Life of
HEBER C. KIMBALL
AN APOSTLE
The Father and Founder of the British Mission

By
Orson F. Whitney

It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who, in the midst of the crowd, keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of his character.—EMERSON.
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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY GRANDFATHER
AND TO THE GREAT
CAUSE OF TRUTH
For which he lived and died; and to all who love that
Memory and that Cause,
This Volume is reverently Dedicated by
THE AUTHOR
A startling innovation, a test designed to try, as never before, the faith and integrity of God’s people now came upon them. Not in the shape of fire and sword, nor toilsome pilgrimage, nor pestilence, nor wealth, nor poverty. Ah! no; something far different from these, and far more difficult to bear.

A grand and glorious principle had been revealed, and for years had slumbered in the breast of God’s Prophet, awaiting the time when, with safety to himself and the Church, it might be confided to the sacred keeping of a chosen few. That time had now come. An angel with a flaming sword descended from the courts of glory and, confronting the Prophet, commanded him in the name of the Lord to establish the principle so long concealed from the knowledge of the Saints and of the world—that of plural marriage.¹

Well knew the youthful Prophet the danger of his task. Well knew he the peril and penalty of disobedience. Fearing God, not man, he bowed to the inevitable, and laid his life—aye, was it not so?—upon the altar of duty and devotion.

¹The principle of sealing man and wife for time and for eternity is known as the law of celestial marriage.

The practice of plural marriage referred to above was discontinued by the divinely inspired Manifesto, issued by President Wilford Woodruff on September 24, 1890 and approved by the general conference of the Church assembled in the tabernacle October 6, 1890.
Among those to whom Joseph confided this great secret, even before it was committed to writing, was his bosom friend, Heber C. Kimball. Well knowing the integrity of his heart, so many times tested and found true, he felt that he ran no risk in opening to Heber's eyes the treasured mysteries of his mighty soul.

But why careful, among so many friends, to select only a few as the recipients of such a favor? Would not the Saints have died to a man in defense of their Prophet—God's seer and revelator? Alas, none knew so well as Joseph the frailty of man, the inherent weakness and wickedness of the human heart.

"Many men," said he, "will say, 'I will never forsake you, but will stand by you at all times.' But the moment you teach them some of the mysteries of the kingdom of God that are retained in the heavens, and are to be revealed to the children of men when they are prepared for them, they will be the first to stone you and put you to death.

"It was this same principle that crucified the Lord Jesus Christ, and will cause the people to kill the prophets in this generation."

What! would even the Saints have so done? Did not some of those who were Saints then, so do?

Had not Joseph said many times—are not men now living who heard him say: "Would to God, brethren, I could tell you who I am! Would to God I could tell you what I know! But you would call it blasphemy, and there are men upon this stand who would want to take my life."

"If the Church," said he, "knew all the commandments, one-half they would reject through prejudice and ignorance."

No wonder, then, that he should choose his confidants, for their sakes no less than his own. For these also are Joseph's words:

"When God offers a blessing, or knowledge to a man, and he refuses to receive it, he will be damned."

Revelation is ever the iconoclast of tradition, and such is the bigotry of man, his natural hatred of the new and strange, as opposed to his personal interests or private views, that the very lives of those whose mission is to introduce and establish new doctrines, though designed as a blessing to humanity, are ever in danger from those whose traditions would thus be uprooted and destroyed.

Joseph was not a coward. It was he who said that a coward could not be saved in the kingdom of God. But neither was he lacking in caution, especially when warned of the Lord of the necessity for its exercise. Therefore, was he now revealing, to a chosen few, whom God had prepared to receive what he should tell them, one of the grand principles of the everlasting Gospel, "unlawful to be uttered" to the multitude, yet one day to be thundered from the house-tops in the ears of all living, with many other mighty truths locked in the treasure house of future time, of which eternity still holds the key.

Before he would trust even Heber with the full secret, however, he put him to a test which few men would have been able to bear.

It was no less than a requirement for him to surrender his wife, his beloved Vilate, and give her to Joseph in marriage!

The astounding revelation well-nigh paralyzed him. He could hardly believe he had heard aright. Yet Joseph was solemnly in earnest. His next impulse was to spurn the proposition, and perhaps at that terrible moment a vague suspicion of the Prophet's motive and the divinity
of the revelation, shot like a poisoned arrow through his soul.

But only for a moment, if at all, was such a thought, such a suspicion entertained. He knew Joseph too well, as a man, a friend, a brother, a servant of God, to doubt his truth or the divine origin of the behest he had made. No, Joseph was God's Prophet, His mouthpiece and oracle, and so long as he was so, his words were as the words of the Eternal One to Heber C. Kimball. His heart-strings might be torn, his feelings crucified and sawn asunder, but so long as his faith in God and the Priesthood remained, heaven helping him, he would try and do as he was told. Such, now, was his superhuman resolve.

