



INTRODUCTION

ABOUT A YEAR BEFORE HIS DEATH, THE PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH FACED A WRIT OF EXTRADITION to Missouri on charges of alleged conspiracy in an attempted assassination of Lilburn W. Boggs.³ Joseph appeared before Judge Nathaniel Pope in Springfield, Illinois, to answer the accusations. Judge Pope began the court proceedings by inviting a few women (including Mary Todd Lincoln) to sit near his bench to accommodate the full courtroom.⁴

When all was ready, Justin Butterfield, Joseph's attorney, began humorously, "May it please the Court, I appear before you to-day under circumstances most novel and peculiar. I am to address the 'Pope' (bowing to the Judge) surrounded by angels (bowing still lower

3. See Morris A. Thurston, "The Boggs Shooting and Attempted Extradition, Joseph Smith's Most Famous Case," *BYU Studies* 48, no. 1 (2009): 4–56.

4. Isaac Newton Arnold, *Reminiscences of the Illinois Bar Forty Years Ago* (1881), 5–7.

to the ladies), in the presence of the holy Apostles, in behalf of the Prophet of the Lord.”⁵

To say that Joseph and his supporters were appreciative of the judge’s acquittal is an understatement. En route to Nauvoo, they burst into joyous song. Two of Joseph’s confidants, Wilson Law and Willard Richards, composed extemporaneous verses, taking for their muse the well-known tunes of “The Irish Jubilee” and “There’s Nae Luck About the House”:⁶

And are you sure the news is true?
 And are you sure he’s free?
 Then let us Join with one accord,
 And have a Jubilee
 We’ll have a jubilee, my friends,
 We’ll have a jubilee;
 With heart and voice we’ll all rejoice
 In that our Prophet’s free.

The remaining thirteen verses praise the people of Springfield, express gratitude for Butterfield and Pope, and even wax Shakespearean, alluding to Henry V’s “Band of Brothers.”

With warmest hearts we bid farewell,
 To those we leave behind;
 The citizens of Springfield all
 So courteous and so kind.

5. Arnold, *Reminiscences*. 6. One variant of Butterfield’s opening quip includes, “I rise under the most extraordinary circumstances in this age and country, religious as it is: I appear before the *Pope*, supported on either hand by *Angels*, to defend the *Prophet of the Lord!*” See “Opening in Joe Smith’s Case,” *The New Orleans Daily Picayune*, February 24, 1843; both quotations are cited in Thurston, “The Boggs Shooting,” 38.

6. Michael Hicks, “Poetic Borrowing in Early Mormonism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 137.



And now we're bound for home, my friends.
 A band of brothers true,
 To cheer the hearts of those we love,
 In beautiful Nauvoo.
 We'll have a jubilee, my friends,
 We'll have a jubilee;
 With heart and voice we'll all rejoice,
 In that our Mayor's free.⁷

The ad hoc lyrics are paradigmatic of early Latter-day Saint verse. Their poetic borrowing, biblical allusions, political musings, humor, optimism, and references to Latter-day Saint current events are all markers of Mormon poetry. Even the spontaneous composition was typical of the era. *Psalms of Nauvoo: Early Mormon Poetry* commences well before that triumphal trek from Springfield to Nauvoo, yet the poetry still displays similar features. Our volume opens with Warren Foote's 1838 poem, "Let Zion And Her Children Mourn," a meditation on Governor Lilburn W. Boggs's extermination order⁸ and the subsequent Mormon exodus from Missouri. "Although the Governor of the state / Said masacre and kill," Foote pens,

Yet their lives are still preserved
 Contrary to his will.
 Then let them boast of taking
 And threaten us to kill

7. Wilson Law and Willard Richards, "The Mormon Jubilee," *Wasp* 1, no. 1 (January 14, 1843): 1.

8. Signed by Governor Lilburn W. Boggs on October 27, 1838, the military directive ordered that "Mormons must be treated as enemies, and must be exterminated or driven from the State if necessary for the public peace—their outrages are beyond all description." See John P. Greene, *Facts Relative to the Expulsion of the Mormons or Latter Day Saints, from the State of Missouri, under the Exterminating Order* (Cincinnati, OH: R. P. Brooks, 1839), 26.

