

## Grant's Watershed: Succession in the Presidency, 1887–1889

Events during 1887–89, during Elder Wilford Woodruff's succession to the Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, remains an important but largely untold story—a time when differing views divided the Church's General Authorities and when the policies and procedures for installing a new president of the Church were tested and confirmed. These years are also important for the insights they offer in understanding the life of Heber J. Grant, who himself regarded that time as a personal watershed. While it is clear that he acted with candor, energy, and idealism throughout the episode, with hindsight he believed that he had erred, especially in breaching a vital rule of the Quorum—collegiality—as he and other young members of the Twelve had tried too hard to make their views prevail. So deep his later anguish, he cut troubling passages from his diary, and on becoming a senior Church leader he either avoided speaking of the Woodruff episode or retold the incident without including much of its detail, a not altogether conscious handling of a painful memory. But clearly it was a lesson learned. For the rest of his life, unity among the “Brethren” was a cherished, if never fully realized, ideal.<sup>1</sup>

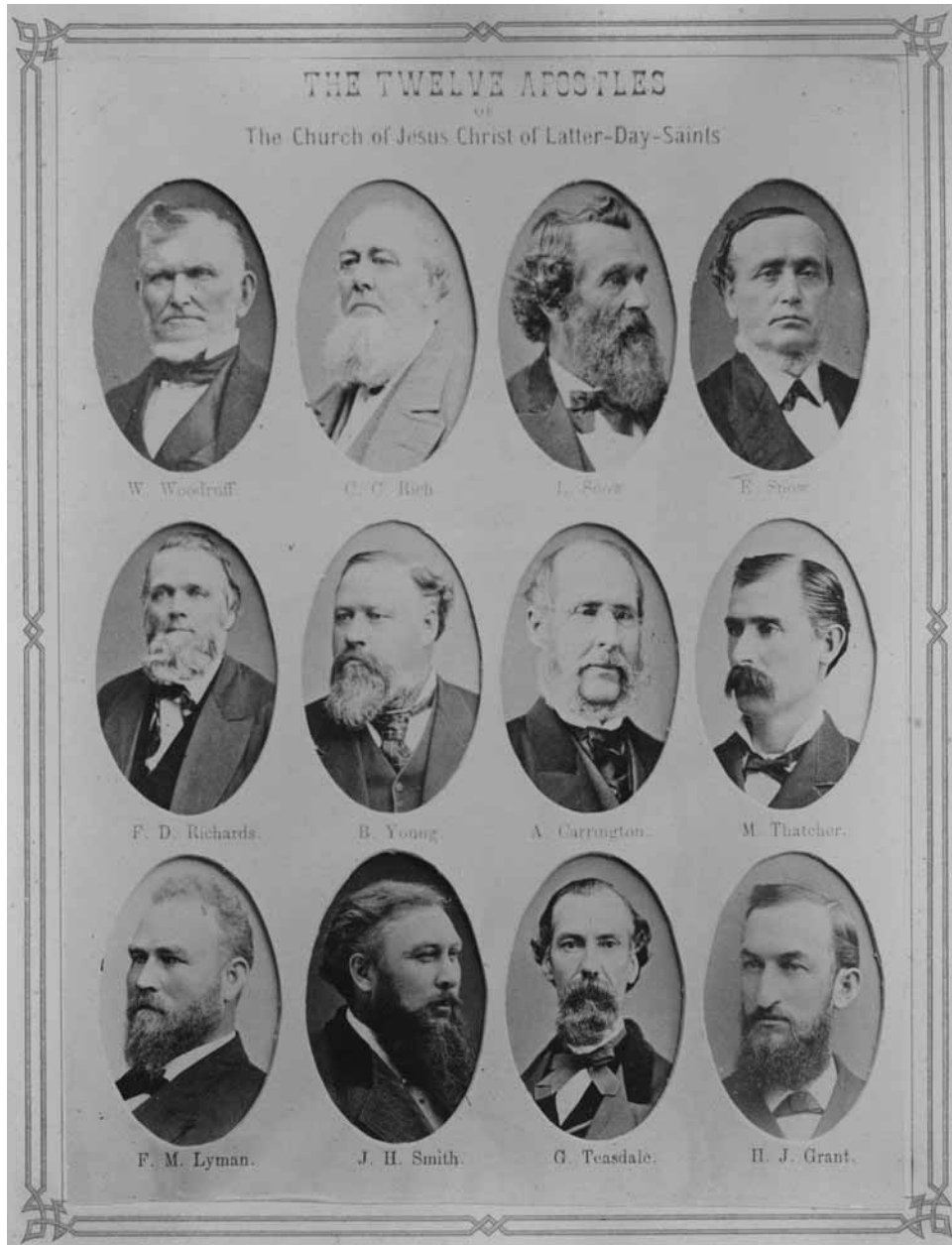
Elder Grant, a self-conscious and fretful Victorian, may have judged himself too harshly. The incident took place early in his career when he had been called upon to juggle personal, family, and institutional pressures, and at a time when he was still learning the ways of his Quorum. Nor had he been alone. To one degree or

another, Grant's views were shared by several other members of the Quorum—second generation leaders like Francis M. Lyman, John Henry Smith, and especially the outspoken Moses Thatcher.<sup>2</sup> These four men, along with the more seasoned Quorum member, Erastus Snow—Grant's benefactor and mentor from youth—felt uneasy about the influence and personality of George Q. Cannon in the leading councils of the Church. They also were reacting to the last years of the administration of President John Taylor, which they saw as peremptory and imperious.

The behavior of Grant and his friends was affected by the times. During the 1880s, the U.S. government took punitive steps against the Church, including the passage of the Edmunds-Tucker Act (1887), which forced many Church leaders into the "underground" to avoid arrest for "cohabitating" with their plural wives. Never in the Church's history had it borne such a legal assault upon its men and institutions. As a result, encounters and meetings of the General Authorities were few and the chance for misunderstanding was real—this at a time when the Quorum of the Twelve was more fully sorting out its institutional duties and procedures (illus. 10-1). How should it interact with the First Presidency or even with the Salt Lake Stake, which its president for a time appeared to claim privileges beyond those normally exercised by such ecclesiastical units in the modern church? Only later would these questions be answered and the Twelve assume its modern organizational identity. Only later would the Quorum hold regularly scheduled quorum meetings to promote harmony and decision-making. And more to the point, only later would the Twelve's role in presidential succession become routine.

### **President Taylor's "Sudden" Death**

During the last week of June 1887, John W. Taylor informed Grant of the approaching death of Church President John Taylor. Young Taylor had been taken to the Thomas Roueche farmhouse in Kaysville, where his father had taken "underground" refuge over a half year earlier. "John W." returned to Salt Lake City badly shaken. His father lay critically ill, he told Grant, who learned for the first time of Taylor's condition. The President's legs were cold and enlarged, his tongue swollen, and his abdomen extended. Each day he could



Courtesy Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Illus. 8-1. Members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, ca. 1882. Top row (left to right): Wilford Woodruff, Charles C. Rich, Lorenzo Snow, Erastus Snow. Middle row (left to right): Franklin D. Richards, Brigham Young Jr., Albert Carrington, Moses Thatcher. Bottom row (left to right): Francis M. Lyman, John Henry Smith, George Teasdale, Heber J. Grant.

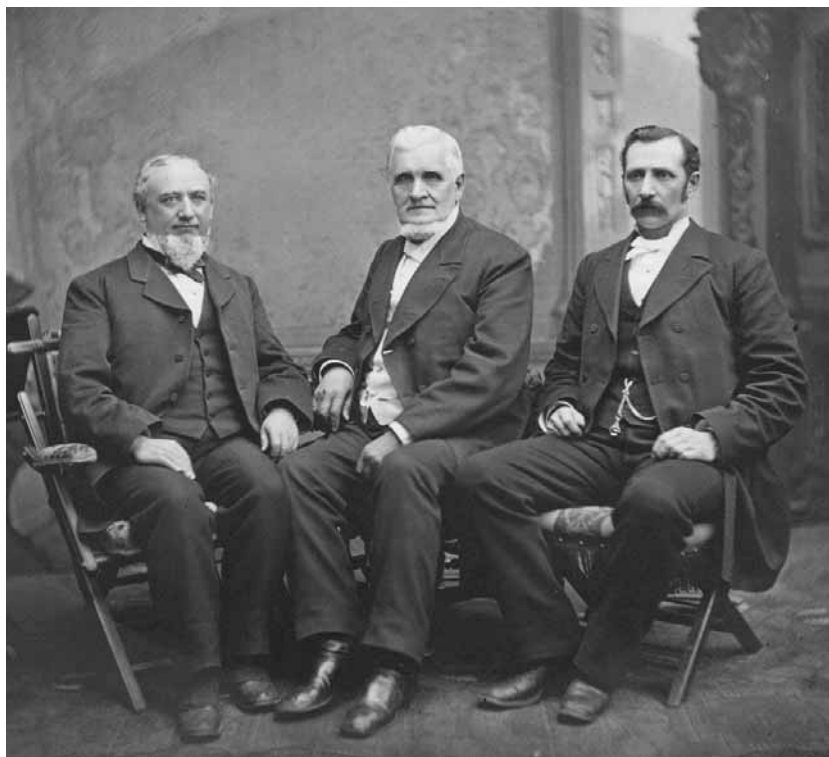
accept only a little food, perhaps a mouthful of bread, a spoonful or two of ice cream, or a bracing glass of Dixie wine, which the prevailing interpretation of the Church's Word of Wisdom then did not proscribe. Taylor's attendants called the disease "dropsy," the nineteenth-century description for any kind of edema or bodily swelling.<sup>3</sup>

Unknown to his son or to most Church members, including many members of the Twelve, President Taylor had been ill for some time, especially since January. His sickness had ebbed and flowed, but when at its worst, First Counselor George Q. Cannon was forced to bear the burden of Church administration (illus. 10-2). "It has been apparent to me that if decisions were reached and action taken in certain directions, I must assume the responsibility, and have done so," Cannon wrote in his journal, "though there are many things that I have not been able to do which I would like to have done."<sup>4</sup> As a result, the disoriented Taylor at times feared his counselor might be making decisions without his full approval, and to protect himself from any later charge of misconduct, Cannon began to keep a day-to-day record of Taylor's illness and of the decisions he was forced to take. As Taylor grew weaker, he stubbornly spurned doctors, and for a time he also spurned Cannon's suggestions for the need to attest a will or to summon the family.<sup>5</sup> Nor did he want his condition to be made public.

