

# The Representation of Reality in Nineteenth Century Mormon Autobiography

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SOME HAVE SUGGESTED that the most successful writing about the Mormon experience in the nineteenth-century comes from the frail and fading pages of the personal accounts recorded by first generation Mormons. From the first it has been difficult for most of us to imagine the size and the nature of this body of material. Now with the publication of Davis Bitton's *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* we can see it laid out before us for the first time.<sup>1</sup> It is indeed an impressive sight: listing only those items available for research and concentrating on holdings primarily of Utah institutions, the *Guide* lists just under three thousand (2,894 to be exact) separate diaries and autobiographies, written for the most part in the nineteenth century. As Bitton suggests, "It is hard to believe that any group of comparable size, with the possible exception of the Puritans and the Quakers, has been so relentless as the Mormons in writing diaries and autobiographies."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the parallels with these other religious groups are both interesting and important. They may, for instance, help to explain this remarkable impulse toward autobiographical writing, for not only did many of those first Mormons have their roots deep in New England soil, but the situation of the mid-nineteenth-century Mormon Church offered many parallels with the seventeenth-century puritan experience: both groups of people lived in a universe that was totally God centered; they were both working out a history that was shaped by divine providence; and with millinarian enthusiasm, they were both planting a new Christian society in an unsettled wilderness. It can be said that both groups were, in their personal writings,

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explaining themselves to themselves and to the world. Both were responding to a vital impulse to give order and meaning to the otherwise varied and disordered nature of individual experience. For both peoples, the autobiographical act in any of its many forms was, in its own subtle way, an attempt not only to preserve but to understand and to shape—an effort at once to fix and to know one's identity. And, on a deeper level, both peoples were responding to that basic human need to locate their identity in some kind of universe that was logically consistent with their own definitions, their own values, their own sense of self.

These claims may attribute more sophistication and intellectuality to these pioneering people than they would like to assume. And by no means do I wish to suggest that such complex concerns were always or even frequently a conscious part of these writings. These people were not primarily philosophers. The sweat of their collective brow was more likely to be spent on personal and social survival than on fine tuning of some harmonious philosophical system. Nevertheless they looked on their experience from a given point of view, and that view provided the reference points by which life and experience were ordered and by which meanings were assigned. And if that world view shapes the meaning of experience, then it must also have some effect on the expression of that experience—on the relationship which a writer establishes between his material and his narrative voice, on the selection and arrangement of details, even on the choice of the words themselves. It must also be true that autobiographies are created by people writing out of a deep level of their own psyche.

What I propose, then, is a tentative venture into that cosmos suggested in nineteenth century Mormon autobiographical writing, discovering at least the outlines of a world that seems to be radically different from its puritan antecedents.

It is not an easy task, for in looking at this body of material one is immediately aware of a striking variety, not just in the size of the pieces themselves but in the subject matter, in the style and in the treatment. Let me, for purposes of illustration offer some representative examples:

The first one is taken from the *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, perhaps outside of Joseph Smith's own story, the best known work of autobiographical writing to come out of the Mormon experience. In the following familiar episode Pratt has been arrested for preaching and brought before an apparently prejudiced court:

I was soon ordered to prison, or to pay a sum of money which I had not in the world. It was now a late hour, and I was still retained in court, tantalized, abused and urged to settle the matter, to all of which I made no reply for some time. This greatly exhausted their patience. It was near midnight. I now called on brother Petersen to sing a hymn in the court. We sung, "O how happy are they." This exasperated them still more, and they pressed us greatly to settle the business, by paying the money.

I then observed as follows: "May it please the court, I have one proposal to make for a final settlement of the things that seem to trouble you. It is this: if the witnesses who have given testimony in the case will repent of their false swearing, and the magistrate of his unjust and wicked judgment and of his persecution, blackguardism and abuse, and all kneel down together, we will pray for you, that God

might forgive you in these matters."

"My big bull dog pray for me," says the Judge.

"The devil help us," exclaimed another.

They now urged me for some time to pay the money; but got no further answer.

The court adjourned, and I was conducted to a public house over the way, and locked in till morning; the prison being some miles distant.

In the morning the officer appeared and took me to breakfast; this over, we sat waiting in the inn for all things to be ready to conduct me to prison. In the meantime my fellow travellers came past on their journey, and called to see me. I told them in an undertone to pursue their journey and leave me to manage my own affairs, promising to overtake them soon. They did so.