This sure will never stop the work
Nor Mormonism still.⁹

As the collection begins, so too does it end with the Saints yet again on the lam. After Missouri, they spent nearly seven years in Illinois. But soon they were again forced to relocate and rebuild. While uncertain of their exact destination, the Saints were convinced of their destiny. As early as 1842 Joseph had prophesied that “the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and would be driven to the Rocky Mountains,” but there, he said, they would “become a mighty people.”¹⁰

Fittingly, the final verse of the collection, “All Is Well” (known today as “Come, Come, Ye Saints”), was penned in 1846 by the English poet and convert William Clayton while resting near Locust Creek in Iowa Territory. The setting was only about one hundred miles from Nauvoo, the beloved city the Saints had just fled.¹¹ Although painfully aware of the arduous trek ahead, Clayton felt blessed after receiving word of his son’s recent birth. “Composed a new song—‘All is well,’” he recorded in his journal. “I feel to thank my heavenly father for my boy.”¹²

“Why should we mourn or think our lot is hard?” Clayton asks in the hymn. “’Tis not so; all is right.” Like the Saints who sang on the road to Nauvoo or those who penned words of hope after Missouri’s tragedies, Clayton’s optimism and faith capture the ethos of Mormon poetry. It’s little wonder that these verses

9. Warren Foote, journal, December 12, 1838. Church History Library.

10. *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B.H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–1951), 5:85. For a thorough description of accounts corroborating the Saints’ plans and premonitions about relocating to the Rocky Mountains and the American West, see Lewis Clark Christian, “Mormon Foreknowledge of the West,” *BYU Studies* 21, no. 4 (Fall 1981): 403–415.

11. See Paul E. Dahl, “‘All Is Well . . .’: The Story of the Hymn That Went around the World,” *BYU Studies* 21, no. 4 (Fall 1981): 515–27.

12. William Clayton, diary, Church History Library.

are still sung on Sunday mornings in Latter-day Saint chapels across the globe:

Why should we think to earn a great reward
If we now shun the fight?
Gird up your loins; fresh courage take.
Our God will never us forsake;
And soon we'll have this tale to tell—
All is well! All is well!

We'll find the place which God for us prepared,
Far away, in the West,
Where none shall come to hurt or make afraid;
There the saints, will be blessed.
We'll make the air, with music ring,
Shout praises to our God and King;
Above the rest these words we'll tell—
All is well! All is well!

And should we die before our journey's through,
Happy day! All is well!
We then are free from toil and sorrow, too;
With the just we shall dwell!
But if our lives are spared again
To see the Saints their rest obtain,
Oh, how we'll make this chorus swell—
All is well! All is well!¹³

Nauvoo: A Poetic Place

The influential eighteenth-century hymnist Isaac Watts famously composed a poetic work that mimicked biblical

13. *Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Europe* (Salt Lake City: Geo. Q. Cannon & Sons, 1894), 58–59.

psalms but used the language of New Testament Christianity.¹⁴ Implicit in early Latter-day Saint poetry is a similar form of mimesis. While only a few Latter-day Saint poems overtly draw on biblical psalms (see “Psalm LII,” “Psalm,” and “Psalm 2”), many mirror and generously borrow from the popular poets of the day.¹⁵ What makes Latter-day Saint poetry unique, however, is not just the poetic borrowing, but the creative expressions of distinct religious doctrines, histories, subjects, and narratives.