At first, Cannon did not resist Taylor's demands for silence. After all, it was possible that the Church leader might recover. But silence also served Cannon's sense of policy. At the time, Utah was again pursuing the goal of statehood, and Cannon, prudently, wanted no distracting publicity. Besides, he felt that if the news of Taylor's death were sudden, it might be used to good advantage. During the federal government's raid against plural marriage, when public opinion both inside and outside Utah was crucial, the shock of Taylor's death—if it came to that—might cast a useful sense of persecution and martyrdom upon the Church, which in fact later took place.<sup>6</sup>

However, with Taylor's health rapidly declining, Cannon was forced to assume leadership. Before informing the Taylor family of the condition of their husband and father, he had written Joseph F. Smith, the other counselor in the First Presidency, who was then hiding in distant Hawaii. While Taylor had firmly instructed Smith to remain there, Cannon now hinted to his fellow counselor that

he might do otherwise. Later, Cannon asked his fellow Quorum member Franklin D. Richards to make the matter clearer. Richards then sent Smith a second letter. “You are not likely to get [direct] counsel direct from the Presidency upon . . . [your return],” Richards wrote. “You may in view of this fact realize your liberty.”<sup>7</sup> Smith understood the meaning of these semi-veiled messages and left for Utah, arriving about a week before Taylor’s passing. Cannon, who felt the heavy responsibility of making decisions for the Church while trying to be loyal to President Taylor’s wishes, was pleased to see his fellow counselor so that the two could “function as a team.”<sup>8</sup> Emboldened, Cannon also began to alert the members of the Twelve of Taylor’s condition by suggesting that they return from their various underground stations, “either to this city or to where you could be easily reached.”<sup>9</sup>



Courtesy Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Illus. 10-2. The First Presidency, ca. 1880. *Left to right:* George Q. Cannon, John Taylor, Joseph F. Smith.

On the evening of July 25, 1887, these anticipations were realized when President Taylor died at the Roueche farm. Shortly before midnight, attendants washed the body and later that morning placed it in an undertaker's refrigerator for a final journey to Salt Lake City. Much of another day was used to conceal Taylor's last residence and the identity of his caretakers. Then, on the evening of July 26, black crepe began to replace the bunting that had been hung to celebrate Pioneer Day, and Church members at last heard the stunning news of their leader's death.<sup>10</sup>

Taylor's death dissolved the old First Presidency, and the Quorum of the Twelve began to function as the Church's presiding authority, a role that it would exercise for the next twenty-one months. During this time, the Quorum would review and decide important Church issues, a cumbersome and inefficient process because of the size of the group and because of the need to operate in inconvenient secrecy due to the polygamy raids. At the time, there were fourteen Quorum members. These included the twelve regular members of the Quorum as well as the counselors, George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith, who had resumed their positions in the Quorum of the Twelve. Also attending some discussions was Daniel H. Wells, formerly Brigham Young's counselor, who now served as a "Counselor to the Twelve." Thus, in theory, fifteen men could attend Quorum meetings, though in practice the numbers present were usually fewer as other assignments and personal circumstances took some of the men elsewhere.

The size of the group was not the only problem. Only four of the men had their "liberty"—the ability to appear in public without the fear of arrest on charges of "cohabitation" for the practice of plural marriage. These included Franklin D. Richards and Lorenzo Snow, who had already made their peace with prosecutors by paying fines and serving jail sentences; the monogamous John W. Taylor; and Grant, whose two plural wives were not yet known.<sup>11</sup> However, elaborate precautions were required for most of the Quorum to protect them from arrest, and to attend a public meeting was out of the question. Traveling from northern Arizona, Elders John Henry Smith and Francis M. Lyman "disguised" themselves by shaving their beards. Elder Erastus Snow journeyed from Mexico posing as an emigrant. Closer to home, former counselors Cannon and Smith

slipped into the President's office on South Temple Street by hiding themselves in a covered wagon disguised by cluttered pipes, a chicken coop, and a few chickens roosting on piles of hay.<sup>12</sup> Painfully, most could not even attend Taylor's funeral. The best they could do was watch the cortege from a distance.

Grant preached one of the funeral sermons, presumably because of his speaking ability and because of his "availability." He praised Taylor's "faithful, honest and conscientious life" and was certain of his former leader's great service to the Kingdom.<sup>13</sup> However, he said little or nothing about Taylor's personal warmth. From the time he had entered the Quorum, Grant found his leader to be distant and unresponsive—to the point that Grant wondered if Taylor liked him or his work. As a result, Grant was constantly off balance around Taylor. Shortly before his last illness, Taylor had unexpectedly embraced Grant and had praised him. "I was never more surprised in my life," Grant said.<sup>14</sup>

Nor was Elder Grant alone. While President Taylor was a man of undoubted talent, especially with the written and spoken word, his personality and administrative style was stern. The problem involved culture and personality—and probably the older generation of which Taylor was a part. In contrast to the open and expressive behavior of the younger, frontier-born Quorum members, one biographer found Taylor to be "correct, reserved, and cultivated"—by no means inferior qualities, yet, nonetheless, lacking in charm.<sup>15</sup> It was said that he carried himself stiffly, which probably had less to do with his attitude toward the office he held than with his natural and native English reserve. And he could be firm to the point of stubbornness. "There was no power on earth that could bend the will of John Taylor," Joseph F. Smith, his counselor, recalled from experience.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Taylor's independence and resolve were legends in their own time.

While Taylor was still alive, his First Presidency typically did not inform or consult with members of the Twelve—or invite their recommendations. That complaint probably could have been also leveled in some measure against Taylor's predecessors, but Taylor seemed unusually aloof, impatient—and at times impersonal. Why were not the Apostles more active in their ministries, he asked? From the first years of the Church, the Apostleship had not required

full-time service. Unless serving on a formal proselytizing mission, a member of the Twelve was allowed latitude for personal as well as ecclesiastical activity. However, with the Church growing, the balance was tipping, and Taylor appeared to be dissatisfied with the proportion of the apostolic time given to Church work. Could not the men be more active in their preaching and visiting to outlying congregations? The issue came to a head in the Church's important Salt Lake Stake, where Stake President Angus Cannon, George Q.'s brother, seemed to treat the Twelve as if they were unwelcome intruders.<sup>17</sup> Nowhere in the Church did members of the Quorum feel such slights, which perhaps reflected Angus Cannon's claim that Zion's central stake had special prerogatives.

Or was it because Angus was reflecting the First Presidency's views that the Apostles should be more active in visiting outlying congregations? By summer 1887, a majority of the Quorum, probably a consensus, felt the role of the Twelve needed redefinition. If Taylor and Cannon wanted them on Church preaching and visiting assignments, Quorum members felt that they should be formally assigned to do such work and that their standing in the Church should reflect the importance of their calling.

### The Cannon-Wells Controversy

The more pressing problem of who would succeed Taylor as Church President was also complicated by issues of personality, which centered around George Q. Cannon. Sometimes what appears to some to be strengths may be perceived as weaknesses by others. "Perhaps no man among us . . . is as gifted as Cannon," thought fellow Quorum member John Henry Smith.<sup>18</sup> Yet Smith and others often found themselves irritated by his manner. "I do wish Pres C. would not impress me with my excessive littleness continually," confided Brigham Young Jr., another of Cannon's associates, to his diary. "While he is kind and good and his all is upon the altar, still he makes his brethren feel that he is too much their superior."<sup>19</sup> These comments were made a decade after the succession controversy, but they might have been expressed equally at the time. Although Cannon moved easily with the best talent in Utah and even on occasion with the best in Washington, D.C., where he had served as a territorial representative, it appeared to



some Apostles that he, for all his capacity, had the need to assert continually his mastery.

