



*John Taylor had thirty-five children in all—twenty-two sons and thirteen daughters. Pictured here are seventeen of his twenty-two sons.*

*J. Lewis Taylor*

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## JOHN TAYLOR: FAMILY MAN

THE great body of the Saints knew [John Taylor] principally as a public man,” observed B. H. Roberts, “and so prominent was he as such that his private life and domestic virtues have attracted but little attention.”<sup>1</sup> This study will consider John Taylor as a family man. We will look briefly at his parents’ family, then focus especially on his role as a husband and father, offering a glimpse of his home life and of some of his sentiments and counsel expressed in letters to his family during long absences from home.

Born on November 1, 1808, in Milnthorpe, Westmoreland, England, John Taylor was the second of ten children of James Taylor and Agnes Taylor (her maiden name was also Taylor, though not a blood relative). Of these ten children, four died in

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*J. Lewis Taylor is a retired Church Educational System instructor and administrator and president of the John Taylor Family Association.*

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infancy or childhood, and the eldest, Edward, died in 1828 at age 21, leaving John next to his father as leader of the family.

John's paternal forebears—the Taylors, Moons, Parkes, Cowperthwaites, Slaters, and Barrows—settled mainly in Westmoreland and nearby Lancashire. His mother's ancestors—the Taylors, Whittingtons, Sewarts, Barkers, Dickinsons, Heblethwaites, Borrets, Richardsons, and Usherwoods—also came largely from Westmoreland.

### TO CANADA: LEONORA CANNON AND CONVERSION

In 1830 John's parents immigrated to Canada with two sons and two daughters; John followed later in 1832 after he disposed of some unsold property and settled his father's affairs.<sup>2</sup> Upon his arrival in Canada, John continued his affiliation with the Methodists, whom he had joined in England, and commenced holding study classes and preaching in the regions around.<sup>3</sup>

While leading these classes he met pretty Leonora Cannon, also a devout Methodist, who had emigrated to Canada from the Isle of Man. Although twelve years older than John, she accepted his second proposal of marriage after she saw herself in a dream as his companion.<sup>4</sup> According to a note in the Taylor family Bible, they were “married in the Episcopal Church, Toronto, U.C. [Upper Canada], Jan. 28, 1833, by Revd. Mr. Lockheart.”<sup>5</sup>

As is well known, John learned of the restored gospel through the missionary efforts of Elder Parley P. Pratt. Both John and Leonora were baptized by Elder Pratt on May 9, 1836, near Toronto on the property of a friend, Joseph Fielding. John was instrumental in the conversion of Joseph Fielding's sister, Mary

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Fielding, who later married Hyrum Smith and whose son Joseph F. would later be John's counselor in the First Presidency.<sup>6</sup>

John preached the glad tidings of the Restoration to his parents, who were also baptized in 1836. His sisters, Agnes and Elizabeth, and his brother William (later to be senior president in the Second Quorum of Seventy) likewise accepted the gospel. His other brother, James, remained in Canada and apparently did not join the Church, much to the displeasure of his family.<sup>7</sup> James did eventually come to Utah, where he died in 1878; John spoke at his funeral services.<sup>8</sup>

#### INITIAL CORRESPONDENCE WITH FAMILY

By the time they had moved to Far West in the fall of 1838, John and Leonora had three children: George John, Joseph James, and Mary Ann. A fourth child, Leonora Agnes, died shortly after her birth in 1842 in Nauvoo. As a militia-mob drove the Saints from Missouri, the Taylors trekked to Iowa and settled in "miserable old log barracks" in Montrose.<sup>9</sup>

Elder Taylor, who was ordained an Apostle on December 19, 1838, by Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, barely saw his family safely settled in Iowa before he returned to Far West with others of the Twelve to dedicate the temple site and begin preparing for a mission to England (see D&C 118). John was obliged to leave Leonora with their children in the log barracks when he began his travels in August 1839. He served for nearly two years, returning on July 12, 1841. His departure marks the beginning of John's family correspondence, which helped keep the family close during his missionary labors which kept him away from home for nine of the next eighteen years.

