



# CORNUCOPIA

SUNSTONE invites short musings: chatty reports, cultural trend sightings, theological meditations. All lovely things of good report, please share them. Send to: <editor@sunstoneonline.com>

## Ward Stories

### GOT COMPASSION?

*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

—JOHN 13:34–35

IT WAS NEARING THE END OF THE SCHOOL YEAR, and in anticipation of my husband's continuing employment, we ordered a brand-new station wagon; it was to be delivered in three weeks. We were very excited about trading in the old car and getting a new one. But the remainder of that year was a nightmare to rival any bad dream.

The following week, my husband's teaching contract wasn't renewed, and he, we, were devastated. Naturally, he was depressed about the job loss, but because he was on a twelve-month contract and would be getting paychecks through the summer, he planned on waiting until September to look for a new position. Thinking of eliminating a car payment in case things didn't go well on the job front, I suggested that we not take delivery on the car. He insisted that the dealership wouldn't let us out of the contract.

September came, and with our stake president's help, Gary found employment as a bill collector for a large department store. The pay was ridiculously low, but he wasn't worried as he didn't pay the bills each month. I did. It was my problem to deal with, and now we had an additional car payment to make. Our kids didn't get new school clothes that year except for the ones I made. I was always stressing about money as it was.

Gary's plan was to make a career change. In preparation, he was taking a typing class at LDS Business College at night. One evening in October, he went to his class while I went to a Cub Scout meeting with our children. Near the end of the meeting, Gary entered the back of the room and signaled to me. His face was bruised and swollen, and the white of one eye was totally red. Walking to his car after class, he had been mugged. His attacker had put him in a headlock and repeatedly pounded Gary's face with his fist. The mugger then pulled Gary's wrist-watch from his arm and ran off.

I'm not sure how Gary got to the meeting that night; maybe angels steered the car from downtown Salt Lake to Sandy. He was really in bad shape. One of the men at the Scout meeting took him to the emergency room.

Gary spent the next few days, including Halloween, moaning in bed. The thing that most distressed him was losing the watch his father had given to him. Some weeks later, he gave a priesthood meeting lesson about the Good Samaritan and mentioned that the watch had been stolen. A few days later, a new watch appeared in our mailbox.

Word got around that we were struggling. Sometime around the end of November, a policeman came to the door. "Some of your friends are concerned about you and want you to have this," he said, handing me an envelope. In the envelope was \$70 in cash. As he left, I wondered who those friends were.

I wanted to make Christmas dresses for my daughters but had no extra money for fabric. A dear friend examined her stash of fabric and gave me the needed material. Then, to my further frustration, my older-model sewing machine, which I had bought for five dollars, refused to function. The same friend lent me her extra sewing machine, and my girls had beautiful new dresses in time for Christmas.

It was Christmas Eve. The kids had gone to bed, and we were putting the last of their gifts under the tree. There was a knock on the door. No one was there, but there was a note that said, "Look in your driveway." On the driveway were five sacks of groceries which included, among other things, a small turkey, two gallons of milk, fresh fruit and vegetables, and candy for stocking stuffers.

THESE ANONYMOUS GIFTS helped us to get through a very difficult Christmas. But there was something missing, something I longed to receive from my neighbors and ward members. What I needed most was hugs and expressions of concern; for someone to actually say to me, "I care about you." I can understand why those givers wanted to remain anonymous; I have given anonymous gifts myself. But I needed their touch and their words.

I don't quite understand why it seems easier for us to give money than to say to someone in distress: "Are you OK? How can I help?"

We're not at all reticent to display our vast intellect and knowledge of the scriptures or give voice to our deeply held spiritual beliefs. But to sincerely express love, concern, and genuine interest in another person who appears to be in distress is difficult for us.

All-seeing eye

## THERE ARE ALSO CELESTIAL BODIES



YOUNG WOMEN'S ADVISORS, BE WARNED! FOR A mere \$14.99, plus shipping and handling, the website MORMONSEXPOSED.COM is selling "Men on a Mission," a sizzling 2008 calendar with twelve men who share two things: They are all returned missionaries, and they all have bodies that truly inspire.

"While the fact that twelve young returned missionaries are posing shirtless will certainly raise eyebrows," the website explains, "it may also help to sort out some common misconceptions of Mormons by celebrating the beautiful bodies, great looks, and amazing stories of service of these deeply spiritual men."