For example, poets wrote of Latter-day Saints abandoning their Missouri homes for Illinois. And once in Illinois, they wrote of their struggles to rebuild. In the swamplands of the Mississippi River, just beyond the reach of Missouri’s authorities, the Saints also wrote about finding a refuge. Joseph called the swamplands and attending bluffs Nauvoo, meaning “a beautiful situation, or place . . . of rest.”¹⁶ When the city was incorporated with a bona fide charter and legal protections, thousands of dispersed Latter-day Saints flocked by wagon, by steamboat, by horse, and on foot.

Soon Nauvoo’s population rivaled that of Illinois’s largest cities.¹⁷ And, as the populous grew, so too did Nauvoo’s cultural offering. Musicians, frontier thespians, amateur architects, writers, and, of course, poets all lived and worked amongst each other in a dynamic religious community. The Nauvoo Singing School and the University of the City of Nauvoo offered musical instruction and performance. British converts like William

14. See Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David: Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* (Boston: Samuel Hall, 1801).

15. See Hicks, “Poetic Borrowing in Early Mormonism,” *Dialogue* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 137.

16. See Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 59.

17. For further exploration of Nauvoo’s growth in the 1840s, see Susan Easton Black, “How Large was the Population of Nauvoo?” *BYU Studies* 35, no. 2 (1995): 91–94.

Pitt formed bands¹⁸ that played to appreciative audiences. The Saints gathered to listen in outdoor venues and in Nauvoo's Music Hall.¹⁹ Theatrical performances debuted in the so-called Cultural or "Masonic" Hall.²⁰ Thomas A. Lane, producer of the Nauvoo Dramatic Company, even cast Brigham Young to play the high priest in the play *Pizzaro*.²¹ Later, Lane joked that President Young had played the part with "great success ever since."²² Immigrant converts such as Sutcliffe Maudsley and Robert Campbell painted and sketched some of the iconic scenes and portraits of early Mormonism.²³

Prophet Poets

No form of creative expression was more integral to Latter-day Saint worship than their hymns and verses. As an artistic medium, the writing of hymns and poetry was "a form whose brevity and apparent simplicity could delude the dilettante into a feeling of cheerful competence in its execution."²⁴ Yet Latter-day Saint poets were inspired by more than ease of craft. As one literary critic wrote, "Nothing else in all of American history [is] *materia poetica* equal to the

18. See Michael Hicks, *Mormonism and Music: A History* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 40–44.

19. See James B. Allen, "Nauvoo's Masonic Hall," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 10 (1990): 39–49.

20. See Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford, England: University of Oxford Press, 2007), 145–46.

21. Stanley B. Kimball, "Also Starring Brigham Young," *Ensign*, October 1975, 51–52.

22. John S. Lindsay, *The Mormons and the Theatre* (Salt Lake City: John Lindsay, 1905), 6–7.

23. See Glen M. Leonard, "Picturing the Nauvoo Legion," *BYU Studies* 35, no. 2 (1995): 95–135.

24. Givens, *People of Paradox*, 167.

early Mormons, to Joseph Smith.”²⁵ Many of the hymns and poems are infused with discussions of prophets, revelations, visions, temples, persecutions, and testimonies of Jesus—in short, *materia poetica*. “We are, indeed beginning to be proud of our poetic writers,” wrote the editor of the *Times and Seasons*. Soon the Saint hoped to cultivate “such a constellation [of poets] in the West, as shall appear more glorious than the more favored muse in the East.”²⁶

Before the Nauvoo era, the Church had institutionally encouraged the writing of hymns for almost a decade. In a revelation received by Joseph Smith in July 1831, his wife Emma was commanded to “make a selection of sacred hymns . . . which is pleasing unto me, to be had in my church. . . . For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me” (D&C 25:11–12). With the assistance of William W. Phelps, Emma compiled the Church’s first hymnal—*A Collection of Sacred Hymns, for the Church of the Latter Day Saints*. The preface to the hymnal alludes to the 1831 revelation:

In order to sing by the Spirit, and with the understanding it is necessary that the church of the Latter Day Saints should have a collection of “Sacred Hymns,” adapted to their faith and belief in the gospel. . . . Notwithstanding the church, as it were, is still in its infancy, yet, as the song of the righteous is a prayer unto God, it is sincerely hoped that the following collection, selected with an eye single to his glory, may answer every purpose till more are composed.²⁷

Shortly thereafter, devout convert Parley P. Pratt finished *The Millennium and Other Poems*, the first volume of poetry published by

25. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Touchstone with Simon and Schuster, 1993), 79.