Cannon's personality alone would not have made him a center of controversy. However, his colleagues were troubled also by Cannon's way of doing things. Some thought him too shrewd, weaving political webs and magnifying some issues out of natural proportion. Others complained that he tended to involve himself in large and sometimes needless, secret projects, where he could give full vent to his careful planning. The national press, not caring about his principles but judging his personality and talent, called him the Mormon Richelieu, after the powerful Cardinal who had done so much to influence the seventeenth-century French court. But a Richelieu is never so much loved by associates as admired, and then usually after the fact. In Cannon's case, a full appreciation for his remarkable service, even among his admirers, would come only after his death.

Had Cannon remained subject to the strong wills of Brigham Young and John Taylor, there probably would not have been much of a problem. But by 1887, with Taylor seriously ill, Cannon had to involve himself in several difficult issues. First, there was the case of his son John Q. Cannon. After completing a mission in Europe, young Cannon had been called as a counselor in the Presiding Bishopric, but the assignment did not seem to hold much attraction for him. Grant, watching the newcomer, saw him as careless and indifferent. The indictment involved church as well as personal activities.<sup>20</sup>

But neither Grant nor any other Church leader, including John Q's father, realized the depth of the problem. More and more, the younger Cannon was enjoying the cigars, strong drink, and billiards of the Walker House, where he also gambled. Apparently to cover his losses or to support his style of living, he forged one \$1,000 check and was reported to have removed \$11,000 from the Church's general and temple accounts.<sup>21</sup> And the misconduct went further. Setting aside President Taylor's refusal to allow him to enter plural marriage,<sup>22</sup> John Q. began a relationship with "Louie" Wells, the daughter of Daniel H. Wells and the sister of his wife "Annie." By September 1886, Louie had suffered a miscarriage, and when John Q. confessed his conduct to his father, the latter demanded that his son make a public admission. Several days later, with no forewarning at all, Stake President Angus Cannon and John Q. suddenly appeared

at the Tabernacle pulpit during a regular weekly Sunday service. Interrupting the speaker, John Q. confessed his sin to the congregation, after which his uncle announced his excommunication. The two then left as quickly as they appeared.<sup>23</sup>

Public confession of a transgression like John Q. Cannon's was not unusual. However, because he was a General Authority and because the announcement had been so sudden and unexpected, it created "great sensation" and "profound impression."<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, the incident at the Tabernacle was not the end of things. With anti-Mormon prosecutors looking into the case in the belief that John Q. must be guilty of cohabitation, George Q. Cannon advised his son to divorce Annie and marry Louie, whose role had not yet been made public. The hope apparently was to protect the family from further embarrassment when the cohabitation case went to trial. This, too, created public controversy when Louie died in childbirth in San Francisco, and during her funeral in Salt Lake City, Angus Cannon revealed more details of John Q. Cannon's affair, including perhaps more than an intimation of Louie's role. This news—so startling and so unfitting for the occasion—caused Annie, her mother Emmeline B. Wells, and several other women in the congregation to faint. During the troubled funeral, some tried to silence Angus by shouting, "Shame!" But the stake president held his ground by claiming he was revealing Annie's role in the affair at his brother's bidding.<sup>25</sup>

"The leading home topic is the death of Louie W. Cannon, . . . and . . . what occurred at the Funeral," wrote one of the Quorum members, who may have been minimizing things.<sup>26</sup> So deep was the Wellses' outrage that another member of the Quorum wondered if "mortal enmity" between the Cannon and the Wells families would result.<sup>27</sup> In fact, when "Millie" Wells, another of the Wells sisters, met Angus Cannon on the street, she struck him across the face. Not intimidated, he threatened to publish a "card" revealing more details of the affair.<sup>28</sup>

The Wells family was upset by more than Angus's open disclosures and their untimely manner. They also feared that Annie's rights might not have been protected. Moreover, the enforced divorce, they feared, might bring undeserving stigma upon her and possibly deprive her of a fair divorce settlement. Further, some worried about

Annie repeating her sister's difficulty of a nonsanctioned sexual relationship: after all, she still seemed very much drawn to her former husband. These problems were solved when Annie and John were remarried some time later.<sup>29</sup>

At the time of John Q.'s excommunication, Grant had approved of President Cannon's straight-forward, public policy toward his son. It seemed honest and just. But as more details of John Q.'s activity came to light, Grant began an about-face. Grant was hardly a disinterested or insulated party, since Emily, yet another of the Wells sisters, was one of his plural wives. To reinforce the Wellses' point of view, his father-in-law, Daniel Wells, allowed him to read the letters that had passed between himself and George Q. This correspondence, to Grant, suggested that Cannon had not been as open as he had at first seemed, especially about John Q.'s lack of honesty. Rather than taking the broad view that Cannon's policy had saved the Church from embarrassment, Grant chose to see the matter in family terms: Cannon had protected his son while at the same time revealing too much about Louie. "Unless I am greatly mistaken . . . [President Cannon's] action has been wrong and someday there will be a squaring of accounting that will be anything but pleasant."<sup>30</sup>

### **Cannon's Leadership Role**

The emotions about the John Q. Cannon affair peaked about the same time the Quorum was learning the details of the First Counselor's leadership during the last months of President Taylor's administration.

At a meeting attended by a small group of Quorum members several weeks before Taylor's passing, Cannon revealed for the first time Taylor's long, incapacitating illness. While rumors may have already been in circulation, the official statement of Taylor's condition was stunning. Because Taylor had been seriously ill since January, the question naturally arose why they had not been informed earlier. Why the secrecy? When Cannon also spoke of exigencies requiring him to "arrange" certain matters, some of the Quorum members began to question President Cannon's handling of details. Was there a story behind the story? As usual, secrecy was the midwife to suspicion, however much the policy of confidentiality had been Taylor's, not Cannon's, at least in its initial stage.<sup>31</sup>

In short, there was little in Cannon's statements that could not be explained and justified, especially in light of Taylor's administrative style and declining health. However, the confusing and suspicious times made most members of the Quorum seek explanation. Had Cannon used his near-exclusive access to President Taylor to suppress news of his condition and in the process gain influence in the Church? Was Cannon behind the First Presidency's impatience about the personal and business activities of the Twelve? What about Angus Cannon's several awkward acts? Some even questioned whether George Q. Cannon had kept Joseph F. Smith in Hawaii so he, as the First Counselor, would not have to share power.

While there were several similar concerns, all of them centered on the question of the proper role of the Twelve. Were they entitled to be informed and consulted? Or did they exist only to react to the First Presidency's wishes? "Unless I am greatly in error," Grant wrote of George Q. Cannon, "no man can rule in the Church & Kingdom of God unless he is willing to fully and freely accord to . . . [the Twelve] all the rights and privileges belonging to his brethren."<sup>32</sup> Whether fair or not—and many accusations *were* unfair—Cannon had come to embody the discontent and anxiety felt by Grant and his young quorum associates, and this at a time when the Quorum was defining its procedures as an organized body.

### **The Bullion, Beck, and Champion Silver Mine**

There was a third major concern about Cannon. A half dozen years earlier, President Taylor had received a formal revelation, confirmed by another, to invest in the Bullion, Beck, and Champion silver mine of John Beck near Eureka, Utah. Using a \$25,000 Church loan, Taylor and Cannon joined Beck as proprietors and sole owners. The following October the transaction took an unusual turn. The three partners reserved 60 percent of the stock to Taylor for "any purpose he may deem wise." While the property should stand independent of Church control, it was understood that if the mine proved profitable, Taylor might reclaim the Kirtland Temple property, build the long-awaited Jackson County Temple, or perhaps endow Church education.<sup>33</sup> In short, the idea of this extraordinary project was to create a Church fund independent of regular budget procedures for extraordinary purposes.

While the Beck property seemed promising, it suffered from mismanagement and the litigation of rival claimants to the property.<sup>34</sup> The mine often threatened its owners with financial ruin, and Taylor and Cannon scurried to reduce their liability by seeking new investors from both inside and outside the Church. By March 1886, Beck had been replaced, and a group of recently acquired California stockholders used their government connections to bring about a settlement with rivals claiming a right to the property.

President Taylor and Elder Cannon also sought to raise money in Utah for the mine. Elder Moses Thatcher, William B. Preston, Marriner W. Merrill, and Charles O. Card—then leading Cache Valley churchmen—were asked to contribute to meet what was described as a pressing but undisclosed Church need. Thatcher gave \$5,000, Preston and Merrill \$1,000 each, and Card \$500. With the possible exception of Thatcher, only later were the men told the underlying nature of their “investment” in the Beck property.<sup>35</sup> At the time, however, President Taylor clearly told them the general terms of their holdings. In each case, two-fifths of the stockholders’ shares would be held by them personally; the rest would be placed in the pool of dedicated stock under the same conditions held by the first investors. Of the latter, Taylor had absolute control.<sup>36</sup>

While unusual, at first none of this was controversial. It was later learned, however, that three weeks before his death, Taylor had deeded the dedicated stock to Cannon, who now claimed the same independent and absolute control as his predecessor.<sup>37</sup> With the mine becoming profitable, several questions became important. Was Taylor competent to make the transfer? Why had the mine not gone to the Church? What right did Cannon have to the dedicated stock and its profits? Cannon’s diary had explanations. According to this source, before Taylor died an attempt had been made to convey the property to the new Church President, but since no successor had yet been chosen, a name could not be inserted into the legal document and attorneys therefore feared that the transfer might be challenged. As a way out, according to Cannon, it was thought “eminently proper” to deed the property to him, with the stipulation that the Beck property would be used for Church purposes.<sup>38</sup> Whatever the merits of the arrangement, almost all these details were unknown to the Quorum during the first stages of the succession episode.