According to the site, the twelve men featured in the calendar, who served their missions in places ranging from Argentina to Japan, were "hand-selected for their striking appearances and powerful spiritual commitment."

The claim about spiritual commitment gets blurry, however, when one browses through the T-shirts sold on the same site, which include trite references to Utah polygamy, deformities resulting from Utah inbreeding, and "missionary positions" (two elders biking or knelt in prayer).

As for the calendar, the site explains that "the 'devout dozen' are stepping away from the Mormon traditions of modest dress and 'baring their testimony' to demonstrate that they can have strong faith and be proud of who they are."

Sing a hymn, sister!



A few years ago, a nerve in my face was viciously attacked by a tiny virus which left my face grotesquely distorted for a time. My first day at work with my new look, I heard people whisper as I passed. I knew it wasn't a great look and wouldn't have been offended if someone asked what had happened. I wondered if I were invisible, especially when speaking face to face with someone. Surely they could see how distorted my face was, but nothing was said. There was some whispering, but only two people asked me directly if I were okay. Weeks later, I asked a friend why he hadn't said anything to me. He answered that he had heard what was wrong and hadn't said anything out of respect for my privacy. That I understand, but what would be more respectful than saying, "Hey, are you OK? I'm concerned about you."

Our scriptures tell us that charity should be our first con-

cern, but too often it seems to be our last. We are uneasy when faced with someone else's misfortune. It reminds us of our own vulnerability. We wonder if maybe it's contagious. Christ healed with words and with touch. He told us that the way to recognize his disciples is by the love they show to one another. Do we best express our love by giving anonymous gifts? Or with a gentle touch and by voicing the love in our hearts?

I say, let's get rid of the rule of etiquette that says it's polite to ignore someone's ill fortune. It's okay to ask how someone is doing. If you don't know what to say, just take her hand or put a hand on her shoulder. That says it all. Her cup is not full and needs replenishing. Pour in some compassion.

PHYLLIS BAKER  
Salt Lake City, Utah

A Place for Every Truth

## SHUNNING BEECHER

This regular column features incidents from and glimpses into the life and ministry of Elder James E. Talmage as compiled by James P. Harris, who is currently working on a full-length biography of this fascinating Mormon apostle. The column title is adopted from the statement inscribed on the apostle's tombstone: "Within the Gospel of Jesus Christ there is room and place for every truth thus far learned by man or yet to be made known."

WHILE WRITING HIS MOST INFLUENTIAL work, *Jesus the Christ*, Elder James E. Talmage consulted the writings of the most able scholars of his day. Among his most frequently cited authorities are Alfred Edersheim, a convert to Christianity from Judaism; Frederick (Canon) Farrar, a noted Catholic authority; and J. Cunningham Geikie, of the Church of England. These sources on Christ's life have been described as "Victorian Lives of Jesus" (see Malcolm Thorp, "James E. Talmage and the Tradition of Victorian Lives of Jesus," *SUNSTONE*, January 1988, 8–13). There is one other major work in this genre, however, that Talmage chose not to cite: *The Life of Jesus the Christ* (1871), by Henry Ward Beecher.

In his day, Beecher was a renowned preacher and speaker. His base of operations was the large Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, New York, which could seat 2,100 with standing room for many more. Beecher was raised a Calvinist but preached for a Methodist congregation. He was an abolitionist who assisted in freeing several slaves through "slave auctions," in which money was raised to secure slaves their freedom. He was also the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote the classic novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Beecher's *Life of Jesus the Christ* received favorable reviews, and Talmage undoubtedly knew about the book. So why, when writing his own life of Christ, did the Mormon apostle shun this potentially valuable source? Here are two possible reasons:

Near the end of his life, Beecher was embroiled in a scandal—an alleged affair with Elizabeth Tilton, the wife of friend and publisher Theodore Tilton—that ruined his reputation. Although Beecher was eventually exonerated, the accusations cast great suspicion on his character. Indeed, Debby Applegate, a recent Beecher biographer, gives circumstantial evidence that Beecher was involved in other affairs. Elder Talmage was a proper man who deeply honored vows of fidelity, propriety, and chastity. And this is certainly one possible reason he would disregard Beecher's book on Christ.

