the earth! Are the editors of the *California American* prepared for such a consummation?

We had the honor to be one of the first propagators of "Mormonism" on the Sandwich Islands, and we were the first individual who preached, what the editors of the *California American* are pleased to term, the "accursed doctrines" of "Mormonism" to those Islanders in their own language; before they go, therefore, to those lands to execute the sanguinary vengeance they have decreed against the "Mormons," they had better commence with us, as we have not only been "guilty" of propagating "Mormonism" there, but are also engaged in the same delightful occupation here, and, the Lord being our helper, intend to follow the business for the remainder of our life and throughout the endless ages of eternity. Before they commence, however, they had better weigh well the consequences of such a movement, and be prepared to meet them, as the shedding of the blood of one Latter-day Saint will be the seed from which such an abundant harvest will be raised that the extirpation of their system would be impossible. We know that the doctrines taught, both on the Islands and here, and, in fact, throughout the world by the "Mormons," are not "accursed," only in the estimation of Satan and his agents; neither is their system "a monstrous evil." As we have been a propagator of these doctrines there, it is but reasonable to suppose that we have a little knowledge on this subject. The people were, and are now, being taught to believe on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, with all their hearts; do the editors of the *California American* think this an accursed doctrine? They have been taught to repent of their sins and forsake them; do they imagine this to be an accursed doctrine? They have been shown that baptism for the remission of sins was necessary; is this what they would phrase an accursed doctrine? They have also been exhorted to walk uprightly, to deal justly and to forsake and abhor

everything licentious or corrupt; do they term these doctrines accursed? These are the doctrines taught by the Latter-day Saints to the Sandwich Islanders, Californians and people of every land for their obedience, and every doctrine antagonistic to these *is not* "Mormonism."

It is a poor plan, and a very great evidence of weakness for men to recommend the hangman's rope as an argument to arrest the progress of "Mormonism." Though very potent in its way, it is not very apt to show men their errors, or to cause men of firmness to abjure them. Such an *argument* in the hands of tyrants and despots may be a terror to slaves and sycophants; but when used by an American editor towards freemen, the only feelings it gives rise to, are those of pity and contempt for the man who would so far forget himself as to use them.

HELEN EKINS:

"Mormonism"
***Daily California American.* 9 December 1856.**

The idea of hanging the Mormons up like pirates appeared in the editorial columns of this paper a week or 10 days ago and was the result of a momentary burst of indignation upon reading, as an item of news from the Sandwich Islands, that the monstrosity of Mormonism was gaining a foothold in that region. The language is somewhat exaggerated it is true for we could hardly be supposed to be literally in favor of publicly executing Mormon preachers—detestable as they all undoubtedly are, and however well deserving the fate of common felons, for however beneficial it might be to the intentions of humanity to extirpate by law so monstrous an evil as Mormonism from the face of the earth yet it would be dangerous to the rights of man and the greater doctrine of liberty of conscience to establish in this government or any other such a precedent. A departure from the great Republican principle of free toleration of religious opinions in a solitary instance would endanger the principle itself and tend to revive in its full force a policy, which the past experience of civilized nations has shown, had better be allowed to slumber among the things that were.

For the Mormons themselves we have no respect—we mean the leaders of the sect—but we do respect the great principle under which they seek shelter, which like the rain from heaven that falls upon the just as well as the unjust, is for them as well as for any other class of men. Had we the power to control our national

legislation we would restrain the hand of destruction aimed at the Mormons, odious as they are and repugnant to every sentiment of decency within us, not for *their* sake but for the sake of the country. We would not strike them down for the same reasons that we would not tear down a splendid monument to the genius of architecture whose massive pillars and sky-reaching dome the labor of a century had reared for the purpose of extracting or putting to death a miserable reptile that had hid within its walls. No. Rather let it live on though it should issue forth at times to hiss and stink and strike at all it met. So much we would not do and so far do we qualify the language of the paragraph above quoted. But we do not hesitate to say that could it be done, with safety to the principle of which we have spoken, the propagators of a general system of licentiousness like that of Mormonism—so open, shameless, indecent in its everyday workings, so destructive of every quality that most ennobles man and distinguishes him from the brutes *ought* to be hung up, every one of them, as the common enemies of mankind.