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John's letters reflect his deep love and concern for his family, as well as his steadfast devotion to his calling. In his initial brief letter, written on a homemade letterhead with the names of his children and "My Dear Nora," he concluded, "I am as ever your affectionate husband." He included short, tender notes to George and Mary Ann: "George, be a good boy, do what your Mother tells you and God will love you and I will love you." And to Mary Ann: "The Lord healed your father from being sick. Your father prays that you and your mother and baby may not be sick. Mary Ann, do not leave your mother when she tells you to. Stay at home, be a good girl. God bless you."<sup>10</sup>

Leonora also reached out with love for John: "I feel as if I want to get into this Letter and go too. . . . May the Lord . . . bring you back in safety [and] make you a blessing while you remain.' She helped the children draw smudgy circle 'kisses' on the bottom of the page."<sup>11</sup>

A short time later, John wrote to her, "I bless you & the children in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . & remain as ever, Your Affectionate Husband for ever and ever."<sup>12</sup>

And he was not hesitant to express his devotion to the work: "My dear Nora, I feel a disposition to labor in the vineyard as much as ever I did and feel that the Lord is with me in Liverpool. We are doing well baptizing all the time more or less, and I have never wanted either friends, money or clothes since I left home, for which I feel grateful to my Heavenly Father. I feel I am in his hands and doing his work and all is well."<sup>13</sup>

Among the first converts John baptized in Liverpool were Leonora's brother, Captain George Cannon, his wife, Ann Quayle, and their three children, twelve-year-old George Quayle Cannon (later John's counselor in the First Presidency), Mary Alice Cannon, and Angus Munn Cannon.<sup>14</sup>

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When John arrived on the Isle of Man, where Leonora had spent her youth, his memories of her were especially strong. He reflected on the occasion of their marriage and the happy times they had shared together, recounted some of their joys, and also their afflictions, exclaiming in conclusion: “Thou hast passed through trials, Nora, but thou shalt rejoice! Thou hast been driven from thy home for the truth’s sake, but thou and thy children shall have a home in the Kingdom of God! . . . The tender association [with thy husband] has been severed—that others may be made partakers of endless life; but thou and thy husband shall yet reign together in the celestial kingdom of God. A few more struggles and the . . . victory will be ours.”<sup>15</sup> Those “few more struggles” were to occur at various times during the ensuing forty-six years.

INCREASE IN FAMILY IN  
NAUVOO AND BEYOND

Not the least of John’s trials came when the Prophet Joseph made known to the Twelve and trusted others the revealed doctrine of plural marriage. John Taylor’s reaction is best told in his own words:

I had always entertained strict ideas of virtue, and I felt as a married man that this was to me, outside of this principle, an appalling thing to do. The idea of going and asking a young lady to be married to me when I had already a wife! It was a thing calculated to stir up feelings from the innermost depths of the human soul. . . . Nothing but a knowledge of God, and the revelations of God, and the truth of them could have induced me to embrace such a principle as this. . . .

Some time after these things were made known unto us, I was riding out of Nauvoo on horseback, and met Joseph Smith

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coming in, he, too, being on horseback. . . . I bowed to Joseph, and having done the same to me, he said: “. . . Look here, . . . those things that have been spoken of must be fulfilled, and if they are not entered into right away the keys will be turned.” Well, what did I do? Did I feel to stand in the way of this great, eternal principle, and treat lightly the things of God? No, I replied: “Brother Joseph, I will try to carry these things out.”<sup>16</sup>

John did follow the counsel of the Prophet, for when he departed from Nauvoo with the Saints two years later, he had married nine additional wives, seven “for eternity”—Elizabeth Kaighin (Leonora’s cousin), Jane Ballantyne, Mary Ann Oakley (these all bore children); Mary Amanda Utley and Mary Ramsbottom (they never came west); Ann Hughlings Pitchforth (divorcée whose husband left her when she joined the Church; she died at Winter Quarters in October 1846); Sarah Thornton Coleman (widow of Prime Coleman and later sealed to Coleman in the Endowment House in 1852). John married two “for time only,” and apparently as guardian, Mercy Rachel Fielding Thompson Smith, widow of both Robert B. Thompson and Hyrum Smith (she was sealed to Thompson for eternity in 1846); Lydia Dibble Granger, widow of Oliver Granger (she was sealed to Granger in 1894).<sup>17</sup>

In July 1846 at Winter Quarters, John Taylor, Parley Pratt, and Orson Hyde were called on a short-term mission to England to correct some difficulties there. Following his return to Winter Quarters nine months later, John married Sophia Whittaker and Annie Ballantyne (Jane’s sister).<sup>18</sup> After arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, he married Sophia’s sister, Harriet Whittaker, who, along with Sophia, also had children with John. Prior to his call to serve in the Eastern States in 1854, he married Caroline Hooper

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Saunders Gilliam, the only one of the “lesser-known” wives named in his will. Later while in the Eastern States he married Margaret (“Maggie”) Young, by whom he also had children. And lastly, while in the underground in Kaysville in 1886, he married Josephine Elizabeth Roueche.<sup>19</sup> Thus John had at least sixteen wives; the more well-known seven bore thirty-four children, and with one adoption, he had thirty-five in all—twenty-two sons and thirteen daughters. Apparently, he did not live in an intimate conjugal relationship with several of his wives, serving only as their guardian.