After sitting awhile by the fire in charge of the officer, I requested to step out. I walked out into the public square accompanied by him. Said I, "Mr. Peabody, are you good at a race?" "No," said he, "but my big bull dog is, and he has been trained to assist me in my office these several years; he will take any man down at my bidding." "Well, Mr. Peabody, you compelled me to go a mile, I have gone with you two miles. You have given me an opportunity to preach, sing, and have also entertained me with lodging and breakfast. I must now go on my journey; if you are good at a race you can accompany me. I thank you for all your kindness—good day, sir."

I then started on my journey, while he stood amazed and not able to step one foot before the other. Seeing this, I halted, turned to him and again invited him to a race. He still stood amazed. I then renewed my exertions, and soon increased my speed to something like that of a deer. He did not awake from his astonishment sufficiently to start in pursuit till I had gained, perhaps, two hundred yards. I had already leaped a fence, and was making my way through a field to the forest on the right of the road. He now came hallooing after me, and shouting to his dog to seize me. The dog, being one of the largest I ever saw, came close on my footsteps with all his fury; the officer behind still in pursuit, clapping his hands and hallooing, "stu-boy, stu-boy—take him—watch—lay hold of him, I say—down with him," and pointing his finger in the direction I was running. The dog was fast overtaking me, and in the act of leaping upon me, when, quick as lightning, the thought struck me, to assist the officer, in sending the dog with all fury to the forest a little distance before me. I pointed my finger in that direction, clapped my hands, and shouted in imitation of the officer. The dog hastened past me with redoubled speed towards the forest; being urged by the officer and myself, and both of us running in the same direction.

Gaining the forest, I soon lost sight of the officer and dog, and have not seen them since.<sup>3</sup>

This is a fine little set piece. The organization is carefully shaped, focusing on a series of three scenes: the court room, the public house and the edge of the forest. The dialogue that Parley recreates sets the vernacular replies of the sheriff against the elaborate discourse of the hero himself, thus giving added impact to the incongruous juxtapositions that characterizes the jokester hero of this tale: namely the singing in the courtroom, the elaborate invitation to come along in the escape attempt and the pursued aiding pursuer. As we list these, we are aware that the singing of hymns by the

captives, the praying for one's captors, and the facing of the possibility of being torn apart by wild beasts are all the very stuff of Christian martyr stories; yet in reading this piece, we do not see the episode that way at all. We do not hold our breath; rather we smile and chuckle, not because of what happened but because of the particular way in which what happened has been treated by Parley Pratt. He has consciously (or perhaps unconsciously) recreated the scene not in terms of Christian history but in terms of literary comedy, constructing an elaborate framework around the actual experience, a framework that mediates that experience in a delightful way for the reader.

An example of a piece essentially comic in tone, but less highly structured in its presentation is found in the diaries of Thales Haskell in which Haskell recounts his experiences as a settler, a soldier and an Indian missionary. On one occasion, Haskell and his companions are having considerable difficulty getting to the place where they must preach to the Indians. One of their biggest problems is the cart and its load of supplies they are trying to maneuver across the roadless wilderness.

*Monday 10th* We rolled out again br Knell officiating as bull driver—got along fine till we came to the clay hills. . . . Set about hunting a road through the hills with uncommon vigor—at length we managed by considerable whipping hooping yeling etc. to get up some 3 or 4 hills. but in going down one, the Cart capsized plumb bottom up with Br. Riddle and myself hanging to the stern. We righted her up, gathered our things together, loaded up, and tried again—went about 30 steps and capsized again—our faith in regard to the cart going to the Colorado now began to weaken. However, after some labor we got the thing started again and finally got through the hills and into the deep sand—here the cart rolled heavily. . . .

*Tuesday 11th* . . . Br. Hamblin [arrived soon and] thought we looked rather low spirited we told him cart was a bad egg and that we did not think it would make the ruffle

*Wednesday 12th* . . . We now packed up and took after the cart—found it at the foot of the mountain where the thing refused to climb so we took out our plunder and had a good time displaying our ingenuity in the art of packing. Went on our way rejoicing. It was dark by the time we got to the top of the mountain and some of our packs getting loose we had enough excitement in repacking, hunting the trail, etc. to make it interesting. Br. Crosby had one mule named devil which I considered, very appropriate as he seemed to take great delight in all kinds of mulish deviltry—for instance Jumping stifleged, turning his pack, getting tangled in the riging, etc Crosby's riding mule also bucked a while but getting pretty well acquainted with a pair of American spurs concluded to give up and be gentle"

Again here, as in the Pratt piece, we are conscious of the writer's tone, a tone characterized by a comic detachment from the weary toil of the actual experience.