We have thus taken the pains to explain our precise meaning in the paragraph in question because it has been taken up as a text by the Mormon *Standard* at San Francisco of Saturday's issue upon which to write a long article denouncing us for the expression of such a sentiment. The editor of that sheet affects to suppose that we are literally in favor of hanging up Mormons or of making it the policy of the country to do so and intimates that if such a course is to be pursued we had better begin with him as he has preached Mormonism both in the Sandwich Islands and in California. Now we do not deny that were we engaged in such a business we should consider the editor a standard fit subject for our attention and we take occasion to say to him, since he seems to desire our notice, that while we pity a poor miserable fanatic who knows no better than to be led by the nose into the filthy slough of the most foul and monstrous superstition we scorn with every feeling of manhood that is in us, the lying hypocrite who knows what he preaches is false and not only false but destructive of the very best interest of society as it is the deadliest blight upon virtue and morality.

We know well enough that the Mormons' leaders expect to thrive upon what they call persecution and that they would delight in getting into controversies with respectable newspapers but we will nevertheless so far humor them on this occasion as to tell them in plain terms what they are at any rate how they are seen by decent people. They are considered hypocrites and imposters, a foul blot upon humanity which ought at once to be wiped out and that they are tolerated at all is owing not to any regard for them but for the

principles of religious tolerance under which, with all their loathsome vileness, they have enough sense to know they can be protected. The sledgehammer, which is to knockout their brains, is not legislation but public opinion and we are satisfied to let it do its work.

ROGER EKINS:

California American on "Mormonism" *Western Standard*. 20 December 1856.

The editor of the *American*, in another article on this subject [of hanging up Mormons like pirates] in last week's paper, states that the item in question was the result of a momentary burst of indignation, and that he would not wish to be understood as being literally in favor of publicly executing Mormon preachers. He then delivers his opinion on the benefits of free toleration of religious opinions etc., and what he would do for the "Mormons" had he the power to control "our national legislation"—that he would restrain the hand of destruction aimed at the Latter-day Saints, not for their sake, but for the sake of the country. So far he attempts to qualify the language of the paragraph in question. But he has no sooner finished his qualifying remarks than he says that, could it be done with safety to the principle of free toleration, the propagators of a system like that of "Mormonism," "*ought* to be hung up, every one of them, as the common enemies of mankind." And again, he says that they are "a foul blot upon humanity which ought at once to be wiped out." Was it another "burst of indignation" that called forth these last sentiments? We suppose that we must set it down as such, and consider the "language somewhat exaggerated," as there is so little difference between these sentiments and the sentiments of the paragraph which he has attempted to qualify, and which he says was the result of a momentary burst of indignation and contained language somewhat exaggerated, that we can scarcely detect any difference. We are pleased that the editor has informed us that he is subject to such fits when he reads anything about the progress of "Mormonism," as we shall be able, hereafter, to overlook any "exaggerated language" that he may indulge in when treating upon this subject.

Still under the influence of this "burst of indignation," however, he goes on indulging in some very vulgar and ungentlemanly language towards ourself, giving us his opinion of "Mormons" in general and ourself in particular, informing us what