For whatever reason, Cannon failed later to convey the property to the Church when a new leader was selected. As a result, the disposition of the Bullion, Beck and Champion Silver Mine not only influenced the coming succession controversy, but it also loomed over several other important Church events during the coming decade.<sup>39</sup>

### The Succession Question and Elder Grant

Before President Taylor died, the Saints speculated on whom might succeed him. In 1884, John T. Caine, Utah's knowledgeable Territorial Delegate, gave his views. "The office is elective," said Caine. If precedent is followed, the successor will be Wilford Woodruff. "He has great ability, and is possessed with the very demon of work. He would be a most able C[hurch] leader." But Caine thought there might be an alternative. George Q. Cannon, "one of our ablest men," would make an "excellent head of the church."<sup>40</sup>

Caine did not mean to suggest that the leader would be chosen democratically by the general Church membership. Everyone was clear on that point. The priesthood keys belonged with the Quorum members, who would choose Taylor's successor. Church members would then be called upon to sustain or ratify their choice. Before a new selection could take place, it was expected that the interim leader would be the current President of the Quorum, the senior Apostle. At the moment that man was Woodruff, an almost eighty-year-old Connecticut Yankee.

Including the death of Joseph Smith, there had been only two previous successions, and neither had gone smoothly. After Smith's death, Brigham Young had delayed reorganizing the First Presidency three and a half years due to the uncertain times of post-Joseph Smith Nauvoo, the Church's Exodus to the West, and the lack of a consensus within the Quorum. When he finally forced a decision in December 1847, it was done despite a lack of enthusiasm on the part of some Quorum members.<sup>41</sup> Taylor's succession had also been somewhat uncertain. "Some [of the Quorum] entertained ideas of one kind, some of another," recalled a participant in the Taylor deliberations, who did not give specific details. "It was thought that some should be brought to the Presidency who were not entitled to it, and we had to take a little time to learn and inquire into the mind of the Lord."<sup>42</sup> Therefore, three years passed before Taylor was formally

sustained as President. With such an uncertain pattern in the past, some ambiguity about the process of succession remained. Before Taylor died, Cannon had asked for a clarification, an action that struck several of the Quorum members as possibly self-serving.<sup>43</sup>

Grant also had questions about succession, but for different reasons. He shared the hope of many Latter-day Saints that a member of the Smith family might once again lead the Church, and with Joseph Smith's own sons unavailable, he turned to Joseph F. Smith, the founding prophet's nephew.<sup>44</sup> During the post-Brigham Young interregnum, Daniel Wells had strongly spoken in Smith's behalf, citing an alleged revelation he had personally received. Also, Lorenzo Snow and Wilford Woodruff had predicted Smith's eventual rise to the office, which on their part was likely a speculation about Smith's eventual but not immediate destiny.<sup>45</sup>

Before learning of Taylor's late illness, Grant had asked Woodruff's opinion on the question. Was it absolutely necessary for Elder Woodruff to become Church President? Or might Woodruff help to select another? Perhaps startled by Grant's directness, Elder Woodruff declined an immediate response but promised a letter.<sup>46</sup>

Woodruff's reply on March 20, 1887, was self-effacing but determined. Claiming disinterest ("I do not expect to outlive the President of the Church"), he nevertheless insisted that if he became the senior Apostle he would not step aside. According to Woodruff, Church succession involved "plain truths" as "everlasting, unchangeable, and immovable as the pillars of heaven." The proper procedure would never be altered until the "coming of the Son of Man." Joseph Smith, Woodruff believed, had given the Quorum of the Twelve the keys of authority. Upon the death of President Taylor, the Quorum therefore would preside, and their presiding officer would be the President of the Twelve. It followed, then, that on the death of any Church President, the senior Apostle was the President of the Church, whatever his title. The President of the Twelve, then, of necessity would become the President of the Church and thereby would assume an incumbency ending only in the new leader's death.

Woodruff's words to Grant carried what may have been a criticism. "I have full confidence to believe that the Twelve Apostles have had experience and light enough to shun any path pointed out to gratify the private interest of any man or set of men against the

interest of the Church.” This sentence, with its underlined emphasis, may have aimed less at Grant’s inquiries on behalf of Joseph F. than at the rumors circulating in the community about the availability of George Q. Cannon.<sup>47</sup>

That the kindly, saintly Woodruff should be looking over his shoulder was a commentary on the mood surrounding Cannon. A week later, Woodruff reported to Grant the rumor of Cannon’s insistence that the deed of the Gardo House, the President’s official residence, be transferred specifically to the future President of the Church, not to the President of the Twelve. Cannon allegedly had been overheard to say the two might not be the same.<sup>48</sup> The result again was the questioning of Cannon’s motives, despite the fact that over the past decade Cannon in a series of sermons had argued that succession rightly belonged to the senior Apostle.<sup>49</sup> However, so uncertain and inflamed the atmosphere, it was apparently thought Cannon could not be taken at his word.

At the end of June, Grant huddled with Thatcher for a “long talk,” and the two emerged believing that Cannon wanted the Presidency. They were equally sure, however, that the position would be denied him.<sup>50</sup> During the next ten days, the pressures and uncertainties of the situation seemed to grow. The day after meeting with Thatcher, Grant learned of Taylor’s likely passing. The next day, he read letters from George Q. and Annie Wells Cannon, learning new, still more troubling details of Cannon’s handling of John Cannon’s affair. While he did not disclose the letter’s contents, Grant’s anger deepened. His dark mood also had him thinking about Joseph F. Smith’s apparent exile. There was no one in the Church for whom Grant had a higher regard. Was Smith being treated fairly? At about this time, too, Grant heard Cannon’s statement about his having made unilateral decisions, and the implication of these various reports and emotions now swept over him. The timing of Grant receiving this information heavily influenced his perceptions and feelings. On the evening of July 3, Grant was so overcome that he found sleep difficult.

During the night, he considered the “many changes” that would occur at Taylor’s death. Grant also reflected upon his belief that Cannon wanted to become the new Church President. “Prest Cannon thinks I am the most ambitious young man in Utah,” Grant reflected,



“and I think there is no limit to his ambition.” In contrast to his feelings about Cannon, Grant had “perfect” confidence in Joseph F. Smith. Certainly, in the post–John Taylor world, Grant hoped the latter’s influence would prevail. At last, as often on occasion of stress, his mood turned inward. He rose from his bed and prayed for the strength to curb his own desires and ambition. He did not wish to be removed from “the path of duty.”<sup>51</sup>

Four times during the month of July, Grant met with Woodruff, once with Thatcher present. While other questions were discussed, Church succession was very much a part of their conversation. “Prest Woodruff seemed to share my opinion that Prest Cannon had not treated our quorum with as much respect and consideration as he should have done, and also seemed to fully endorse my good opinion of Prest. Smith,” Grant reported, seeing Woodruff’s remarks through the prism of his own hope. According to Grant, Woodruff had no personal desire for the office and would be willing to sustain Joseph F. Smith if the Quorum should desire. Yet, it was also true that Woodruff gave little encouragement to such a move, having “no idea that such a thing would be done.”

However, Grant’s interviews with Woodruff left him impressed. If his brethren should move on Woodruff’s candidacy, Grant claimed he would be “perfectly satisfied,” though such an alternative seemed a distinct second in his mind to the highly preferred Joseph F. Smith.<sup>52</sup> Grant’s preference in part was a matter of personality and relative youth; he felt drawn to Smith and his vigor, and he feared that Woodruff, whatever his sterling quality, might come to be unduly influenced by Cannon if Woodruff should become Church president. These fears were partly fueled by Cannon’s leadership role after Taylor’s death. The situation simply did not allow Cannon to step back into the Quorum as a regular member; as an experienced member of the First Presidency, he knew too much and was too indispensable. Cannon reported in his journal that Woodruff, recognizing his value, needed his help in the weeks and months after Taylor’s death. “He felt quite unable to attend to the business, as it was all new to him. I was familiar with it, and he would be very much pleased to have me assist him.”<sup>53</sup> While Cannon’s willingness to help Woodruff may have been genuinely altruistic, some interpreted it as another sign of his grasp for influence.

### The Apostles' Meetings to Determine Succession

On August 3, 1887, the Quorum had its first meeting since Taylor's death—and for several members it was their first meeting in several years. Inevitably, the recent issues and tensions, too long hedged and suppressed, broke into the open. Woodruff began by promising the Quorum that it would not be dispatched *en masse* from headquarters; nor would he seek an immediate reorganizing of the First Presidency. But Grant and Thatcher swept past these assurances to assail what they regarded as the recent slights experienced by the Quorum. Surprised and nettled, Cannon questioned the propriety of his being restored to the Quorum while such anger existed in the heart of some of its members.