The elaborate understatement with its pseudo-religious overtones ("Our faith in regard to the cart going to the Colorado now began to weaken."), and the unexpected circumlocution (Brother Crosby's mule "getting pretty well acquainted with a pair of American spurs") are not new techniques; still, they are successful devices—pleasing to the reader—and, I would imagine, to Haskell too. If the experience itself was unpleasant, the act of

writing about it could be less so. Indeed, Haskell's attitude toward his Missionarying is exemplified in a bit of verse written in that same Missionary Journal.

I wish I had a clean shirt  
I wish I had some shoes  
I wish my old mule was fat  
And I didn't have the blues  
If ever I get home again  
Contented I'll remain  
And never go exploring  
Till called upon again<sup>5</sup>

It is the paradox of those last lines that catches our interest. Here is exemplified that old tension between desire and duty which is so much a part of the religious experience and which informs the humor of Haskell's diaries. Instead of wrestling with angels the man is wrestling with himself, and the wit of his comic stance gives him a perspective that makes it possible to endure and to try again.

There is, of course, more than one mode for dealing with difficult experiences. If a comic tone served well, there were other times when only a serious tone would do. And serious autobiographical efforts have their own problems. This can perhaps be illustrated by considering attempts to deal with what we might call limit situations, confrontations with overwhelming catastrophe or great loss. When pushed into the anguish of such situations, the writer may well grasp for whatever means of expression are at hand. Sometimes this means simply picking up from genteel culture and popular parlance an easy set of expressions which may be familiar, but which are finally inadequate or even misleading. Again, let me illustrate, this time from the Journal of Hosea Stout. In this particular episode Stout's little son has just died.

Thus died my son and one too on whom I had placed my own name and was truly the dearest object of my heart. Gone too in midst of affliction sorrow & disappointment in the wild solitary wilderness. Surrounded by every discouraging circumstance that is calculated to make man unhappy and disconsolate. Without the necessaries of life, Without even our daily bread and no prospects for the future. There in this wild land to lay him where the silence of his peaceful grave would only be broken by the savage yells of the natives seemed to come in bold relief before us. . . .

We buried him on a hill in the prairie about one mile from the Nodaway where there was the grave of an infant of Brother John Smith and then pursued our journey leaving the two lovely innocents to slumber in peace in this solitary wild until we should awake them in the morn of the resurrection.<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt that Hosea was grieving, nor is there any doubt that the sight of that fresh, hilltop grave made a deep impression. But the real significance and meaning of that experience are held at arms length. We cannot get close to the events themselves. We are, to a degree, separated from the experience by the language itself which is more appropriate for describing a sentimental nineteenth-century parlor picture than the scene at

hand. And if this is true for us, may it not also be true for Hosea himself? Thus, with Stout (as with Haskell and Pratt) a particular rhetorical mode mediates between the reader (and the writer too, perhaps) and the events themselves.

There is, however, another journal-autobiography in which almost nothing is interposed between the material and the audience. The experiences are presented directly and apprehended directly. While such a mode can be consciously constructed (one thinks for instance, of Hemingway's careful selection of detail) more often in the autobiographies we are looking at, such expression is the unconscious product of a sensitive but unsophisticated mind.

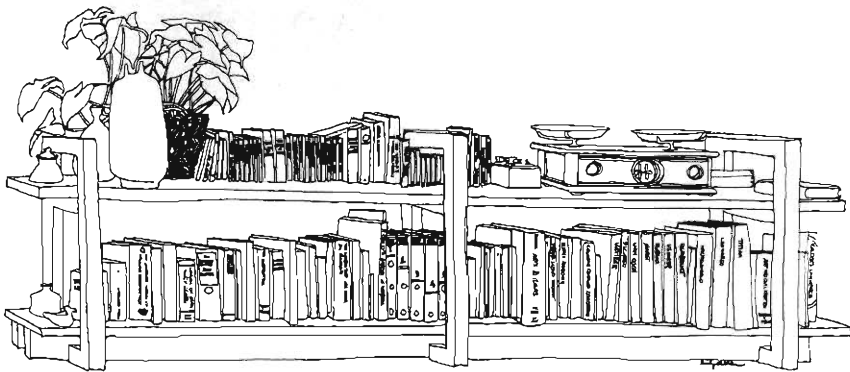
The following excerpt was written by someone whom I would guess is entirely unknown to this audience—Patience Loader. Her account of her own life is unpublished. There exists, so far as I know, only the original manuscript and the typescript copy from which I quote here. She was, in our parlance, uneducated: her writing is not only misspelled and unpunctuated, but it is innocent of any sense of the received notions of grammar or syntax. In this section Patience Loader recounts her experiences as a young girl coming through the snow-choked Rockies with the Martin handcart company. Her father, weakened by exposure and the unfamiliar labor of pulling their belongings on a two-wheeled cart across the plains, is dying. Unable to walk further, he has been laid on the cart itself which Patience, her sisters and her mother now pull.