Three days he fasted and wept and prayed. Then, with a broken and a bleeding heart, but with soul self-mastered for the sacrifice, he led his darling wife to the Prophet's house and presented her to Joseph.

It was enough—the heavens accepted the sacrifice. The will for the deed was taken, and "accounted unto him for righteousness." Joseph wept at this proof of devotion, and embracing Heber, told him that was all that the Lord required. He had proved him, as a child of Abraham, that he would "do the works of Abraham," holding back nothing, but laying all upon the altar for God's glory.

The Prophet joined the hands of the heroic and devoted pair, and then and there, by virtue of the sealing power and authority of the Holy Priesthood, Heber and Vilate Kimball were made husband and wife for all eternity.

Heber's crucial test was in part over. Vilate's trial was yet to come. The principle of celestial marriage was now known to them, so far as their own eternal covenant was concerned, but the doctrine of plurality of wives which it involves, was yet to be revealed. How Heber and

Vilate received and embraced this feature of the principle is thus tenderly told by their daughter Helen:

"My mother often told me that she could not doubt the plural order of marriage was of God, for the Lord had revealed it to her in answer to prayer.

"In Nauvoo, shortly after his return from England, my father, among others of his brethren, was taught the plural wife doctrine, and was told by Joseph, the Prophet, three times, to go and take a certain woman as his wife; but not till he commanded him in the name of the Lord did he obey. At the same time Joseph told him not to divulge this secret, not even to his mother, for fear that she would not receive it; for his life was in constant jeopardy, not only from outside influences and enemies, who were seeking some plea to take him back to Missouri, but from false brethren who had crept like snakes into his bosom and then betrayed him.

"My father realized the situation fully, and the love and reverence he bore for the Prophet were so great that he would sooner have laid down his life than have betrayed him. This was one of the greatest tests of his faith he had ever experienced. The thought of deceiving the kind and faithful wife of his youth, whom he loved with all his heart, and who with him had borne so patiently their separations, and all the trials and sacrifices they had been called to endure, was more than he felt able to bear.

"He realized not only the addition of trouble and perplexity that such a step must bring upon him, but his sorrow and misery were increased by the thought of my mother hearing of it from some other source, which would no doubt separate them, and he shrank from the thought of such a thing, or of causing her any unhappiness. Finally he was so tried that he went to Joseph and told him how he felt—that he was fearful if he took such a step
father was also being tried, and her integrity was unflinching to the end. She gave my father many wives, and they always found in my mother a faithful friend."

Helen also refers in her narrative to the sensation caused in Nauvoo, one Sabbath morning, prior to the return of the Twelve from England, by a sermon of the Prophet's on "the restoration of all things," in which it was hinted that the patriarchal or plural order of marriage, as practiced by the ancients, would some day again be established. The excitement created by the bare suggestion was such that Joseph deemed it wisdom, in the afternoon, to modify his statement by saying that possibly the Spirit had made the time seem nearer than it really was, when such things would be restored.

These facts serve to show something of the nature and extent of the sacrifice made by the Saints, in accepting this principle, and likewise the pure, lofty, religious motives actuating both men and women who could thus heroically embrace a doctrine against which—as is generally the case with the gospel's higher principles—their traditions and preconceived notions instinctively rebelled.

Soon after the revelation was given a golden link was forged whereby the houses of Heber and Joseph were indissolubly and forever joined. Helen Mar, the eldest daughter of Heber Chase and Vilate Murray Kimball, was given to the Prophet in the holy bonds of celestial marriage.

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Without doubt, the revelation of the great principle of plural marriage was a prime cause of the troubles which now arose, culminating in the Prophet's martyrdom and the exodus of the Church into the wilderness. True, the old causes remained, sectarian hatred and political jealousies, and these were the immediate reasons for such results. But back of all was the eternal warfare of truth and error, battling each for the world's supremacy, and the mailed hand of Omnipotence pushing the chosen people along the thorn-strewn, blood-sprinkled path of a glorious destiny.

John C. Bennett, an individual who had wormed himself into the good graces of the Saints, like the serpent of old among the flowers of Eden, at this juncture apostatized, not finding the Church of God, with its pure and wholesome laws, a safe refuge for vice, or a suitable arena for the antics of rascality. Excommunicated for his vile practices, he at once entered the lecture field—that favorite resort of vengeful apostates—and sought to abuse the public mind in relation to the Latter-day Saints and their religion. His charges were so atrocious as to half defeat their own purpose, the more intelligent at once rejecting them for what they were—outrageous fabrications. Many of the ignorant and fanatical, however, believed them. The