IN THE SALT LAKE VALLEY

Shortly after his arrival in the Salt Lake Valley as a leader of the second pioneer group, John built a ninety-foot shanty-type building with separate partitions for his family on the south side of Pioneer Fort. Into these humble quarters he moved his wives and the five children who had been born.

John was not to be home in the valley for long, for in October 1849 he was called on another mission, this time to France and Germany, where he served until August 1852. Again his primary tie with his family was by letters. To his sixteen-year-old son George John, Elder Taylor wrote while en route to France: “I am always anxious to promote your happiness by all the means that lay in my power. . . . I wish you to be a good boy and obedient to the counseling of your mother and to promote her happiness and peace, and God will bless you. . . . Do not forget to pray to the Lord and call upon him in secret for blessings upon you, upon your Mother, sisters and brothers and all the family. . . . Treat all the family without sectional feelings.”<sup>20</sup>

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John was much concerned about providing educational opportunities for his family. Not long after his arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, he set up a school in the adobe granary behind his home and invited the older children to teach the younger ones. Continuing the letter to George John, the eldest and principal teacher of the children, John wrote:

I wish you to pay attention to your studies and I have sent you two French books. You have a French dictionary. With these you will be enabled to study the French (which I wish you to attend to) with the aid of someone to instruct you. . . . Don't forget or neglect the German, but perfect that and learn the French also. If Joseph [James] can learn it you can teach him and baby Anna [Marie].

Now George, observe the things that I have told you and abide in my counsel and you shall be blessed. Until I see you again, and forever I remain, Your affectionate father.<sup>21</sup>

Later, in another letter to "My dear Family," he invited Mary Ann to take piano lessons, for which he would "pay the expense," then instructed her to "teach Josephine, Harriet, Ann and Richard James, and Joseph if he wants to learn."<sup>22</sup> Then one of the most touching letters to his family followed:

Let me tell my feelings if I can. Home! Home! Home! What shall I say, can I tell it, No! a thousand times, no!! Your forms, your countenances, your bodies and spirits are all portrayed before me in living characters. You are with me in my imaginations, thoughts, dreams, feelings; true our bodies are separated, but there you live—you dwell in my bosom, in my heart, and affections. And will remain there forever. . . . Seas,

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mountains, deserts, plains and oceans may separate us, but in my heart you dwell. . . .

But do I murmur? No. Do you? I hope not. Shall I not say for you, ‘No’? I am engaged in my Master’s business. I am a minister of Jehovah to proclaim his will to the nations and go to unlock the door of life to a mighty nation, to publish to millions the principles of life, light, truth, intelligence and salvation. . . .

I love my family; they love me. But shall that love be so contracted, so narrow, . . . as to prevent me doing the will of my Father in heaven. No, say I. . . . No! Our thoughts and feelings soar in another atmosphere. We live for time and we live for eternity. We love here and will love forever—. . . .

A few more separations and trials, a few more tears, a few more afflictions, and the victory will be ours! We’ll gain the kingdom, possess the crown, inherit eternal glory. . . .

May the spirit of peace abide with you forever. . . . Your affectionate husband, father and friend.<sup>23</sup>

A letter to “My dear Family” a year later reflects a touch of homesickness:

In the midst of strangers, I am alone.  
Let me go to the valley far off in the west  
To my kindred and brethren who I love the best  
Where with love and affection our hearts can overflow  
To my home in the mountains, O there let me go.<sup>24</sup>

Not long after returning from Europe in 1852, John Taylor received a fourth mission call, this time to preside over the Eastern States Mission and counter the vitriolic attacks upon the Church by publishing a newspaper, which he titled the *Mormon*. His son

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George John and nephew Angus M. Cannon accompanied him. A letter written to his family from New York City on New Year's Day in 1855 reflects again his deep twin concerns—his family and his service to the Lord:

My mind naturally reverts to the position and circumstances of my family. . . . I should like to have the privilege of dropping in to see you and bringing with me a few things that I could easily pick up here as a new years gift; but as I am deprived of this pleasure I can only be with you in spirit. . . . With all the strength of affections of a father and husband I wish you a happy new year. Our life is indeed a singular one, called by the duties of my office in this Church Kingdom. To be frequently absent on long missions from my family and home makes it difficult for me and solitary for you. I necessarily leave you and the children in a lonely, solitary, and unpleasant position; but this I suppose is all right. It is a blessing to be a servant of God, the bearer of salvation, to hold the keys of the priesthood and administer life to a perishing world. . . .