That was a terrible day never to be forgotten by us and poor father dieing on the hand cart, he did not seem to suffer pain he never opened his eyes after he closed them in the morning . . . [p. 152] the brethren came to adminester to father in the afternoon they anointed him oil his lips was so dry and parched they put oil on his lips then he opened his Mouth and licked the oil from his lips and smiled but did not Speak the breathen Knew he was dieing they said we will seal father Loader up to the Lord for him alone is worthy of him he has done his work been a faithfull Servant in the church and we the Servants of God Seal him unto God our Father: and to our surprise my dear father said amen so plain that we could understand him and . . . that was the last word he said Amen to the blessing the brethren prounouced upon him and he seemed to Know and understand all they said and we oursevs thought he could neither hear or speak [p. 153] . . . but when the brethren came to adminester to him it seemed that he understood all they said by saying Amen: we started again from that place at Six o clock in the evening to find a camping place So we could get wood and water it got dark long before we campt we traveled over brush and on awfull rough road we did not camp untell past ten oclock we could not moove poor father as he was not yet dead so we put the tent up and took the hand cart into the tent and our dear father died he breathed his last at fifteen minute past eleven o clock at night [p. 154] that had been avery hard trying day on us all and we spent asorowfull night . . . the next morning Br S. S. Jones and his brother dug two graves one for my poor father and the other for a welch brother . . . this was asevere trial here we had to rap my dear father in a quilt all we had to lay him in no nice casket to lay him away in comfotable but put into the grave and the earth thrown in upon his poor body oh that sounded so hard I will never forget the sound of that dirt beign shoveld anto my fathers boday it seemed to me that it would break every bone in his body. it did indeed seem a great trial to

have to leave [p. 155] our dear father behind that morning . . . we comfort to our Minds our father had a good deep grave the two Kind brothers Samuel and Albert Jones dug him a deep grave so that the wolves could not get to him and we all fealt to thank and ask God to bless our brethren for there kindness to us in our great Sorrow and Berevement.<sup>7</sup>

This is a different artistry. This piece impresses us by its very simplicity and its lack of sophistication. It flows forth under the pressure of simple recall, uninterrupted. Like a stream of consciousness it follows the eddies of spontaneous design, organizing itself around such dominant perceptions and impressions as the father's dry lips, the startling sound of his loud "Amen," the thump of frozen clods dropping into an open grave and the necessary depth of the grave itself. The effect of these reiterated details is to bring us into an immediate relationship with the experience of Patience Loader herself. Indeed the quality of this piece lies in the simplicity and the unconscious directness of the narrative technique. Even if we are not expected to admire the writer as a separate performer, we can still be profoundly impressed by what she has done.

What we see here in these different pieces suggests the vast range of technical and tonal possibilities in the large area of Mormon autobiographical writing. One can find examples, of course, of a rich variety of presentational techniques: from conscious virtuosity to self-conscious artifice, from unconscious brilliance to dull-minded monotony. One can find many examples of writers painting over their own lives in broad sweeps of purple prose while others, like Patience Loader, catch in the web of their subconscious the appropriate details which not only make past experiences live, but which give them lasting significance.