he would do with us were he *hangman*—that if that were his business, he would consider us a fit subject for his attention—all of which, after the explanation he has given, we conclude to be the unmeaning, exaggerated ravings of a man who has a strange habit, whenever the progress of "Mormonism" is alluded to, of writing about hanging men up like pirates, when in reality he does not wish to be so understood! Not being subject to "momentary bursts of indignation," nor being in the habit of dealing in "exaggeration," we confess that we cannot compete with the editor of the *American* in the use of low, abusive and ungentlemanly epithets. In this he excels us. His past education and experience have given him such ready command of ribaldry that we must for ever despair of being able to emulate him. Our sense of self-respect and neighborly courtesy, if nothing else, would forbid the attempt. But as the editor of the *American* is probably not aware of the fact, that slang and abuse do not pass among sensible and well bred people for argument and ability, we take the pains to enlighten him, and to inform him, also, that the use of such terms as *lying hypocrite—miserable fanatic—impostor—filthy monstrosity—foul superstition*, etc., only betrays a mean and ignoble spirit that, by its proficiency in vulgarity, would endeavor to hide its lack of sense. He is of the opinion that the Latter-day Saints expect to thrive on persecution, and that they would delight in getting into controversies with respectable newspapers; insinuating, of course, that he is *respectable*! and that we ought to submit quietly and resignedly to any insults or abuse to which he may give vent whenever he is seized with one of his "bursts of indignation." That is the idea conveyed throughout his whole article. He has said the "Mormons ought to be *hung* up like pirates." We have had the temerity to condemn the sentiment, though uttered by the editor of the *California American*! and because we have done this we must be bespattered by the filthy emanations of the brain and pen of a man who calls himself *respectable*. Now, we wish the editor of the *American* to distinctly understand that, whenever he shall so far forget himself as to give utterance to a sentiment similar to that with which we found fault, and which he attempted to qualify, we shall unhesitatingly condemn and expose it. We do not seek either persecution or controversy; but if they are to be the consequences of our condemning odious, tyrannical and unrighteous sentiments, let them come, and we will do our best to prepare for them. We have been educated to believe that we have an equal right, with every other citizen of this Republic, to express our dissent to everything arbitrary and intolerant, and the fact that we are a Latter-day Saint will never hinder us from exercising it. The

religious tolerance of which he speaks, and under which he says we have sought protection, is not a *privilege* granted unto us, neither is it anything for which we should be thankful to him or any other man; it is our inalienable *right*—our birthright—bestowed upon us by the Deity himself, and though we may be deprived of it by despots, it is still a right for which we shall ever contend.

HELEN EKINS:

"Mormons" Again
Daily California American. 22 December 1856.

The editor of the *Standard* accuses us of using "low, abusive and ungentlemanly epithets" and says something about our "past education and experience" fitting us for ribaldry. Those who know us and not strangers are the best judges of our past education and experience and they will at least bear us out when we say that our past education and experience never led us into any such vile and shameless conduct as is the everyday practice of Mormonism whatever may have been our past education and experience and of that as we have just intimated we will leave to those who know to speak for us.

In regard to our using "abusive and ungentlemanly epithets" we can only say that we generally call things by their right names. We consider the Mormon leaders lying hypocrites and can find no fitter words to convey our meaning. We look upon the actual believers in Mormonism as the dupes of imposters and regard their faith as a foul and monstrous superstition and must so express ourselves. If there is a more elegant and gentlemanly way of signifying the same thing we have no objection to adopting it but a skunk is a skunk and it could not change the nature of the animal were we call it an odoriferous digitigrade carnivorous mammal.

ROGER EKINS:

The "California American" Again
Western Standard. 3 January 1857.

Our article headed the "California *American* on Mormonism," published in the *Western Standard* of the 20th ultimo, has called forth a rejoinder from the editor of that paper, which we feel disposed to notice, though at the risk of being again charged by him with a desire to covet his attention. We have an aversion to

newspaper warfare, but when assailed in the manner we have been by the *American* we should be, in our opinion, recreant to the cause with which we are identified and to every duty incumbent upon us, were we to allow it to pass unnoticed.