26. “To the Saints,” *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 16 (June 15, 1841): 439.

27. *Collection of Sacred Hymns, for the Church of the Latter Day Saints* (Kirtland, OH: F. G. Williams, 1835).



Emma Smith in a Dark Riding Dress BY SUTCLIFFE MAUDSLEY.
COURTESY OF CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY, THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS.

a Latter-day Saint. His poems, as he put it later, “sprang into existence one after another as occasion called them forth, at times and in places, and under circumstances widely varying.”

In a second printing, Pratt added verses from his experiences in “the lonely dungeons of Missouri.”²⁸



Eliza R. Snow BY MARSENA CANNON.
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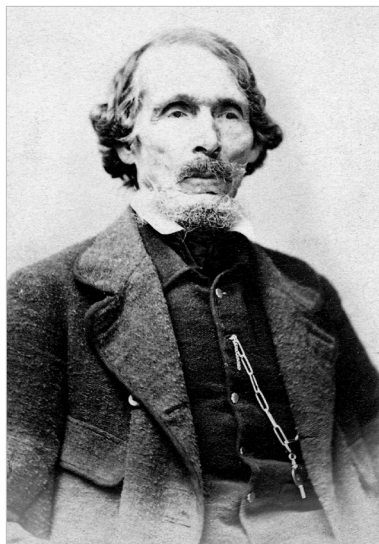
Alongside Pratt, Eliza R. Snow's contributions to Latter-day Saint poetry are second to none. In her early twenties Snow published a few secular verses in local Ohio newspapers. However, after uniting with the Saints she dedicated her poetic talents to writing religious verses. In rhyme she chronicled the historical events of the Church and extolled its doctrines and leaders. The *New York Times* dubbed her “the Mormon Poetess” and eulogized her as “one of the central figures of the Mormon galaxy.”²⁹ More than a century after their deaths, Snow and Pratt remain two of Mormonism's strongest poets

and intellectuals.³⁰ Scholars today consider their work among the greatest contributions to early Mormon literature.

28. Parley P. Pratt, “Preface,” in *The Millennium and Other Poems: to Which Is Annexed a Treatise on the Regeneration and Eternal Duration of Matter* (New York: Parley P. Pratt, 1840).

29. “The Mormon Poetess Dead,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1887, as cited in Jill Mulvay Derr and Karen Lynn Davidson, “Eliza R. Snow's Poetry,” *BYU Studies* 48, no. 1 (2009): 132.

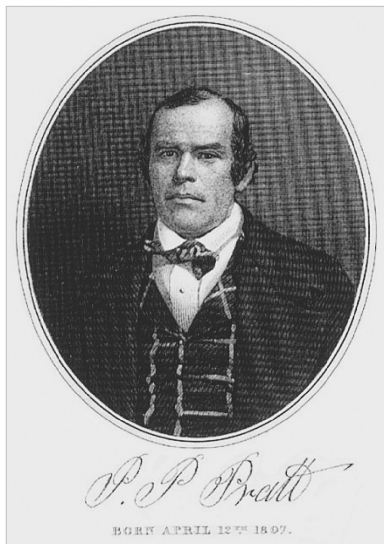
30. Stan Larson, “Intellectuals in Mormon History: An Update,” *Dialogue* 26, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 187–89.



William Wines Phelps.