I have been concerned thus far with pointing out certain technical differences, matters that are fairly obvious and explicit in the works themselves. I would now like to focus on the necessary but more difficult problem of similarities. The people in these pages did not spend much time anguishing over the conditions of their souls or in longing for deliverance from the catastrophically fallen world. Theirs was not the puritan sense of sin. Indeed they seem not to be very other-worldly. Their concerns are, for the most part, this-worldly. As different as they are in their tone and technique from each other, neither Patience Loader nor Parley Pratt reach above and beyond their material world to find meaning and significance for their day-to-day

existence. The events and experiences of their lives are neither types nor shadows, nor are the things around them symbols reflecting a higher or transcendent reality. Rather both writers—though they make reference to God and salvation and religious concerns—find their highest reality made manifest in the here and now, in the clear light of common day. The universe in which both Patience and Parley live and move and have their being is a world accessible to sense perception and open to observation. The locus of the reality that underlies both their accounts is not in any transcendental world, it is in the phenomenal world, the world they move in now. Mormon autobiographical writing has, in other words, much more in common with the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* than it has with the *Personal Narrative of Jonathan Edwards*. The latter, for all its concrete detail, finally locates its highest reality in a transcendent world, the former is solidly grounded in the stuff of this life.

If this rather metaphysical observation is correct (and I believe it is) we are presented with a particular difficulty: we seem to be saying that in locating their ultimate concerns in the immediate world of common man, nineteenth century Mormons were (like the eighteenth century Franklin) essentially secular, that even their theology was reduced to a set of intellectual constructs derived from everyday experience. We seem to be saying that if they did not carry a calvinistic sense of sin, neither did they carry a sense of the sacred, that their values were essentially practical and pragmatic. Looking at some passages in these journals and autobiographies may seem to suggest as much. Consider the particular emphasis given to the sacrament of marriage in these two passages from two separate journals:

April 29 we took the train for the city paying \$2.00 for our tickets and reached the city at about 9 a.m. I spent the day in making some purchases of goods for the store, and in settling up some accounts for different persons.

On May 1 I went to the endowment house where I got Adelaide M. Smith sealed to me, after which I transacted some business at some of the stores. I went to the Land Office and got the patent for Parowan City. I made arrangements during the evening for the shipping of the goods that I had purchased, and a wagon that I had purchased for Brother Neils Mortensen. While in the city I stopped with Mrs. Susan West Smith, an old neighbor of ours in Parowan, and the girls' aunt.<sup>8</sup>

June 26th. Being the Sabbath preached in Antwerp village in the forenoon and also in the afternoon upon the faith once delivered to the saints, the falling away of the church, the losing of the authority of the priesthood. . . .

June 27th. Elder Dutcher and myself laid hands upon Mrs. Hamlin who was sickly and then went to LeRayville. Preached in the afternoon upon the spiritual gifts. . . .

July 3rd. Preached to a crowded congregation at the yellow schoolhouse in Henderson. . . .

July 4th. In the forenoon went to the water and baptized 7, four of whom were from the town of Mexico. In the afternoon I was married to Sister Sally M. Bates, the ceremony being performed by Elder Luke Johnson. After the ceremonies of the wedding were over in the evening, attended to the confirmation of eight. . . .



July 7th. Myself and companion rode to Jerico. I preached in the afternoon at Jerico upon the falling away of the church and the restoration of the gospel by another Angel. . . .

July 8th. We rode to LaRayville. I preached in the afternoon at Evans Mills upon the first principles of the gospel. . . .

July 10th. I preached in Antwerp upon the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, its contents in short, the blessings of Joseph. . . .

July 12th. . . . I did not preach.<sup>9</sup>

In these passages, marriage seems to be reduced to whatever denominator is common to the day on which it occurs, whether that is buying supplies or preaching a sermon. Mormon journals and diaries are replete with examples of what we might ordinarily think of as the sacred treated in exactly the same manner as the profane. Sometimes both are presented in the now obvious incongruous juxtaposition and with little or no distinction between the two. This may appear on the one hand to be a profaning of experience. But is it not also possible that just the opposite is true, that such a juxtaposition comes about because the writer believes that all experience is infused with the sacred?

Consider for a moment the following typical experience recounted in the journal of Mosiah Hancock:

While we were going down East Canyon Creek, mother's foot got caught in between the box and wagon tongue and broke the toe at the upper joint; but the skin was not broken. So father anointed her foot there and administered to her and it was healed. We went on and at the mouth of Emigration Canyon I broke a hind wheel; but we had some of father's carpenter tools along and the wheel was mended.<sup>10</sup>

This is a rather startling juxtaposition—all the more so because of the interesting rhetorical balance of the sentences. This equation of miraculous healing and repairing a wagon wheel may seem incongruous to us, but—and this is my point—it was obviously not so to Mosiah Hancock. His world included both.