I do not fail to remember you before my heavenly Father that you and your children may be blest; that your wants may be supplied, . . . and that the peaceful influence of the spirit of God may rest upon you and fill you [with] joy and consolation. . . . God bless you all forever.

Your affectionate Husband and Father. John Taylor.

P.S. Buy the children a pound of candy. . . . J.T.<sup>25</sup>

Typical of the sentiments in letters to his individual wives during this period were stirring words of encouragement through trials they were experiencing:

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It is now a number of years since we embarked on board the same ship and united our fortunes, for weal or woe; since then neither you nor I have been without our trials and afflictions. This we have expected, and many. . . . but as we are aiming at a higher goal, perhaps they are more certain with us than others, especially when we consider that through sufferings we are to be made perfect. . . .

Our trials will not last forever. They are earthly. This is our probation. We are aiming at higher and holier pursuits. Our reward is not here—yet. But it is sure. . . . These long separations are painful. They are to you; they are to me. They will not last forever. . . . All is well and will be and I feel in my heart to say God bless you and your children, provide for your wants and fill your bosom with the joy and consolation arising from the sweet influence of his Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, the Taylors waded through a variety of heartaches. As to the family, for instance, five children died in infancy or childhood and two others—David John Taylor and William Whittaker Taylor—in early adulthood. And perhaps most heartrending of all were the defections of two children. A daughter was “led away from Mormonism” while John was away in the Eastern States Mission; she married out of the Church in the spring of 1855 to a man named James Smith Drummond (not, as shown in several records, the infamous federal associate Judge William W. Drummond).<sup>27</sup> This broke the family’s heart. Another son left the Church behind and moved to Oregon.<sup>28</sup>

Upon his return from the Eastern States in 1857, John was able to be with or near his family for most of the next thirty years, except for the last two and a half years, when he withdrew to the underground.

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### A GLIMPSE OF JOHN TAYLOR AT HOME

After his initial settlement in Pioneer Square, John established his family in modest adobe houses, known as “Taylor Row,” on First West (Second West today), between South Temple and First South in Salt Lake, where a portion of the Salt Palace is presently (2008). He helped build these homes and made much of the furniture. And there he spent many happy hours with his family, ever teaching, counseling, and blessing.

Daughter Ida provided this account of the Taylor family life in a tribute at a 1939 family reunion:

My father, John Taylor, stood for so many fine principles of living. I have time only to mention a few. Father loved his family and treated his wives so graciously. With all his many responsibilities he took the time to get his family together and teach them how to live the gospel. He [also] wanted them to be well educated, so the first school was held over the granary where the older children taught the younger ones. He also had neighbor children in the school.

In the home he wanted things clean and orderly, and at meal times, to have family prayer, pleasant times, and not to bring up unpleasant subjects at the table. He was so hospitable and loved to have folks come into his home and entertain them.

An honorable character meant so much to him. The incident of the chickens, for instance, showed how he tried to impress upon [his children] the principle of honesty. A neighbor by the name of Angus Cannon had some chickens that happened to run on the east lot. Angus Cannon said that if Brig [Brigham John] and Ebb [Ebenezer Young] could catch the chickens, they could have them [for the family to eat]. Well, the chickens were caught—and sold. When Father

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heard of it, he held court with the family around and took out the family Bible and read where it said to pay four-fold [2 Sam. 12:6; Luke 19:8]. And the boys had to pay four-fold! Brig had some money saved up for a shirt—which went into the payment of it also.

Each year on his anniversary [birthday] he had all his wives and children present. It was his Home Night. Games, talks, and other interesting matters were given, refreshments served, all of which bound the family together. Since Father's death 53 years ago, his family's families have met together to honor him and to renew old friendships.

I am certainly proud to be the daughter of such a loving, illustrious father.<sup>29</sup>

Another look at John Taylor at home comes from Matthias F. Cowley, a neighbor and close friend of the family:

As a boy and young man [I] have been in [President Taylor's] home many times, going there chiefly to visit his son John W. who was my boyhood friend and companion. . . .

Early in life while yet in my teens, I was ordained a Teacher and on my block were four of the homes of this great and good man. . . .

