Sailing "The Old Ship Zion": The Life of George D. Watt

Ronald G. Watt

In the history of nineteenth century Mormonism, the contrary spirit of apostasy several times claimed stalwart Latter-day Saints who were respected by their contemporaries and who were influential in Mormon life and thought. Despite many faithful years of service, these once-dedicated servants disappear from the annals of Mormon history, and posterity catalogs them with the obscure and insignificant. Such is the case with George D. Watt.

Once a prominent figure in Utah history, Watt was known widely as a clerk in Brigham Young's office, as founding editor of the *Journal of Discourses,* as one of the developers of the Deseret Alphabet, and as a promoter of Utah's silkworm culture. A long association with President Young provided George Watt with numerous opportunities to serve, and by his quiet efficiency the enthusiastic British convert assisted and even influenced the prophet. In 1874, however, Watt lost his membership in the Church and with it the associations which had brought him a measure of prominence. After his excommunication, old friends ignored him and his obscurity began. To later generations of Mormons George D. Watt is a little-known individual.[1]

Rediscovering the character of this man who faithfully reported the discourses of Church leaders for almost twenty years can give us a better understanding of the early Church. He was a man full of paradoxes and complexities, yet one who could be simple in his outlook and in his adherence to a cause.

Watt seemed always to sense a need for love and approval by those closely associated with him. He mentioned this to Willard

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Ronald G. Watt is assistant librarian-archivist in the Church Historical Department.

[1]Once before a descendant has tried to redeem him. But Ida Watt Stringham and Dora Dutson Flack's *England's First Mormon Convert: The Biography of George Darling Watt* (n.p., [ca 1958]), fails to restore his reputation. Probably this is because the book neither captures Watt's complicated character nor reveals an understanding of the man and his shortcomings. Andrew Jenson gathered material for a sketch on Watt in his *Biographical Encyclopedia,* but his notes were never printed.

Richards as early as 1852, and as late as 1878 to John Taylor. He was impulsive, as may be seen by the fact that he ran to the water's edge so as to be the first person baptized in Great Britain. He sought counsel and advice from his superiors, but he wanted them to say he could do as he wished. He was also endowed with a stubborn pride that made it almost impossible for him to admit his own faults, though his need for love and acceptance tempered that pride most of his life. He spent so much of his life with a pen in his hand that it was easier for him to express his feelings in writing than in conversation, although the few sermons or lectures extant show that he could express his ideas well orally. He could be critical of some of his fellow beings to the extent of accusing them of wronging him. He was not a leader of men, but neither was he a blind follower. He was a man well-trained in his own profession, and enjoyed his position, thinking of it as a calling rather than as a daily task.

George D. Watt was born in Manchester, England, in December 1815, to James Watt and Ann Wood. About two years later, his father left for America where he subsequently died in New Orleans. His mother remarried, and young George spent some time in a poorhouse and then went to live with his grandfather in Scotland. When he was fourteen he returned to England where he married and lived in Preston close to his mother.

It was in Preston that Watt joined Reverend James Fielding's congregation at Vauxhall Chapel and first met the Mormon missionaries. James Fielding's brother, Joseph, had joined the Mormons in America, and he wrote to his brother describing this new religion. In 1837 Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Willard Richards, and this same Joseph Fielding journeyed to Britain as missionaries where they first contacted Reverend Fielding who allowed them to preach in his chapel. However, when his congregation began to leave him for these Americans, Fielding barred the missionaries from Vauxhall.

Watt later attributed his conversion to the lack of the ancient Christians' spiritual gifts in his church which dissatisfied him and led to some disputes between him and his pastor. When the missionaries came he believed in their teachings[2] and was baptized by Heber C. Kimball with that first group of nine Latter-day Saints in Britain on 30 July 1837.[3] His mother was baptized the same day.

Watt was the type of person who needed counsel and advice.

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[2]*Salt Lake Tribune,* 12 April 1874.

[3]Orson F. Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1888), p. 135.

At the time of his baptism, he was working in a factory. He asked some of the presiding brethren whether to continue in the factory or to become a policeman. Joseph Fielding worried about Watt's testimony remaining strong, but Willard Richards blessed him, and he joined the police force.[4] Later that year Watt wrote to Joseph Fielding asking him to ask Kimball about leaving the police force,[5] and Kimball sent him to Scotland as a missionary. It was a thrilling experience and he saw many people baptized. He became homesick, however, and in February 1841 returned to Preston to be with his wife and two small children.[6] Concerned about his family, he wrote to Brigham Young who was then in Liverpool. Thinking that Satan was trying to prevent him from doing the Lord's work, he felt a need to move his family but he did not want them to be a burden on Orson Pratt who already had a destitute family in Edinburgh. It would be nice to be off to the land of Zion, but he desired to continue in the work.[7] The record is not clear as to the advice he received, but in April the Council of the Twelve made him a high priest and sent him to preside over the Edinburgh conference where he remained until he sailed for Nauvoo in 1842.[8]

In the five years he spent in Britain after his baptism, Watt formed lasting associations which would be important for most of his life. Especially was this true of his friendship with Willard Richards and Brigham Young. These men, at different times, became the father he had never known as Watt depended on them for advice and counsel when he most needed it. However, like most children, he did not always accept it.