For the moment, Cannon's demur was left unanswered. Wells had his own statement to make, which seemed to go in a different channel from the flow of the meeting and also from the general feeling of the Quorum. As a "Counselor of the Quorum"—John Taylor had never agreed to Wells's formal ordination to the body—Wells renewed his 1877 claim that the Quorum lacked any kind of presiding authority. Arguing with unusual power, Wells urged the Quorum to immediately choose Taylor's successor—he felt they had that much authority—but then urged them to retire from trying to manage affairs. That responsibility should lie with a newly created First Presidency, he believed.<sup>54</sup> Wells's speech flew in the face of the Quorum's growing sense of their role, as both individuals and as a presiding quorum.

However, most of the Quorum's discussion examined Cannon's past role. The assault continued into the late evening, and the former First Counselor was hard put to provide satisfying answers, particularly about John Q. Cannon's affair. But Cannon's explanations finally gained enough ground for most of the Quorum to offer Cannon their fellowship. Grant was less sure. On one hand, he wished to stand united with his colleagues and to show mercy. But he also thought collegial unity had left unsatisfied the demands of justice. "I am almost ashamed of myself that I did not stand [in opposition to Cannon] . . . until I was satisfied," he later said.<sup>55</sup> But in the end, he, too, extended his hand.

The proceedings of August 3 were the beginning of a pattern. The more senior Quorum members, seasoned by their Church service

and more accepting of their usual and accepted roles, were unwilling to make a point about Cannon's recent acts. Woodruff, for instance, described the charges as mere "pointless things," matters of personality rather than as items of substance.<sup>56</sup> That position was unconvincing to some of the newer members of the Quorum, men like Thatcher and Grant. However, a clear majority of the Quorum—senior as well as junior members—wanted a change in several other areas of Church administration. Under their direction, many of Taylor's security guards were released and the vehicles used to serve President Taylor and other Church leaders hiding from federal marshals were sold. The Church's financial papers, previously scattered in private hands for the sake of security, were once more collected together. More pointedly, Cannon was asked to surrender the Church's financial books for auditing. He did so with some feeling, claiming pleasure at being rid of anything that might bring upon him a further attack from his colleagues.<sup>57</sup>

In spite of the handshakes of August 3, Cannon remained for Grant and others an uneasy presence. The problem lay not so much with settling past grievances as with planning for the future. With the exception of Wells, no one during the August 3 meeting had called for the reorganization of the First Presidency. Sensing the divisions among them, the Quorum for the time being was content to endorse Woodruff's letter to the Church proclaiming an apostolic rule.<sup>58</sup> But what was to be done about Cannon? If opposition in the Quorum made his selection as president unlikely—if the idea ever was a real possibility—he might, some feared, dominate Church affairs as First Counselor to an aging and perhaps too pliable Woodruff.

The possibility spawned at least one fanciful, anti-Cannon maneuver. According to the memory of Edwin D. Woolley Jr., later a stake president in Kanab, Utah, Thatcher wanted his father-in-law Erastus Snow, to lead the Church as chairman of an executive committee of the Quorum. Traveling across the northern Arizona plateau, Woolley heard Thatcher repeatedly ask Snow to make himself available for the position, and he claimed that if Snow did so, he would receive widespread support in the Quorum. For some time Snow refused to reply until Thatcher, growing impatient, complained that he was failing to grasp his chances. That finally brought a firm response

from the usually impassive Snow. “I want you to understand that I will not fight my brethren,” he said. He was apparently referring to fighting Woodruff, but quite possibly to Cannon also.<sup>59</sup>

When the Quorum met prior to the opening session of the October 1877 general conference, Woodruff hoped to defuse the growing tension. Convening at 10:00 A.M. at a pre-arranged underground station—some of the Quorum members arrived secretly before daylight—the meeting continued interminably through the afternoon and evening, ending only at 2:00 A.M. on October 6, six hours before the opening of the conference. “Prest. W. W. thought there were feelings in the Council unbecoming & wished the brethren to speak freely,” commented Franklin D. Richards in his diary. Cannon spoke next. While acknowledging no specific wrongdoing, he asked for forgiveness. The months since Taylor’s death, Cannon said, had brought him more personal suffering than any time in his life. His welling tears showed his emotion.

Despite Woodruff’s good intention, the deliberations of October 5 and 6 did not have the desired effect. Once more the emotion of August 3 was present, and perhaps still more. Pausing to allow the senior members to speak first if they wished, Thatcher launched a warm attack on Cannon’s leadership and way of doing business. Grant followed with a list of a dozen or more supposed Cannon infractions. For their part, John Henry Smith and Francis M. Lyman were less assertive. These men focused on what they felt was Cannon’s disrespect for the Twelve. “Bro Cannon has been his ideal of a man until late years,” said Lyman, “but . . . his confidence [in him] had been shaken,” as any disagreement brought the lash.

When the junior members’ accusations had run their course, even Grant saw how little their mills had ground. No single charge was of “very great importance,” he admitted; only when all the irritations were added together did they seem to have much weight.<sup>60</sup> In fact, the opposite seems to have been true. From the evidence presented, it appeared that the controversy was mainly about apostolic perceptions, not Cannon’s transgressions, and the former had their origin in Cannon’s personality and administrative style.

“It was painful,” Woodruff said in understatement. Still pursuing reconciliation, Woodruff reminded Cannon’s critics of the human qualities of all the Church’s past great leaders—yet in spite

of this they had been called by God. He himself had often differed with President Taylor, he said. But Taylor was “responsible to God and not to me, and this is the key upon which I wish to treat all these matters.” Likewise, Cannon of course had failings—“if he did not he would not be with us.” Woodruff concluded by warning “if we did not feel to forgive and become united, the spirit of the Lord would not be with us.”<sup>61</sup>

Clearly, nothing had been resolved. The next night, after a full schedule of general conference meetings, the Quorum again met until the early morning. It was more of the same: accusations, a Cannon defense, and senior members praying for the elusive balm of Gilead. Woodruff’s secretary, L. John Nuttall, who had not attended the preceding day’s meeting, was stunned by what he heard. “I never attended such a meeting,” he said.<sup>62</sup> At one point, Thatcher and Cannon engaged in an exchange that Grant described as “not calculated to bring them any nearer together.”<sup>63</sup> Yet, when it was all done, some progress had been made. “Differences [were] healed and we were one again,” said Brigham Young Jr. optimistically. “Thank God now we may unite the people[,] for oh they need a solid head.”<sup>64</sup>

Grant’s description of the October meetings was more personal. He also had found them to be unpleasant, but seemed uncertain what to make of them—or of his own role in them. He sensed that he had vacillated. On one hand, he had not wished to seek “occasion against my brethren.” He knew the need for mercy. However, he wanted the “moral courage to say I am not satisfied [with Cannon’s explanations] unless I am.” When it was all over, despite his swings in emotion, he wrote a passage in his diary that bore the closest examination. “All I want is to have what I think is wrong made right,” he wrote, “and if I am wrong I hope for wisdom to make amends. I desire to have the Kingdom of God first in my desires and affections and ask God’s help to do this.”<sup>65</sup>

To this point, Elder Woodruff had made no attempt to reorganize the First Presidency. Such a move might have increased tension. Yet as he tried to lead the Church as President of the Twelve, he found himself drawn to Cannon and not simply because no one else knew the business detail from the past administration. As Woodruff later remarked, Cannon had “the biggest and best mind in the Kingdom,” which in Woodruff’s new, growing estimate of the man

was joined by a sense of Cannon's humility.<sup>66</sup> When nearly a year later Cannon accepted a plea bargain with government attorneys to serve a term in the territorial penitentiary for plural marriage, Woodruff felt his loss. "This leaves me in a Measure alone for 5 Months [Cannon's projected jail sentence]," he wrote in his diary, "but I will do the best I Can."<sup>67</sup>

Cannon's talents were best seen as a public speaker, a writer or, when working in a small circle, a peer or an adviser; it was within this last area—working with Woodruff—that Cannon was regaining his footing. The growing Woodruff-Cannon relationship was one reason why in mid-March 1888, before Cannon accepted his prison term, Woodruff announced his desire to reorganize the Church Presidency.<sup>68</sup> In a series of four business meetings of the Quorum, starting on March 20, Woodruff tried to get his brethren to approve the plan. Lorenzo Snow, Franklin D. Richards, Brigham Young Jr., John W. Taylor, and Counselor Daniel H. Wells voted to sustain the measure. In opposition were Erastus Snow, Moses Thatcher, Francis M. Lyman, John Henry Smith, and Heber J. Grant. The Quorum was badly split. As usual Cannon lay at the center of things. Everyone understood that Cannon would probably be selected as Elder Woodruff's First Counselor, and this hard fact prevented resolution.<sup>69</sup>

During these meetings, Cannon's record was reviewed again and again—and then again and again. The first day alone left Brigham Young Jr. wringing his hands. "Much valuable time is wasted in these comparatively groundless charges and their generally successful refutation. I tremble for the future if we continue these unrighteous proceedings."<sup>70</sup> The second day went no better. Woodruff recalled:

I Called upon the Quorum to bring to light all the Accusations they had against Brother Cannon As the younger Brethren including Erastus Snow was filled with Jealousey against him And he proved ev[e]ry accusation against him to be fals[e]. He was Accused to using church Money to [pay] for his Son John Q for Embezeling Church Money. He proved them to be fals[e]. Th[en] of paying large sums of Church Money in the Iron Mine that He proved to be fals[e]. Also in dealing with the Beck Mine. That was proved fals[e] and Ev[e]ry other Accusation was proved fals[e]. It was another painful day.<sup>71</sup>

By the fourth day, it was clear that matters were worse, not better. “The more we tryed to get to gether the wider apart we were,” wrote the despairing Woodruff. “I never saw as much bitterness manifest against one good man by 5 Apostles since the days of the Apostate Twelve against the Prophet Joseph in Kirtland.”<sup>72</sup> In the heat of emotion, Woodruff was satisfied that those opposing Cannon were dictated by simple jealousy. “Any acts of President Taylor that five of the Twelve did not think was right was laid to George Q. Cannon,” he complained.<sup>73</sup> In reply, Erastus Snow, the nominal leader of the anti-Cannon group, also used strong language. Apparently still upset with Cannon’s attempt to minimize rumors of the financial misdeeds of John Q.—and perhaps the misdeeds of another son, the rising politician Frank J. Cannon—Snow leveled the charge of “toadyism” and “man worship” against him. These words brought a sharp rebuke from Woodruff. When it was all over, Woodruff was full of remorse. “I think I done wrong & went to far in the matter,” he said of his encounter with Snow.<sup>74</sup> With such disunity present and with no solution in sight, on the evening of March 23, Woodruff withdrew his proposal.<sup>75</sup>

“Never in my life have I suffered such an ordeal,” said the bruised Cannon. For months he had avoided arrest for cohabitation and the thought of serving in the penitentiary had often been on his mind. But these meetings of accusation made the fear of prison recede. “Nothing” could be compared to facing the examination of his five brethren in the Quorum, he said.<sup>76</sup> Yet, while wounded, Cannon acknowledged no self-doubt, steeled by a confidence in his motives and by the self-inoculation that great men often feel toward stricture. “There are none of father’s actions but what he can defend, and show that his intentions were good in doing them,” said Abraham Cannon, another of Elder Cannon’s sons, who no doubt reflected his father’s views.<sup>77</sup>

Grant’s emotions are more difficult to gauge. While he was present and active during the March meetings, surviving diaries tell little of his role. Nevertheless, quite likely Brigham Young Jr. had Grant and Thatcher in mind when complaining of the “useless talk” engaged in by some of the younger members. “It does seem the less we know the more we have to say.”<sup>78</sup> Young’s comment may have had something to do with the new administrative policies being

urged by the five dissenting Quorum members. More than raising questions about succession, these men wanted reform. During the March meetings, they worked to decentralize First Presidency authority by moving some financial functions to the Presiding Bishopric and still other activities to committees within the Twelve.<sup>79</sup> Woodruff's consent to these suggestions brought the first measure of truce since before Taylor's death.

By October 1888, Grant, Thatcher, and several others were appointed to raise cash for the hard-strapped Church by selling the organization's excess property. Once again their acts were annoying to the older brethren. In February 1889, Nuttall, Woodruff's secretary, recorded his displeasure at such attention to temporal things. "I went to bed," said Nuttall, "having fears in my own mind as to Moses Thatcher's integrity for the welfare of the church and Kingdom—In that financial matters have more weight with him & Bro. H. J. Grant than the things of the Kingdom."<sup>80</sup> However, had Nuttall and others been watching more carefully, they might have sensed a change. Erastus Snow, upset by his exchange with Woodruff, had written both Grant and Thatcher to express his personal sorrow and concern. Snow had come to the conclusion that Grant and Thatcher were on the spiritual precipice, and he wanted them to know it. They had pressed their views too strongly, and Snow believed that if they continued to do so, the two would lose their places in the Quorum.<sup>81</sup> Snow's letters were kind but filled with portent.

In the following months, Snow's warning slowly took hold of Grant, and he later described it as a turning point in his life. Then, too, Grant must have reacted to the contrary example of Thatcher, whose opposition did not cease. In late 1888, Thatcher surprised his colleagues by threatening to sue Cannon over the Beck property stock and profit distributions. This extraordinary act—which introduced the possibility of two General Authorities engaged in legal action—cost Thatcher much of the influence he then retained with his colleagues. When Thatcher continued to agitate the Beck issue, Grant privately warned him, much like Erastus Snow's early caution, of the possible result of his behavior. In fact, Grant did more. He went to Cannon and spoke of Thatcher's continuing hostility—news that Cannon could hardly have found too surprising.<sup>82</sup> But more



astonishing was Grant's change. Within the year, he turned from being Cannon's opponent to being his defender.

### **Final Steps to Reorganize the First Presidency**

By January 1889, President Woodruff made another attempt to reorganize the Presidency.<sup>83</sup> At the time, Quorum meetings could still be tension-filled, noisy affairs, with Thatcher and Grant insisting upon more businesslike financial procedures for the Church. Woodruff left one such meeting complaining he would rather attend a funeral.<sup>84</sup> But on the issue of succession, the Quorum seemed to be coming together. In February, Woodruff wrote Francis M. Lyman, then serving a cohabitation prison term, asking for his position on the question and received Lyman's approval to go forward.<sup>85</sup> Presumably other soundings went as well.

The growing consensus was a tribute to Woodruff's leadership. A less patient man might have forced a greater confrontation and brought open rupture. Yet, President Woodruff's quiet way had controlled events. And whatever his words about denying personal ambition, he had never yielded from his view that he, as senior Apostle, must lead the Church, temporarily and in the long-term. Faced by his resolution, the dissenting members never felt freedom to bring any of their succession alternatives to the Quorum. As a result, by 1889, only two leadership possibilities existed: (1) President Woodruff might continue to preside over the Church as President of the Twelve with Cannon at his side, or (2) he might become President of the Church with Cannon as his First Counselor. The Quorum was left with Cannon *de facto* or Cannon *de jure*. The latter had the advantage of ending the unwieldy and fractious business meetings.

One issue still had to be settled before there could be a new First Presidency. Woodruff asked Thatcher and Cannon to resolve their Bullion-Beck dispute, and, consequently, Cannon at last agreed to distribute Thatcher's portion of dedicated stock. While Thatcher remained "very persistent" on the other Bullion-Beck matters, he granted that his differences with Cannon had been resolved enough to permit the Quorum to continue with its business.<sup>86</sup>

Two days later, on April 5, 1889, the Quorum met and the motion to organize the First Presidency carried unanimously and with little

discussion. However, when the issue of Woodruff's counselors arose, the troubled past could not be entirely forgotten. Nominated as First Counselor, Cannon rhetorically asked if he should be excused from the office. He could only accept President Woodruff's invitation, he said, with the knowledge that it was God's will and that he had the "hearty and full approval of my brethren." He assumed that his colleagues would "all understand my feelings in this matter."<sup>87</sup>

Woodruff provided certainty on the first question. He had prayed about counselors, he told the Quorum, and announced the Lord's "mind and will" that George Q. Cannon and Joseph F. Smith should be selected (illus. 10-3). The second question—whether Quorum members would support the nomination—ended almost as well. The men responded with expressions of good will, although if the surviving diaries give full accounts, Grant said very little. Thatcher, however, was unbowed. Because of President Woodruff's assurance of divine approval, Thatcher told his colleagues that he would vote for Cannon, although, he said, he wished he had put himself in a position to receive the "same manifestation." Nor was that the only suggestion of bygones. "There has been some matters of . . . [Cannon's] former administration which have not been approved by the Saints but I will let that pass," said Thatcher. But "when I vote for him I shall do so freely and will try and sustain him with all my might."<sup>88</sup> These careful words were apparently the best Thatcher could do.

Prior to being sustained by the Quorum, Cannon spoke to each of the Brethren, calling them by name, one by one, to ask their forgiveness. "I do this," he said, "as a duty, privilege and a pleasure."<sup>89</sup> Cannon's ascension was best served by generosity. Woodruff also had words of healing. He assured the Twelve that there was never a time when the Church needed them as much. A few days later, he also told them that they were welcome to work with the Salt Lake Stake, Angus Cannon's acts notwithstanding.<sup>90</sup>

The names of Presidents Woodruff, Cannon, and Smith were unanimously accepted at the Church's April general conference in 1889. One conference speech after another pled for harmony. Thus, only a hint of the rift was exposed, and that only by giving emphasis to its nonexistence. The Woodruff succession had in fact preserved unity—at least outward unity and consensus. Taking his office, President Woodruff was modest and well-meaning. "This office is

placed upon me in my 83 year of my life,” he said. “I pray God to Protect me during my remaining Days and give me power to Magnify my Calling to the End of my days.”<sup>91</sup>

### Conclusion and Aftermath

Although more than a century has passed since the Woodruff succession, it is still difficult to make judgments about it. Why had emotions been so strong and words so angry? On one level, some answers may be found in the issues of honor and propriety, to which



Courtesy Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Illus. 10-3. The First Presidency, 1894. *Left to right:* George Q. Cannon, Wilford Woodruff, Joseph F. Smith. The statement at the bottom of the pictures reads: “First Presidency of the Mormon Church taken on the 87th birthday of President Wilford Woodruff, 1894.”

the late nineteenth century gave such importance. While many details of the Annie and Louie Wells relationship with John Q. Cannon remain screened from view—those elusive details that Grant found so damning in the Wells family’s correspondence—enough of a public record exists to suggest there were grounds for complaint, both in the commission of acts and later in the management of the affair. Further, John Q. Cannon’s financial misconduct made these sensitivities irretrievably worse, involving as it did Church as well as family reputation.