When we went to his home, we would sometimes find him playing checkers with one of his boys, for rest and recreation from his serious duties. He would immediately lay it all aside, call his family together, and show us the greatest respect possible. . . .

When we finished our evening services as Teacher in the home of President Taylor, he would pleasantly say to us, "Now boys, you have been teaching me; I would like to teach you a little." He would then proceed not to give us a stereotyped

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sermon on morality, goodness, etc., but would relate anecdotes to us of how God answered his prayers, especially when he was in the world preaching the gospel without purse or script [sic].

These incidents in his life were very faith-promoting and I shall never forget them. They have been a source of inspiration to me ever since.<sup>30</sup>

As mentioned, John was very concerned about his children's schooling and what they were reading and learning. One evening, one of his sons, Frederick W., was reading *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne. John entered and asked where he got the book. "From school," the boy replied, "it's a novel." "You shouldn't read such," said his father. So Frederick put the book down and went to bed. When he arose in the morning, he went into the parlor and there was his father still reading the book! John commented to Fred, "That's a good book, son, you may read it."<sup>31</sup>

Having such a large family as John Taylor did was at times a bit taxing on memory. On one occasion he went to ZCMI with one of his wives. One of his sons was also there. The wife immediately recognized the boy and greeted him; but to John the boy didn't seem familiar until they began to talk. John was chagrined. They all laughed together, and John took the brunt of light teasing.<sup>32</sup>

John Taylor took opportunities to teach the gospel in his families' various homes and to encourage close family ties. Family prayers were held regularly. And, introducing a family tradition, he faithfully bid by written invitation each member of his family and some Church dignitaries to attend his annual birthday celebrations, featuring a banquet, music, talks, and dance. This

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was the annual whole family get-together. Such family reunions continued for ninety years after his death, until 1977.

#### TO THE GARDO HOUSE

At the April 1879 conference, the spacious Gardo House, located on the corner of South Temple and First East (70 East South Temple), was voted the official family residence of the President of the Church. It was “doubtless the largest and finest residence in Salt Lake City.”<sup>33</sup>

John’s habits of life were simple and free from ostentation, and his own inclination was to remain in his own humbler home. Not until the change was repeatedly urged upon him did he reluctantly consent to make the Gardo House his residence.<sup>34</sup> Some twenty months later in late December 1881, he moved into the house along with his remaining wives (several had died) and his primarily unmarried children.<sup>35</sup> But their life together as a family was to be short-lived.

#### JOHN’S FINAL MESSAGES TO HIS FAMILY

In 1882 Congress passed the Edmunds Act, which declared polygamy a felony and also made cohabitation with more than one wife a misdemeanor. Persecution of the Saints began in earnest. President Taylor counseled with his family, and it was arranged for his wives and some children to return to their former homes while he continued to reside at the Gardo House with a few of the children. Thus, the family was together in the official residence only for about five months.<sup>36</sup>

As persecution intensified, President Taylor felt it necessary in February 1885 to go “underground” so as to continue to preside over the Church, and “for the public good and in the interest

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of peace.” When he did so, most of his remaining wives with their unmarried children returned intermittently to the Gardo House.<sup>37</sup>

John’s wives and children were hounded and watched; they scarcely appeared in public for fear of arrest, and they had to dress to hide their identity, sometimes even using fictitious names for protection.<sup>38</sup>

Again, John Taylor was separated from his family—this time for the remaining two and a half years of his life. To avoid possible arrest, he was not even able to be at the bedside of his dying wife Sophia Whittaker Taylor nor attend her funeral services. He wrote to his wives fairly often and to his grown children, especially concerning the well-being of their mothers, for whose care they were now responsible. And letters from his family reached him through a carefully guarded delivery system. One such came from two daughters:

Dear Father, We are blessed in having good parents, although we are obliged to be separated from you. We often talk of the pleasant times we have spent in the past and of your excellent teachings and instruction, and hope we will always remember them and carry them out in life. . . .

We feel anxious for your safety and ’tis our prayer that you be kept from the hands of our enemies and hope you will have good health to endure constant confinement to which you are subjected. . . .

Praying that the Lord will watch over you and keep you from harm; and please remember us kindly to the Brethren with you. We remain, Your affectionate daughters, Ida and Leonora Taylor.<sup>39</sup>

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President Taylor approved also by letter Ida's marriage to young John Mills Whittaker, whom he had never been able to meet. His letters reflect his deep concern for proper courtship, careful selection of an eternal companion, and parental consent for marriage.<sup>40</sup>

While in exile or "on the dodge," John moved from place to place until he made the last move in late November 1886 to the large farmhouse of Thomas F. Roueche in Kaysville.