In 1840 the first Mormons left England for Nauvoo; the spirit of gathering to Zion had begun. Two years later on 17 September 1842, George and his wife boarded the ship *Sydney* for New Orleans. Sometime between Watt's letter to Brigham Young in 1841 and the departure, the couple's two children had died. The Watts arrived in New Orleans in mid-November and then made their way up the river by steamer.[9]

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[4]Diary of Joseph Fielding, 29 February 1840, Church Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Diary of Willard Richards, 12 February 1840, Church Archives. Handwritten materials are reproduced as in original with minor alterations in capitalization and periods.

[5]Watt to Fielding, 4 July 1840, Joseph Fielding papers, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

[6]Watt to G. A. Smith, 16 January 1841, G. A. Smith papers, Church Archives.

[7]Watt to Young, 9 February 1841, Brigham Young papers, Church Archives.

[8]Diary of Andrew Sproul, 28 January 1842, p. 20, Library of Congress Collection of Mormon Diaries, Church Archives. *Millennial Star,* 1:301-05; 1:15.

[9]*Millennial Star*, 3:60.

Nauvoo, the City of the Saints, was a bustling city. The temple was beginning to take shape, and new homes were being built. Watt had something unusual to offer this city of almost 12,000 people. Apparently sometime before May 1843 he had learned shorthand, or as it was then called, phonography. In 1837 Sir Isaac Pittman had invented a phonetic shorthand which enabled the scribe to write every word as fast as a person could speak. In May 1843, Watt delivered lectures on the new writing. Within two years he was teaching classes on the subject, and when the Phonographic Society of Nauvoo was organized, he was its president.[10] In exchange for reporting the conference speeches, he was given a house and a lot.[11]

Watt had many other things to do. When Joseph Smith organized a group to explore the West, Watt impulsively volunteered, but the expedition never left. Shortly before the Prophet's death Watt was called to serve a proselyting-campaign mission in North Carolina and Virginia.[12]

In late 1845 the Mormons prepared to leave Nauvoo. Work on the temple continued, for the Saints wanted to begin the ordinance work. When the building was sufficiently completed, Watt took Mary to the temple. With Brigham Young officiating, they were first adopted and sealed as the children of Willard and Jeanette Richards, and then sealed to each other as husband and wife.[13]

The following spring, carrying a recommend to Wilford Woodruff, President of the British Mission, they left with their small son for England.[14] When they arrived they were sent to Glasgow where Watt served as president of the conference. During the next five years he labored in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Staffordshire, Preston, and for a few months in northern Scotland. His stenographic ability lay dormant except for two mission conferences for which he was the clerk and a debate between a Mormon and a sectarian minister.[15]

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[10]*Nauvoo Neighbor,* 2 May 1845; 16 July 1845.

[11]Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 7:425. Hereafter cited as *HC.*

[12]*HC,* 6:224, 341.

[13]Nauvoo Sealing Book, Record A., Genealogical Society, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

[14]Brigham Young to Wilford Woodruff, 4 February 1846, Woodruff papers, Church Archives.

[15]*Report of Three Nights Public Discussion in Bolton between William Gibson, H.P. Presiding Elder of the Manchester Conference and the Rev. Woodville Woodman, Minister of the New Jerusalem Church.* Reported by G. D. Watt. (Liverpool: Franklin D. Richards, 1849).

Meanwhile, Willard Richards corresponded with Watt, telling about the migration of the Mormons from Nauvoo and of United States relations with Mexico. He asked forgiveness for having so long neglected his friends, "yet, the cause of Zion swallows up all minor or personal considerations, and wife and children and relatives, appear lost as it were, and we are obliged to forsake them all to build up the kingdom of God."[16]

Watt was more personal in his reply since Richards knew all the mission news from the *Millennial Star.* He shared with his adopted father some observations drawn from introspection since returning to Britain. "I am more foolish than wise in general," Watt confided. "This conclusion has checked in some degree my headstrong nature, teaching me to think twice before I speak once." He now realized, he said, that his brethren in high positions had passions like himself, and therefore he would overlook their blemishes and expected the same from them. "In conclusion allow me to say that we are every thing to you, which the Law of God, and your own heart shall suggest, give us an interest in your prayers that we may be kept even unto the end Amen. From your children G. D. Watt Mary Watt."[17]

For some time George had longed to be with the Saints in Zion. He was finally released from his mission late in 1850, and he and his family sailed to America, and crossed the plains, arriving in the Salt Lake Valley late the next summer. After returning, he became involved again in shorthand, for we have record that in December he gave a lecture on phonography.[18] His contribution in this endeavor cannot be emphasized enough, because it was not until Watt returned from England that the complete speeches of the leaders of the Church were recorded.