Others, such as Joel H. Johnson, were prodigious poets and “gained some credit”³¹ for publishing spontaneous hymns and poems. Starting in Ohio, Johnson wrote poetry through the remainder of his life with the Saints in the west. Also, one of the Church’s earliest newspapermen, William W. Phelps, made extensive contributions to Mormon poetry and literature. Together, the poems of Phelps, Johnson, Snow, and Pratt make up much of this collection. Yet selections from other prominent Latter-day Saint figures such as Joseph Smith, John Taylor, and Wilson Law also appear, as well as lines from lesser-known contemporaries such as Milo Webb, Abigail Pitkin, Alexander Neibaur, and John Hardy, to name a few.

Generally, early Latter-day Saint hymnody and poetry resembled the lyrics of the era’s common Christian songs.



Parley P. Pratt

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LATTER-DAY SAINTS.

31. See Joel Hills Johnson, “A Journal or Sketch of the Life of Joel H. Johnson, circa 1857–1859,” Church History Library.

Although we often assumed that Latter-day Saints favored singing hymns “of the restoration,” traditional Christian songs were integral to early Latter-day Saint worship.³² More than half of the hymns selected by Emma Smith for the first hymnal were reprints or revisions of well-known Protestant verses, including some of the most popular hymns of the day, such as Isaac Watts’s “Joy to the World” and John Rippon’s “How Firm a Foundation.”³³

Yet Latter-day Saint lyrics were not scarce. Venues like the *Evening and the Morning Star*, the *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*, *Times and Seasons*, the *Wasp*, the *Nauvoo Neighbor*, the *Prophet*, and the *Millennial Star* provided ample column space. Never “reticent about poetry,”³⁴ Latter-day Saints filled newspapers, hymnals, periodicals, and eventually books as converts and Church leaders alike dabbled in the craft.

Poetry as History and Theology

Though most of the poetic verses corroborate the established historical record, some expand our understanding of past events and circumstances. For example, a little-known letter sent from a Nauvoo resident details the derisory circumstances following the Saints’ exile from Missouri. The author explains, “where we live. / What’s our employ, what we possess, / How we appear, and how we dress.”

In Nauvoo City we reside,
Where we in peace can now abide,
Our dwelling measures “Thirteen Feet,”

32. Michael Hicks, “What Hymns Early Mormons Sang and How They Sang Them,” *BYU Studies* 47, no. 1 (2008): 98–99.

33. Stephen A. Marini, “Hymnody and History: Early American Evangelical Hymns as Sacred Music,” in *Music in American Religious Experience*, ed. Philip V. Bohlman, Edith L. Blumhofer, and Maria M. Chow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 134–35.

34. Richard E. Cracroft and Neal A. Lambert, eds., *Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 251.

With walls rough-hewn and white-washed neat.
 Our bed springs up against the wall
 Because our room is rather small;



For mobs you know have saucy grown
 And will not let us have our own.



With chairs we're blessed with only two
 Missouri claims the remaining few;
 Our glass above the table stands,
 Cracked through the center by your hands.³⁵

A few years later, when visitor Robert McCorkle arrived in Nauvoo, we infer that circumstances had changed. The fledgling city he describes exhibited signs of prosperity. McCorkle went to Nauvoo with the thought of possibly joining the Saints. "One thing candor forces me to say," he wrote after his visit, "there is more intelligence among the common people [in Nauvoo], than ever I met with before; nor have I ever seen as little immorality exhib[it]ed in any city, town, or hamlet in which I ever spent the same length of time."³⁶ Despite a favorable impression of the community, McCorkle left town with unanswered questions. In poetic form, McCorkle wrote to the Prophet Joseph: "A question on my mind appears / which has been hanging there for years,"

Do you possess the gifts of God,
 As are recorded in his word?



For if its true, That God has given
 Late revelations right from heaven,

35. Abigail Pitkin to Rebecca Raymond, Church History Library.

36. Robert A. H. McCorkle to Joseph Smith, May 10, 1844, in "Received Letters," Joseph Smith Collection, Church History Library; see Hal Robert Boyd and Susan Easton Black, "'A Question on My Mind': Robert McCorkle's 1844 Letter to Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 49, no. 4 (2010): 83.