John's letters, written from a variety of "safe retreats" during this period, are remarkably positive; there is a noticeable lack of complaint or expressions of self-pity, although he prayed for the day when "these inhuman persecutions will cease, and peace, liberty, and freedom be enjoyed by us and all the saints."<sup>41</sup>

His letters include reassuring expressions of his love and concern for his remaining wives, for their health and comfort, their spiritual well-being, financial needs, and safety:

Your image often presents itself to me and I reflect with great pleasure upon the many happy seasons we have enjoyed together during a long pilgrimage and I can assure you that my feelings of affection . . . are still as unchangeable as they have always been, and I expect them to grow and increase in time and throughout the eternities.<sup>42</sup>

I have not forgotten you in time, or in eternity, . . . and then again, I don't want to forget [you].<sup>43</sup>

Notable are the times he asked, "Can I do anything to add to your comfort? If I can please let me know."<sup>44</sup> And on occasions he sent money orders or cash (\$5 or \$10) for purchases his wives wished or needed to make.<sup>45</sup>

John felt keenly the loss of regular association with his family. "We are deprived of the dear associations of wives and children

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and friends,”<sup>46</sup> he commented. John also wrote, “I wish I could see you and chat with you as in times past.”<sup>47</sup> And he often sent warm greetings to the children, such as when he wrote, “Give my love to . . . all the dear children.”<sup>48</sup>

He continually encouraged his family during this trying time, admonishing faithfulness, patience, and endurance. And he ever expressed hope for a pleasing end to their trials, sensing perhaps that the true end would be their passing beyond:

In due time we will all get through all right; let us try and be faithful, courageous and trust in God, and all will be well with us and all the saints.<sup>49</sup>

Although these circumstances are not pleasing, yet as we are called upon to pass through them, we will try and endure them patiently. . . . A few more struggles and our trials will be over, and we shall be where the wicked, the corrupt and the ungodly cannot come, and where the weary are at rest.<sup>50</sup>

Shall we mourn and lament then over our little afflictions? No! No! A thousand times No! But we will lift up our hearts and rejoice.<sup>51</sup>

He sought for his wives the continuing blessing of heaven:

God bless you, my dear wife, and may the consoling influence of His Spirit always be with you to cheer your heart, and may life and health be added also to your body.<sup>52</sup>

God bless you my dear wife . . . and may the comforting influence of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, always be with you.<sup>53</sup>

He was especially delighted when learning of his wives supporting each other or joining harmoniously together. On one occasion in 1886, three of his wives sent him a watch chain. He replied: “I am the more pleased as it comes from three of you,

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which exhibits a sisterly union which is very gratifying to my feelings, for union and harmony and brotherly and sisterly love are some of the most pleasant parts of the gospel that we profess to believe in.”<sup>54</sup>

He continually invited his family not to worry about him, assuring them that he was in good health, heavily engaged in the work, and in comfortable circumstances: “Notwithstanding our peculiar position, we are surrounded with very many blessings, for which I feel grateful to God our Heavenly Father; don’t trouble about me. I am all right and have a good Father to go to in whom I trust.”<sup>55</sup>

In his last and longest birthday letter, his final epistle to his family and friends “who may have assembled at the Gardo House” on November 1, 1886, he sent his benediction and blessing. He noted that “some of you have written that you ‘would like to have a peep at me.’ I heartily reciprocate that feeling, and would like to have a ‘peep’ at you . . . ; but in my bodily absence my spirit and peace shall be with you.”

As in many of his communications, he affirmed that “if we are doing the will of the Lord and keeping His commandments, [afflictions] may be truly said to be blessings in disguise.” “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad,” he encouraged, “for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

He delighted “to be informed that the health of the family is generally good, and that the disposition and feeling of both wives and children is to fear God, to work righteousness, and to yield obedience to His laws.” Such, he said, is essential “if we expect to obtain a celestial glory and exaltation.”

He exulted in the privilege of being engaged in the great work of the Lord and of helping to lay the foundation thereof by being “a bearer of this gospel to several nations, and . . . the means of

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bringing many to the knowledge of the truth; among which are some of you, my wives.”