The personalities of John Taylor and George Q. Cannon created their own social discord. Cannon, who bore the brunt of the succession controversy, had great intellectual and administrative gifts, as well as Christian virtue. Nevertheless, he lacked the politician’s easy, personal touch that might have allowed many of his associates to like him as much as they admired him. Yet, as Woodruff observed, the charges brought against Cannon mainly concerned “personality” and not “substance.”<sup>92</sup> The most potentially serious accusation was his gaining control of the Bullion-Beck consecrated property during Taylor’s decline, the full details of which still wait extended historical analysis. However, in Cannon’s defense, the matter was investigated during the Woodruff succession, and no charge of wrongdoing was leveled against him, then or later.

It is likely that each one of these factors—the John Q. Cannon affair, the personalities of John Taylor and George Q. Cannon, and Cannon’s administration of Church programs—might have been managed without incident had historical circumstance not been so contrary. On one hand, the U.S. government’s crusade against plural marriage left the Church’s efficient governing structure in ruin, with a lack of communication that gave life to rumor and misunderstanding. Also true, the difficulty of the Woodruff succession coincided with the historic rise of the Quorum of the Twelve. Previously, except in the two eras of apostolic interregnum, its members had served the Church as individuals acting on assignment from the First Presidency. However, by Taylor’s last years, it was clear that the Quorum had a budding institutional role of its own. Taylor’s insistence that the Twelve be more active in their ministries was one sign of the change. Another was the Quorum’s complaint that its members had not been consulted during the last months of

the crippled Taylor administration and the insistence of some of the Apostles that their voices be heard during the Woodruff succession. In short, this was a time when the Quorum was gradually assuming its modern role of a regularly constituted, fully engaged organization, second only in influence to the First Presidency.

The remaining threads of the succession story wove themselves in fairly predictable patterns. During the 1890s, George Q. Cannon served as much as he had in the past, providing strong and able, and at times controversial, leadership. In 1898, when Woodruff died, Lorenzo Snow assumed the office of Church President, and Cannon's heavy influence over policy diminished within hours, although Cannon was retained as First Counselor; he died three years later.

As part of President Lorenzo Snow's administrative transition, Cannon was asked to give an accounting of the Beck property stock, which had proven enormously profitable in the 1890s. Since the Woodruff succession, the Beck, Taylor, and Thatcher interests had each forced the dispersal of their portions of the "dedicated stock" and then used the proceeds for their own purposes. Cannon's share of the pool had earned an impressive \$160,000, which he had used for a variety of Church and personal projects, including the quiet repayment of John Q. Cannon's speculations. Snow and Cannon, not wishing any impropriety, agreed that Cannon should surrender assets to the trustee-in-trust to cover all Cannon's private expenditures, plus interest—despite the fact that others involved in the mine had used its dividends for their personal gain. The amount of Cannon's repayment was never announced, nor for that matter was the transfer itself. As enigmatic was the value of the dedicated stock, which by the time of the Snow-Cannon settlement may have become worthless. Thus closed the chapter that Joseph F. Smith called "one of those things that perhaps had never been heard of before, and whose parallel would never be heard of again."<sup>93</sup> Whatever its virtues, the Bullion and Beck endeavor had generated more than its share of ill will.

Others involved in the Woodruff succession had their own stories to tell. Moses Thatcher's alienation deepened in the 1890s. During these years, he suffered from a severe illness and a resulting drug dependency, which may have increased his instability. Increasingly unwilling to accept the Quorum's consensus, particularly in political matters, he was at last removed from the Twelve in 1896.

Grant, ironically, played a role in preferring charges and acting as a prosecuting witness against him.<sup>94</sup>

The voluble Grant continued to play an active role in the Twelve's discussions, just as he had done during the years 1887 to 1889. Yet, much of his persistence and assurance was gone. He also continued to make peace with Cannon, making confession both to him and to members of the Quorum, believing that "God had forgiven him" for his accusations and wishing that his brethren would do so, too.<sup>95</sup> To help finance the new Utah sugar industry, Grant joined Cannon as a partner in Cannon, Grant & Company. In this and other enterprises, the two maintained respectful relations, although the differences in personality that had done so much to confound them in the late 1880s were never far from the surface. If Grant worried about some of Cannon's initiatives in the 1890s, he was now willing, as a rule, to let those questions be settled by time and by senior colleagues.

Finally, Lorenzo Snow's smooth succession to the presidency in 1898 owed a great deal to the events of 1887–89. They had been decisive in strengthening the precedent of Church succession by apostolic seniority, although Snow himself, who had sustained Woodruff's succession, mused in one passing conversation in 1890 that in matters of succession the Quorum still might choose whomever it wished, even a non-Apostle.<sup>96</sup> In the discussion preceding Snow's selection, it was Grant who maintained the traditional view, citing Woodruff's earlier letter to him.<sup>97</sup> As one who had questioned the idea of succession by apostolic seniority ten years earlier, Grant's statement suggested how deeply the idea had taken root in him and in the Church itself. His words also reflected how much the episode had molded and seasoned him.

## Notes

1. Grant's papers remain one of the best sources for reconstructing the succession difficulty. During the late 1880s, he maintained an extensive correspondence as well as writing two parallel copies of his diary. While destroying parts of one copy of his diary, he retained the second in full, perhaps inadvertently. For profiles of two other leading figures in the succession episode—and details about the event itself—see Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 235–45; and Davis Bitton, *George Q. Cannon: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret

Book, 1999), 286–98. For a previously published detail about the succession, see D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 45–50. Also see Reed C. Durham Jr. and Steven H. Heath *Succession in the Church* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 78–102; and Todd M. Compton, “John Willard Young, Brigham Young, and the Development of Presidential Succession in the LDS Church,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35 (Winter 2002), 111–34. This last article treats the development of apostolic seniority within the Mormon tradition and assumes its general acceptance in the nineteenth-century selection of Church Presidents—an argument that this chapter underplays.

2. Heber J. Grant to Georgia Thatcher, April 18, 1896, Grant General Correspondence, Grant Papers, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

3. Heber J. Grant, Letterpress Diary, June 25 and 29, 1887, Grant Papers; Franklin D. Richards, Diary, June 27, 1887, Church Archives; Samuel Bateman, Diary, June and July 1887, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; Abraham H. Cannon, Diary, June 25, 1887, Perry Special Collections.

4. George Q. Cannon, Journal, July 18, 1887, as cited in Bitton, *George Q. Cannon*, 287–88.

5. Grant, Letterpress Diary, July 7, 1887; Franklin D. Richards to Joseph F. Smith, June 28, 1887, Joseph F. Smith Correspondence, Church Archives.

6. George Q. Cannon to John W. Young, July 11, 1887, First Presidency Letterbooks, Church Archives.

7. George Q. Cannon to Joseph F. Smith, March 21, 1887, First Presidency Letterbooks; Franklin D. Richards to Joseph F. Smith, June 28, 1887, Joseph F. Smith Correspondence.

8. Bitton, *George Q. Cannon*, 287–88.

9. George Q. Cannon to Brigham Young, Francis M. Lyman, and John Henry Smith, July 1, 1887, First Presidency Letterbooks; George Q. Cannon to Erastus Snow, July 1 and 11, 1887, First Presidency Letterbooks; George Q. Cannon to Wilford Woodruff, July 1, 1887, First Presidency Letterbooks; John Henry Smith, Diary, July 21, 1887, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

10. Bateman, Diary, July 25, 1887; Richards, Diary, July 25–26, 1887.

11. Franklin D. Richards to Joseph F. Smith, June 28, 1887, Joseph F. Smith Correspondence.

12. John Henry Smith, Diary, July 30, 1887; Andrew Karl Larson, *Erastus Snow: The Life of a Missionary and Pioneer for the Early Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952), 702; Bateman, Diary, August 2, 1887.

13. “Laid to Rest: The Remains of President John Taylor Consigned to the Grave,” *Millennial Star* 49 (September 5, 1887): 561.