Its also true, he's set his hands
To gather Israel from all lands.

. . .

This truth unveil, and set me free
And show me who the Mormons be.³⁷

In his letter McCorkle requested “an answer in poetic form . . . either privately, or in the ‘Times & Seasons.’” Though the Prophet Joseph was assassinated before he could respond, the corpus of Latter-day Saint poetry presents its own answer about “who the Mormons be.” The poems and hymns provide a fuller historical vision of the early Latter-day Saint experience. Yet they also lend perspective to our universal human experience. As Latter-day Saint scholar George Handley has written:

The humanities—literature, philosophy, history, and the arts—are born of a striving to bear witness to human experience in all of its varieties, usually under conditions in which the particularities of experience are threatened by oblivion. . . . Human expressions . . . always demand attention to the particulars of individual lives and distinct cultures, they can provide a valuable check against our tendency to rush to quick and glib generalizations.³⁸

The poems of this volume do indeed bear witness “to human experience.” They give voice to soaring spiritual highs and seemingly bottomless lows; to extreme deprivation, but also immense elation. They present playful musings and mournful eulogies. On one page we find this playful verse:

The truth and virtue both are good
When rightly understood

37. Boyd and Black, “A Question on My Mind,” 90.

38. George B. Handley, “Poetics of the Restoration,” *BYU Studies* 49, no. 4 (2010): 47.

But Charity is better Miss
That takes us home to bliss
And so forthwith
remember Joseph Smith.

Several pages later we encounter somber verses detailing the martyrdom of the Prophet: “Oh wretched murd’rers! fierce for human blood!” cries Zion’s poetess,

You’ve slain the prophets of the living God,
Who’ve borne oppression from their early youth.
To plant on earth, the principles of truth.

Shades of our patriotic fathers! Can it be,
Beneath your blood-stain’d flag of liberty;
The firm supporters of our country’s cause,
Are butcher’d while submissive to her laws?

Like all humans, Latter-day Saint poets experienced love and loss, life and death, persecution and prosperity, spiritual silence and thunderous theophany. Although their conditions were often more hellish than heavenly, they learned to turn hell into heaven. Their swamps became beautiful and their deserts blossomed. Even in the face of death, pioneer faith and optimism persisted. “One night, as we were making camp,” pioneer Oscar Winters remembered:

we noticed one of our brethren had not arrived, and a volunteer party was immediately organized to return and see if anything had happened to him. Just as we were about to start, we saw the missing brother coming in the distance. When he arrived, he said he had been quite sick; so some of us unyoked his oxen and attended to his part of the camp duties. After supper, he sat down before the campfire on a large rock, and sang in a very faint but plaintive and sweet voice, the hymn “Come, Come, Ye Saints.” It was a rule of the

camp that whenever anybody started this hymn all the camp should join, but for some reason this evening nobody joined him; he sang the hymn alone. When he had finished, I doubt if there was a single dry eye in the camp. The next morning we noticed that he was not yoking up his cattle. We went to his wagon and found that he had died during the night. We dug a shallow grave, and after we had covered his body with the earth we rolled the large stone to the head of the grave to mark it, the stone on which he had been sitting the night before when he sang:

“And should we die before our journey’s
through,
Happy day! all is well!”³⁹

The early Saints found a way to persevere, and so their poetry too perseveres. Generations have sung their hymns and read their words. This volume showcases well-known verses, but it also preserves a few lesser-known songs and poems that offer fresh vistas into the hearts and homes of some of early America’s finest Latter-day Saints.

39. See Heber J. Grant, “Our Favorite Hymns,” *Improvement Era*, June 1914, 781–83. Oscar Winters was Heber J. Grant’s father-in-law.