He admonished his loved ones to not let their lives “be a blank.” Rather, “we should at all times place ourselves in conformity with [God’s] laws . . . and requirements of the Church and kingdom of God upon the earth.” “All ought to dedicate themselves daily, morning and evening to the Lord, and seek for His mercy, blessing and oversight.” And he encouraged his family to “be strictly honest, one with another, and with all men; let our word always be as good as our bond; avoid all ostentation of pride and vanity; and be meek, lowly, and humble; be full of integrity and honor; and deal justly and righteously with all men; and have the fear and love of God continually.” He concluded: “God bless you all, in time and throughout the eternities to come, is the prayer of your affectionate husband, father and friend in the new and everlasting covenant.”<sup>56</sup>

## FINAL HOURS

After enjoying measurably good health while in the underground, John took a sudden turn for the worse in the summer of 1887. On July 3, he sent for his sons George J. and John W. to discuss matters pertaining to his estate; then a week later his wives Mary Ann Oakley and Margaret Young came to be with him.<sup>57</sup>

On July 20, Mary Ann wrote to daughter Ida telling of President Taylor’s condition: “I am in the room beside him. . . . O Idy you can very readily imagine the grief we feel to gradually see him passing away, the dearest Friend we have in this earth.”<sup>58</sup>

At his bedside as John’s life slipped away on July 25 were both Mary Ann and Margaret. Also present were John’s counselors,

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George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith, as well as several other attendants.

Funeral services were held in the Tabernacle on July 29 with a viewing at the Gardo House. Angus M. Cannon, President of the Salt Lake Stake, conducted and spoke: "I saw him last in enfeebled health, and when I asked him if he would have me bear a message to his loved ones—to his family, his wives and his children—he said, 'Yes, say unto them I remember them always. I love them individually, and never cease to plead with God for them.'"<sup>59</sup>

#### CONCLUDING TRIBUTE

John Taylor was a man of high moral character, honor, and purity, indeed the embodiment of those qualities of mind, heart, and spirit that most become a man of God. As fearless preacher and defender of the faith, trusted friend of the Prophet Joseph Smith, editor of Church periodicals and prolific writer, apostle of the Lord, pioneer, legislator, and President of the Church, he was also a dedicated family man—a faithful and gracious husband to his wives and beloved father and teacher to his children.

One of the attributes that so endeared John Taylor to his family and also to the Saints was his absolute integrity. In his personal character and example he did not break down. His daily life reflected the precepts he taught both at the pulpit and in private, in the Church and in the home.

John Taylor handled his many and continuing challenges, such as plural marriage and multiple families, perhaps as well as any in this dispensation, and he did so with equity and grace. He looked with deep love, affection, and delight upon his large family and envisioned the day that he would live with them in celestial exaltation.<sup>60</sup>

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### NOTES

1. B. H. Roberts, *The Life of John Taylor* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963), 434.
2. "History of John Taylor: By Himself," Manuscript History of the Church, Book G, 266. This is a holograph reviewing briefly John's life from his birth in 1808 to the time of his call as an Apostle in 1838.
3. "History of John Taylor," Book G, 268.
4. Roberts, *Life of John Taylor*, 30.
5. In Kate B. Carter, comp., *Our Pioneer Heritage* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1964), 7:219.
6. Francis M. Gibbons, *John Taylor: Mormon Philosopher, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 24.
7. Agnes Taylor to John Taylor, April 20, 1856; John Taylor Collection, 1829–1894, Church History Library, MS 1346, reel 1, folder 4, item 3.
8. Gibbons, *John Taylor: Mormon Philosopher, Prophet of God*, 207.
9. Roberts, *Life of John Taylor*, 67.
10. John Taylor Collection, reel 1, folder 1, item 2.
11. Richard L. Jensen, "The John Taylor Family," *Ensign*, February 1980, 53.
12. John Taylor Collection, reel 1, folder 1, item 4; from Liverpool, January 30, 1840.
13. John Taylor Collection, reel 1, folder 1, item 5; from Liverpool, September 6, 1840.
14. Gibbons, *John Taylor: Mormon Philosopher, Prophet of God*, 37; Roberts, *Life of John Taylor*, 458.
15. Roberts, *Life of John Taylor*, 90.
16. Roberts, *Life of John Taylor*, 100–101.
17. Samuel W. Taylor and Raymond W. Taylor, eds. *The John Taylor Papers: Records of the Last Utah Pioneer*, vol. 2, *The President* (Redwood City, CA: Taylor Trust Publishing, 1984–85), appendix 1, 514–19. Sealing information found in Nauvoo, Endowment House, and Logan Temple records.
18. John Taylor and Annie Ballantyne were later divorced "by mutual consent"; divorce certificate, dated November 9, 1852, at Great Salt Lake City.