This is not a denial of transcendence but a demonstration of it. For these people, God was not something separate and apart. His will, his power, his spirit were in the world. God was not metaphorically but literally building his kingdom on earth. An actual prophet spoke God's word, a new Jerusalem was literally to be built. This was not a rehearsing of the old revelation, a working out of the old patterns, it was a new revelation, a literal preparation for the coming of the kingdom of God.

As the German theologian Professor Ernst Benz has reminded us:

For the Puritan immigrants, America was the wilderness, including the American Indians, a wilderness provided by God to European religious refugees for the plantation of a better church in the desert, better than the older European churches corrupted by popes, bishops, and kings. The American continent appeared to the European immigrants as a wild place of refuge, a wilderness without history, a *tabula rasa* offered by God for a new beginning. The historical consciousness of the Puritans was always that of immigrants.<sup>11</sup>

This was not true for the Mormons. For them America was not a *tabula rasa*

but a land with a long religious history recounted for them in the pages of the Book of Mormon. But even more significant, this land was one of the geographical centers for their own version of traditional Christian eschatology. The history of the redemption of mankind was to include the Mormons' own sacred cities in Missouri and Utah.

So they proceeded to work out this religious history, suffering as earlier settlers had done, but not seeing that suffering as the consequence of sin, rather seeing it as one of the experiential necessities of this life, a life represented not in terms of human catastrophe and deserved degradation, but latent with promises and potentialities. Thus these writers were, in their journals and autobiographies in small, sometimes in grand patterns, working out a meaningful part of a cosmic enterprise that needed no reference points outside of itself. As they struggled across the "great American desert," they did not need the Bible to explain the spiritual significance of their exodus. For them the biblical analogues may have been useful, but they were almost never central. Their enterprise contained its own validation within itself.

Such a universe can be a very comfortable reality to inhabit. As one Mormon pioneer said:

I felt happy. I had a good, affectionate wife, a promising young son, a comfortable house, a little farm, a good stock of cattle. I was in the church of Latter-Day Saints, settled in the garden of the world, a secluded retreat in the mountains of Ephraim. I was one of the Seventies, chosen as a special witness to the nations, to preach the Gospel of Christ to the meek and lowly.<sup>12</sup>

Such a world view may in some cases give rise to a personal account that is not only positive but cock-sure. We must acknowledge that for us now some of those early writings seem to carry personal enthusiasm to the point of arrogance. There is certainly a clear note of superiority that rings throughout much of Parley Pratt's autobiography.

Given the apparent simplicity and surety of the world of these autobiographies, we may say to ourselves these are not for our troubled times. They may well be interesting historical artifacts, but they speak of another world. We may feel that as a body they have little to say to us or to our age with its existential paradoxes and tragic dilemmas. That is only partly true. It seems to me that, at their best, these writings may have literary significance for us here and now, not just to us as Mormons, or even as Americans, but as human beings. Again, let me illustrate with an impressive autobiography.

Like Patience Loader, Mary Goble Pay was uneducated, a simple pioneer girl making her way with the remnants of her family from Winter Quarters to Salt Lake City. Like Patience Loader, her pioneer company was caught in the early snows that trapped the emigrants in the Fall of 1856. The telegraphic quality of her presentation with its unconsciously controlled understatement is impressive. Here are selected passages dealing with her voyage to America, her trial on the plains and her arrival in Salt Lake City:

When I was in my twelfth year, my parents joined the Latter-day Saints. On November 5th I was baptized. The following May we started for Utah. We left our home May 19, 1856. We came to London the first day, the next day came to Liverpool and West on board the ship, *Horizon*. . . .

When we were a few days out, a large shark followed the big vessel. One of the saints died and he was buried at sea. We never saw the shark any more. . . .

My sister Fanny broke out with the measles on the ship and when we were in Iowa Campgrounds, there came up a thunder storm that blew down our shelter, made with hand carts and some quilts. The storm came and we sat there in the rain, thunder and lightening. My sister got wet and died the 19 July 1856. She would have been 2 years old on the 23. The day we started on our journey, we visited her grave. We felt very bad to leave our little sister there.