Gentlemanly courtesy will never prompt a man to call another a liar, and publish it abroad, unsupported by anything but assertion; much less will it influence him to denounce a whole community as lying hypocrites, impostors and dupes without advancing the slightest shadow of proof, other than his bare opinion, to support the charge. What would the editor of the *American* think were we to call him a driveler, a political trickster, a man who would advocate any measure or support any candidate, if he should only be paid enough? Were we to make such statements and publish them upon no other evidence than our mere say so, the mildest terms men could use to us would be that we were low, abusive and ungentlemanly, and the plea, that we "generally called things by their right names," would avail us but little. Yet this would be equally as consistent and honorable a course as the one he has taken towards us in his articles. We have, for nearly a year past, been disseminating and advocating "Mormonism" through the columns of this paper; this is the only object we had in view in publishing it. It may be presumed, therefore, that a tolerably correct idea of our doctrines can be gathered from its contents. Now, we defy the editor of the *American* to bring forward a single instance from it, or indeed from any of our publications or teachings, where licentiousness or immorality is taught and sanctioned. If "Mormonism" be such a system as he represents it to be, so vile and shameless in its everyday workings, he surely will have no difficulty in proving it be such from our writings; but we wish him to bear in mind that his idea of what is vile, shameless and fanatical will not be the standard by which we must be measured—that standard must be God's word and not man's opinion. We hope our cotemporary will not run away this time with the idea, because we have noticed him again, that we covet his attention; we want him to be undeceived on this point. We have lived thus far without the attention of so "respectable" a paper as the California *American*, and we are not yet quite so low as to be under the necessity of resorting to it. The editor of that paper may rest assured, however, that whenever he gives vent to such sentiments as he has lately advanced regarding "Mormonism" and the "Mormons," we shall never hesitate, by the assistance of that Being to whom "Mormonism" owes its origin, to expose and condemn them.

There were no more rejoinders! Cannon wore him down on that one. Well were the Mormons of mid-nineteenth century America saints or sinners? The answer would have to be an unqualified "both". Like any people the Mormons had plenty of the good and the bad among them but to judge the entire religion either for good or for bad on the basis of a single individual or on the basis of a single tenet of the religion such as the little understood principle of polygamy would be completely unjust. Nonetheless that's exactly what happened in the frontier west. Far too often those who did the judging did so on the basis of second or third-hand information often from those who had once been members of the Church but who had left with hurt feelings and personal grudges.

For a number of reasons there is probably no need for polemical apologists such as the young George Q. Cannon in today's Church nor is he likely to be remembered by many for his early years as the editor of the *Western Standard* overshadowed as they were by a subsequent career as a business executive, political catalyst and Church leader. But Cannon's fiery editorials of 1856 and 1857 are worthy of historical memory. If nothing else we must acknowledge the value of good writing and sound reasoning. Cannon, one of Mormonism's most effective defenders of the faith, was not without error but the worst of his writing was infinitely superior to much of what passes for reasoned argument today.

Perhaps just as importantly he wrote with a flair and faithful sense of purpose rarely encountered at the beginning of the 21st century. The power and mastery of the early writings of George Q. Cannon reveal that something quite extraordinary was lost with the passing of the editor of the *Western Standard* and the feisty little San Francisco newspaper through which he took on his role(?).

Time has only permitted us a brief glance at the many inflammatory editorials that made up the California Mormon newspaper wars of 1856-7 but to give you an idea of the various issues that fed those wars all of which contributed to the general question of whether the Mormons were saints or sinners the following are the titles of the other chapters in my book:

— Two wrongs never will make a right: Sam Brannan and the vigilantes
— The pusillanimous railings of an apostate Mormon: the strange case of Elder Cannon and Mr. Hyde
— The bandits of the plains: red Indians, white Indians, Lamanites, and Danites
— The grossest form of human depravity: polygamy and the relics of barbarism
— The best news from this place is the reformation: the reality of rhetoric
— The kingdom that Daniel saw: autocracy, theocracy, and theo-democracy in Deseret
— The villainous, wholesale calumniator: Judge Drummond and the friends of the Court

— The hoary-headed Reverend seducer: the assassination of Parley P. Pratt
— The Mormons must be crushed out: War and rumors of war
— A horrible massacre of emigrants: vengeance at Mountain Meadows
— Faithfully warning the people: Cannon's parting shots

All appearing now at a bookstore near you! Thank you very much.

SCOTT GORDON (President, FAIR): Are there questions for this gentleman?

Q: This interchange ended in January of 1857. That summer Johnson's Army arrived in Utah, what's the relationship?

ROGER EKINS: That's why it ended. George Q. was called back along with everybody else and that's what brought an end to it all.

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