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19. Taylor and Taylor, *The President*, appendix 1, 514–19. Sealing information in Endowment House and Logan Temple records.
20. John Taylor Collection, reel 1, folder 3, item 2; from St. Louis, February 11, 1850.
21. John Taylor Collection, reel 1, folder 3, item 2; from St. Louis, February 11, 1850.
22. John Taylor Collection, reel 1, folder 4, item 2; from New York City, January 1, 1855.
23. John Taylor Collection, reel 1, folder 3, item 3; February 18, 1850.
24. John Taylor Collection, reel 1, folder 3, item 5; from Liverpool, July 23, 1851.
25. John Taylor Collection, reel 1, folder 4, item 2; from New York City, January 1, 1855.
26. John Taylor to Jane Ballantyne Taylor from New York City, June 18, 1855, in Jane Ballantyne Taylor Papers, MSS A 193-1, Utah State Historical Society.
27. John Taylor Collection, reel 1, folder 4, items 5, 7, 8, 9.
28. Jensen, “The John Taylor Family,” 55.
29. Ida Oakley Taylor Whittaker, “Notes on My Father’s Home Life,” in author’s possession.
30. Matthias F. Cowley, “Reminiscences of Prest. John Taylor,” typescript of address given at LDS University Breakfast Club, October 4, 1925, in Church History Library, MS 157 2, 1–4.
31. As told by son Frederick Whittaker Taylor, recorded in small notebook by his son, Heber R. Taylor; record in possession of Lee T. Cox, Provo, Utah.
32. As above, told by Frederick Whittaker Taylor to his son Heber R. Taylor.
33. Roberts, *Life of John Taylor*, 331.
34. Roberts, *Life of John Taylor*, 331; Taylor and Taylor, *The President*, 196–97.
35. John Mills Whittaker Journals, Church History Library; transcript of Journal 3, MS 1356, 20.
36. Taylor and Taylor, *The President*, 221, n. 20.
37. John Mills Whittaker Journals, transcript of Journal 3, 20. Margaret Young Taylor resided intermittently in a separate home (Jane Ballantyne Taylor

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- Papers). Letters of John Taylor to Jane Ballantyne Taylor reveal that Jane resided at times with her family elsewhere or with friends, September 26, 1885; May 24, 1886.
38. John Mills Whittaker Journals, transcript of Journals 2 and 3; also Taylor and Taylor, *The President*, 345.
  39. John Mills Whittaker Papers, box 6, folder 15; from Manti, November 7, 1885, MS 0002 University of Utah Special Collections.
  40. John Mills Whittaker Journals, transcript of Journal 1, 19–25.
  41. John Taylor to Mary Ann Oakley Taylor, October 20, 1886, in John Mills Whittaker Papers, box 6, folder 16.
  42. John Taylor to Jane Ballantyne Taylor, August 20, 1886, in Jane Ballantyne Taylor Papers.
  43. John Taylor to Margaret Young Taylor, September 8, 1886, in Margaret Young Taylor Papers (1886–1894), folder 1, item 1.
  44. Jane Ballantyne Taylor Papers; letter of March 4, 1886.
  45. Jane Ballantyne Taylor Papers, letter of December 10, 1885.
  46. Margaret Young Taylor Papers, folder 1, item 1; February 2, 1887.
  47. John Taylor to Mary Ann Oakley, January 9 1857, in John Mills Whittaker Papers, box 6, folder 16.
  48. Margaret Young Taylor Papers, folder 1, item 1; 1887 (no more specific date).
  49. John Taylor to Mary Ann Oakley Taylor, October 20, 1886, in John Mills Whittaker Papers, box 6, folder 31.
  50. Jane Ballantyne Taylor Papers; February 24, 1885.
  51. John Taylor to Margaret Young Taylor, February 2, 1887, in Margaret Young Taylor Papers, folder 1, item 1.
  52. John Taylor to Jane Ballantyne Taylor, December 10, 1885, in Jane Ballantyne Taylor Papers.
  53. John Taylor to Mary Ann Oakley Taylor, October 20, 1886, in John Mills Whittaker Papers, box 6, folder 16.
  54. Jane Ballantyne Taylor Papers, 1887 (no more specific date).

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55. John Taylor to Jane Ballantyne Taylor, March 4, 1886, in Jane Ballantyne Taylor Papers.
56. Roberts, *Life of John Taylor*, 391–99.
57. Gibbons, *John Taylor, Mormon Philosopher, Prophet of God*, 269.
58. John Mills Whittaker Papers, box 6, folder 31.
59. Roberts, *Life of John Taylor*, 459.
60. See Roberts, *Life of John Taylor*, 435.