We traveled on till we got to the Platt River. That was the last walk I ever had with my mother. We caught up with Handcart companies that day. We watched them cross the river. There were great lumps of ice floating down the river. It was bitter cold. The next morning there were fourteen dead in camp through the cold. We went back to camp and went to prayers. We sang the song "Come, Come, Ye Saints, No Toil Nor Labor Fear." I wondered what made my mother cry. That night my mother took sick and the next morning my little sister was born. It was the 23rd of September. We named her Edith and she lived six weeks and died for want of nourishment.

We had been without water for several days, just drinking snow water. The captain said there was a spring of fresh water just a few miles away. . . .

I became confused and forgot the way I should go. I waded around in the snow up to my knees and I became lost. Later when I did not return to camp the men started out after me. My feet and legs were frozen. They carried me to camp and rubbed me with snow. They put my feet in a bucket of water. The pain was so terrible. The frost came out of my legs and feet but did not come out of my toes. . . .

We left our wagons and joined teams with a man named James Barman. He had a sister Mary who froze to death. We stayed there two or three days. . . . My brother James ate a hearty supper was as well as he ever was when he went to bed. In the morning he was dead.

My feet were frozen also my brother Edwin and my sister Caroline had their feet frozen. It was nothing but snow. We could not drive the pegs in the ground for our tents. . . .

We traveled faster now that we had horse teams. My mother had never got well, she lingered until the 11 of December, the day we arrived in Salt Lake City 1856. She died between the Little and Big Mountain. She was buried in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. She was 43 years old. She and her baby lost their lives gathering to Zion in such a late season of the year. My sister was buried at the last crossing of the Sweet Water.

We arrived in Salt Lake City nine o'clock at night the 11th of December 1856. Three of four that were living were frozen. My mother was dead in the wagon.

Bishop Hardy had us taken to a home in his ward and the brethren and the sisters brought us plenty of food. We had to be careful and not eat too much as it might kill us we were so hungry.

Early next morning Bro. Brigham Young and a doctor came. . . . When Bro. Young came in he shook hands with us all. When he saw our condition—our feet frozen and our mother dead—tears rolled down his cheeks.

The doctor amputated my toes using a saw and a butcher knife.

Brigham Young promised me I would not have to have any more of my feet cut off. The sisters were dressing mother for the last time. Oh how did we stand it? That afternoon she was buried.<sup>13</sup>

The terse, laconic, unsubordinated style of these passages has a power not unlike that of some of the best modern writers. But more significant is the impression of the experiences themselves. In unmitigated starkness Mary Goble presents a world that is at once immediate and transcendent, a world that is both harsh and meaningful as she herself explains on the occasion of writing these memories down. "I have been to a reunion, . . . had a good time talking over incidents of our trip across the plains. It made me feel bad it brought it all up again. It is wise for our children to see what their parents passed through for the Gospel, yes, I think it is."

Perhaps all of us in our human longings to locate ourselves in some kind of identifiable reality would like to be able to "see what [our] parents passed through," would like to know from where and from whom we came to this particular here and now. Perhaps we still would like to locate our own ancestral exodus that would help us find the meanings we seek for our present situation. Until such needs and longings are satisfied, autobiographies such as Mary Goble Pay's will continue to speak to us from their own God-centered world to remind us of the fragile dimensions of our own.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Davis Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.v.

<sup>3</sup> Parley P. Pratt, [Jr.], ed., *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1950), pp. 49-51.

<sup>4</sup> Thales Haskel, "Journal, 1859-1860," typescript, Brigham Young University Library, pp. 2-4.

<sup>5</sup> Haskel, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Hosea Stout, "Diary, 1844-1869," As quoted in Richard Cracroft and Neal Lambert, *A Believing People* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), p. 131.

<sup>7</sup> Patience Loader Rosa Archer, "Autobiography, 1827-1872," typescript, Brigham Young University Library, pp. 151-158.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Fish, *The Life and Times of Joseph Fish*, ed. John H. Krenkal (Danville: Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> Orson Pratt, "Journal, 1811-1868," holograph, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>10</sup> Mosiah Hancock, "Journal, 1834-1867," typescript, Brigham Young University Library, p. 26.

<sup>11</sup> Ernst Benz, "Mormonism and the Secularization of Religions in the Modern World," *Brigham Young University Studies* (Summer, 1976), 16, p. 632.

<sup>12</sup> Maybelle Harmon Anderson, ed., *Appleton Milo Harmon Goes West* (Berkeley: Gillick Press, 1946), p. 56.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Goble Pay, "Autobiography," as quoted in Cracroft and Lambert, *A Believing People*, pp. 143-145.