However, Talmage's animus towards Beecher goes back to 1884, when Talmage was a student at Johns Hopkins University. In his journal entry of 4 March 1884, Talmage writes:

In the evening I attended a lecture by the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, at the Masonic Temple. His subject was "A tour of the continent" and he related that during the tour he visited Utah. His account of Utah and her

people was very fair in most respects—none of the rant and tear of most talkers upon that subject, but he made the following four very gross mis-statements:

- (1) That the Utah government is entirely under the control of the Church.
- (2) All property of the territory is owned by the Church as a corporation.
- (3) The government of Utah is an absolute despotism.
- (4) Hatred and revenge toward the oppressors of the people is regularly inculcated in the schools.

Talmage goes on to say that he enjoyed the lecture very much but lamented that Beecher's disparaging remarks about Utah would be believed by many, even though Beecher actually spent a very short time in Utah. "I was grieved to hear these statements: For his other references to Utah were remarks of praise for our people."

Talmage then wrote a lengthy letter to a Baltimore newspaper titled *The Day*. The letter is titled "A Young Teacher from Utah Criticizes Mr. Beecher's Remarks." Talmage spends the bulk of the letter refuting Beecher's claims that Utah is under despotic control and says,

I can, from personal experience, deny in toto, and the existence of the despot's arm I have never seen cause to suspect. But if a despotic power is holding sway, either openly or under disguise, within the wide boundaries of this land, should Mr. Beecher, or any one else holding access to the public ear, not cease to cry aloud for its abolition?

Talmage goes on to explain that the "despotic power" to which he alludes is the "disenfranchisement of an entire people," a reference to then-current legal proceedings against the Church in cases against plural marriage. He finishes with a paragraph defending the Utah school system, saying that if Beecher had entered any of the Utah schools,

he never would have said, as he did, that the inculcation of the spirit of hatred and revenge against the "Mormon" oppressors is a regular part of a child's education. I happen to be a graduate from, and have been an instructor in, the leading institution of professedly "Mormon" tenets in the Territory, viz., the Brigham Young Academy, its founder being indicated by its name, and I have never been taught or expected to teach anything in the least akin to hatred or revenge.

Talmage's final thought on the matter of Beecher's brief visit to Utah is as follows: "Though the lecturer be a man of note, will not every one say that 'despotism,' 'hatred' and 'revenge' are strong terms to be applied in the sense in which they were used by Mr. Beecher, with the experience of but a few hours observation to base such usage upon?"



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# The Sugar Beet







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Of Good Report or Praiseworthy

## CELESTIAL MUSIC: A PRIMER

**I**N AN EFFORT TO HELP THE YOUTH of the Church listen to music that wouldn’t embarrass them if Jesus walked into the room, the following was recently posted as an iTunes Celebrity Playlist by the Man himself.

- 
**THE BEATLES:** *Abbey Road* (“A real breakthrough in their musical style,” he says, “from mere pop to the beginnings of true artistry.”)
- 
**BILLIE HOLIDAY:** Anything (“What can’t that woman turn to sheer gold just by brushing that deliciously ragged voice over it?”)
- 
**THE GRATEFUL DEAD:** Any live album (“Can you dig those eternal psychedelic guitar solos? I signed my kids up for lessons with Garcia as soon as he found his way to this side of the veil—which he described as ‘quite a trip.’”)
- 
**PINK FLOYD:** *The Wall* (“Such a frank exploration of existential angst has not been recorded since Job!”)
- 
**SATURDAY’S WARRIOR:** Original cast version (“I go to the Sunstone symposium every year just for the sing-along!”)
- 
**APOCALYPTICA:** *Inquisition Symphony* (“Metallica on cellos! What’s not to like?”)

Spotted in the Post-Mortal Times

## RUNNING OUT OF TIME SALE

**HAVE YOU NOTICED?** The Four Horsemen are chomping at the bit, the trumps are sounding, and the angel is pouring out his final cups of destruction. With time so short, don’t leave your eternal posterity to chance! Take advantage of Kid Kolob’s huge sale today!

Gotta increase your kingdom—and FAST? Want to snatch up those last elect spirits for your own? Give those dawdling great grandchildren of yours a little surprise and jumpstart the next generation: Birth Control Override Packets are BUY 1, GET 2 FREE.

Save 50 PERCENT on pre-birth visits so you can see what gender your progeny’s parents will be! You can never be sure these days.

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