14. Heber J. Grant to J. Golden Kimball, April 23, 1903, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 36:81–83, Grant Papers.
15. Paul Thomas Smith, “John Taylor,” in *The Presidents of the Church*, ed. Leonard J. Arrington (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 113.
16. Grant, Letterpress Diary, August 3, 1887, Grant Papers.
17. Grant, Letterpress Diary, August 3, 1887. See also John Henry Smith, Diary, August 3, 1887. The brethren charged Angus with being “tyrannical and insubmissive to apostles.”
18. Grant, Typed Diary, January 4, 1898, Grant Papers.
19. Brigham Young Jr., Diary, March 2, 1897, Church Archives.
20. Grant, Letterpress Diary, June 26–27 and September 4–5, 1886.
21. Francis M. Lyman to Joseph F. Smith, May 25 and 27, 1887, Joseph F. Smith Correspondence.
22. Richards, Diary, January 30, 1888.
23. Abraham H. Cannon, Diary, September 5, 1886. To make this announcement about John Q. Cannon, Angus Cannon came out of underground hiding, which necessitated his hurried departure after the transaction of business.
24. Abraham H. Cannon, Diary, September 5, 1886.
25. Francis M. Lyman to Joseph F. Smith, May 25, 1887, Joseph F. Smith Correspondence.
26. Richards, Diary, May 22, 1887.
27. Francis H. Lyman to Joseph F. Smith, May 27, 1887, Joseph F. Smith Correspondence.
28. Abraham H. Cannon, Diary, September 14, 1887.
29. Abraham H. Cannon, Diary, May 13, 1888.
30. Grant, Letterpress Diary, June 26–27, 1887; Heber J. Grant to Daniel H. Wells, November 21, 1886, Grant Letterpress Copybook, 6:510–11.
31. Grant, Letterpress Diary, July 7, 1887.
32. Grant, Letterpress Diary, June 24, 1887.
33. Papers and Agreements, esp. those of June 11 and October 3, 1883, Papers on Bullion, Beck and Champion Manufacturing Company, 1882–84, Financial Department Papers, Church Archives; Francis M. Lyman, Diary, October 4, 1883, First Presidency’s Office, Salt Lake City; Journal History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 27, 1899, Church Archives, microfilm copy in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. See also Edward Leo Lyman, “The Alienation of an Apostle from His Quorum: The Moses Thatcher Case,” *Dialogue* 18 (Summer 1985): 67–91, which treats the Bullion, Beck, and Champion Mine within its larger context.
34. Lyman, “Alienation of an Apostle,” 68.
35. Statement of William B. Preston, Journal History, April 27, 1899. Thatcher may have had previous knowledge inasmuch as President Taylor



had earlier requested members of the Twelve to invest in the property. Thatcher's investment is detailed in "Statement Regarding Elder Moses Thatcher's Stock in the Bullion Beck and Champion Mining Company," Financial Department Papers, Box 23, Fd. 3.

36. John Taylor to William B. Preston, December 17, 1886; John Taylor to Moses Thatcher, April 20, 1887, First Presidency Letterbooks.

37. "Agreement of 2 July 1887," Papers on Bullion, Beck and Champion Manufacturing Company, 1882-84.

38. Diary of George Q. Cannon, July 1, 1887, as cited in Bitton, *George Q. Cannon*, 286-87.

39. This is the persuasive argument of Lyman, "Alienation of an Apostle from His Quorum," 68-72.

40. Journal History, January 9, 1884, quoting from the *Leader*, January 13, 1884.

41. Meeting of the Twelve, December 5, 1847, Minutes of Meetings, Brigham Young Papers, Church Archives.

42. Franklin D. Richards, in *69th Semi-Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1898), 31. The Taylor succession, which requires further scholarly attention, was probably complicated by some Quorum members urging the candidacy of Joseph F. Smith. Other observers have argued, then and more recently, that Young wished his son John W. Young to succeed him, although no direct evidence suggests that Young or other Church leaders favored such a course. This argument receives some sympathy in Todd M. Compton, "John Willard Young," 111-34.

43. Wilford Woodruff to Heber J. Grant, March 28, 1887, Wilford Woodruff Papers, Church Archives. Cannon had defended the principle of apostolic seniority in the succession of John Taylor and may have continued to support the idea, although perhaps with less fervency than on the previous occasion. For an example of Cannon's earlier views, see George Q. Cannon, Remarks, October 8, 1877, George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses* 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855-86), 19:230-7.

44. Meeting of the Twelve, October 1, 1890, Grant Letterpress Diary.

45. Woodruff to Grant, March 28, 1887.

46. Wilford Woodruff, Diary, March 20, 1887, Church Archives; Woodruff to Grant, March 28, 1887.

47. Wilford Woodruff to Grant, March 20, 1887. His passion not fully spent by his letter, Woodruff wrote a lengthy and equally firm entry in his diary on the topic, March 28, 1887.

48. Woodruff to Grant, March 28, 1887. George Q. Cannon's diary, long unavailable to researchers, might clarify his motivation, though it is also possible that he carried his penchant for confidentiality even to his private papers.

49. George Q. Cannon, Remarks, October 8, 1877, in *Journal of*

*Discourses* 19:230–37; October 19, 1882, 23:357–67; and August 17, 1883, 24:274–76.

50. Grant, Letterpress Diary, June 24, 1887.
51. Grant, Letterpress Diary, June 25–27, and July 3, 1887.
52. Woodruff, Diary, July 14–15, and 31, 1887. See Grant, Letterpress Diary, July 25, 1887.
53. George Q. Cannon, Diary, August 5, 1889, as cited in Bitton, *George Q. Cannon*, 289.
54. While Grant's Letterpress Diary, August 3, 1887, provides the fullest account of the meeting, the journals of L. John Nuttall, Franklin D. Richards, John Henry Smith, and Wilford Woodruff each contain additional details.
55. Grant, Letterpress Diary, August 3, 1887.
56. Woodruff, Diary, August 3, 1887.
57. Abraham H. Cannon, Diary, September 8, 1887; Grant, Letterpress Diary, September 21, 1887.
58. "A Communication from President Woodruff to the Saints of God throughout the World," *Millennial Star* 49 (August 29, 1887): 545–46. The letter is reprinted in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 3:130–32.
59. Journal History, March 8, 1897.
60. Grant, Letterpress Diary, October 5, 1887. The diaries of John Henry Smith, Franklin D. Richards, Brigham Young Jr., and Wilford Woodruff provide additional documentation of the proceedings.
61. Grant, Letterpress Diary, October 5, 1887.
62. L. John Nuttall, Diary, October 6, 1887, Nuttall Papers.
63. Grant, Letterpress Diary, October 10, 1887, detailing events of October 6, 1887.
64. Young, Diary, October 6, 1887.
65. Grant, Letterpress Diary, October 10, 1887, detailing events of October 6, 1887.
66. Abraham H. Cannon, Diary, February 22, 1889.
67. Woodruff, Diary, September 17, 1888.
68. Richards, Diary, March 14, 1888.
69. Woodruff, Diary, March 20, 1888.
70. Young, Diary, March 20, 1888.
71. Woodruff, Diary, March 21, 1888.
72. Woodruff, Diary, March 23, 1888.
73. Woodruff, Diary, March 23, 1888.
74. Woodruff, Diary, March 23, 1888.
75. Woodruff, Diary, March 23, 1888; Richards, Diary, March 23, 1888.
76. George Q. Cannon to Joseph F. Smith, April 18, 1888, Joseph F. Smith Correspondence; Richards, Diary, March 23, 1888.
77. Abraham H. Cannon, Diary, March 23, 1888.
78. Young, Diary, March 28, 1888.

79. Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Was There More to the Moses Thatcher Case Than Politics?" unpublished paper in author's possession, makes the argument that Thatcher held a long-time commitment to personal freedom and a fear of authoritarian control.

80. Nuttall, Diary, February 27, 1889, see also December 3 and 17, 1888; Woodruff, Diary, October 10, 1888. Nuttall's comment suggests a clue that helps unravel the larger controversy. Since the founding of Utah, the Church had been heavily involved in economics, largely for the sake of promoting the social and economic well-being of the Saints, which contemporaries generically called "the Kingdom." In this regime, early Church leaders like Brigham Young and George Q. Cannon were less concerned about business efficiency for the sake of maximizing profits than in establishing programs of social and economic benefit to Church members. The newer and younger Apostles seemed less driven by this vision. The standard work for the early nineteenth-century Mormon social and economic vision remains Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), see esp. p. 292.

81. Grant to Thatcher, April 18, 1896; Journal History, November 26, 1896.

82. Grant, "Saving the Ogden Bank," undated memorandum, Box 145, Folder 4, Grant Collection. Lyman, "Alienation of an Apostle," 71-72.

83. Nuttall, Diary, January 23, 1889.

84. Nuttall, Diary, February 27, 1889.

85. Nuttall, Diary, February 18 and 20, 1889.

86. Richards, Diary, March 14 and April 3, 1889; Nuttall, Diary, April 3, 1889.

87. Nuttall, Diary, April 5, 1889.

88. Nuttall, Diary, April 5, 1889.

89. Nuttall, Diary, April 5, 1889.

90. Nuttall, Diary, April 5 and 10, 1889.

91. Woodruff, Diary, April 7, 1889.

92. Woodruff, Diary, August 3, 1887.

93. Journal History, April 14, 24, and 27, 1899.

94. Lyman, "Alienation of an Apostle," 73-88; Journal History, May 7 and August 7, 1897.

95. Grant, Typed Diary, April 20, 1893, see also January 29, 1891.

96. Grant, Letterpress Diary, October 1, 1890. Also in 1890, Thatcher, still in the Quorum, thought that some future difficult time might require a younger man without seniority.

97. Grant, Letterpress Diary, October 1, 1890.