In those economically difficult times Watt soon found himself financially strained, which circumstances eventually brought him into an unpleasant confrontation with Willard Richards, his adopted father and a member of the First Presidency. Richards, as editor of of the *Deseret News* employed Watt as a reporter and it was Watt's job to record all of the important speeches and prepare them for publication in the *News.* Given no permanent salary, Watt was in an extremely insecure economic position. He had to borrow ten dollars from Daniel H. Wells to pay a school tax and obtain a few

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[16]Richards to Watt, 16 April 1847, Watt papers, Church Archives.
[17]Watt to Richards, 5 February 1848, Richards papers, Church Archives.
[18]*Deseret News,* 17 December 1851.
[19]Watt to Wells, 4 January 1852, Wells papers, Church Archives.

necessities.[19] Finally, in September 1852, he wrote a letter of complaint to Willard Richards. The two men exchanged three emotion-filled letters containing exaggerations of the facts, but both men perceived their own position as correct. Even though Watt had valid complaints, Richards saw him as a tormentor for the devil. Watt complained that his wife was ill with diarrhea, and he had nothing to give her but bread and water, for Richards had never paid him. Richards had offered Watt twenty-five pamphlets to sell, but only after he had "drained all the money that would come in this City from Them." (Brigham Young had given Watt the privilege of printing his and Orson Pratt's speeches on celestial marriage. Apparently Watt then gave them to Willard Richards and Richards had published them in the *Deseret News,* taking all the profits for himself.) Watt said, "Brother Brigham's Docterine is 'Man make provision for thy own reasonable wants, and then meet the demands the Lord makes upon thy increase.' The Doc's [Richards'] doctrine (as per 'Deseret News') 'God helps them that help themselves.' " Watt finished the letter with:

> I love you as I ever did; I shall cleave to you to the last, you cannot bluff me off if you wished to. . . . I am ready to work on, and do my duty, but I cannot tamely submit to have the fruits of my labors taken from me alltogether, when it is right by every law that I should enjoy them.[20]

Richard's reply was like that of a father chastising an ungrateful son:

> I regret, that after I have used all my influence and exertions to qualify and place you in a situation in this Church where you might be eminently useful; and have instructed you in the nature of your duties pertaining to your calling as Reporter; . . . that you should pursue such a course after all my brotherly entreaties for daily and hourly intercourse.

Richards was disturbed that Watt had written to him and forwarded the letter through the public post office. A five minute conversation would have been better, he said. He accused Watt of not having fulfilled his duty as reporter. "Brother Watt has done but little for the *News,* compared with what he might have done, if he had devoted his time and talents, to the cause as diligently as Brother Willard has done." He had offered Watt the pamphlets, and if he had taken them, he would have had more than enough money to provide his family with certain comforts and pay his growing bill

[20]Watt to Richards, 24 September 1852, Richards papers, Church Archives

in the tithing store. Richards said earlier in the letter that Watt of late had a foreign spirit about him, "foreign from the Spirit which dwells in the bosom of the Eternal Father." Further revealing his attitude and setting up a defense as well, Richards continued, "My course has been dictated and controlled by my President; and when you find fault with my President you find fault with my God." Concluding, he beseeched Watt to call on him.[21]

Watt's reply was not long in coming. He had written because he could write more effectively than speak in face to face conversation. He wanted to know how he was to be rewarded. If an account was to be kept against him, a price needed to be put upon his labors. Richards had not employed him and had no more right than a stranger to ask Watt why he had not been reporting speeches. Richards had mentioned that Watt had been absent on important occasions, but Watt could only remember one important occasion, and then he had been in City Creek Canyon registering his complaints with the Lord. He added,

> I have written my honest mind Brother Willard: I cannot be intimidated by being told that I have *sliped down;* I only ask for the enjoyment of my common rights with other men. I am not aware that freedom of speech (whether verbaly or in writing) is always a shure sign of a man possessing a bad spirit; neither do I write thinking that I can change your mind and thoughts concerning me, but this I know, I want to do right to you, to my family, and to mankind at large, and shall try to have them do right to me. . . . You can lead me but you cannot intimidate me; while a kind word from your lips viberates through my soul like the sweetest sounds of harmony.[22]

That October Conference no detailed reports appeared in the *Deseret News.* The next April the *News* published most of the speeches in detail; apparently Watt had sent a copy of the talks to Richards. But there was a definite estrangement between the two men. In August 1852, Watt sent Richards another letter in which he noted that he had several sermons which Richards might want to publish in the *Deseret News. "Anything I have is at your command, and has ever been."*[23]

Richards had been wounded deeply by the previous exchange, and he would not seek Watt out. Richards said that he had received Watt's note through the post office, "and as I know not

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[21]Watt to Richards, 25 September 1852, Watt papers, Church Archives.
[22]Watt to Richards, 29 September 1852, Richards papers, Church Archives.
[23]Watt to Richards, 6 August 1853, Richards papers, Church Archives.

where to find you, reply through the same channel." He told Watt that if he had a speech he would send it to press that afternoon.

> I have not disposition to command you but I will once more repeat the request which I have often made, and that at every reasonable opportunity; that you will furnish me with copies of President Young's sermons, teachings, &c. in the midst of this people, that may be useful for the "News," and which ought to be preserved in the Archives of the Church as a matter of history, and you shall in nowise lose your reward; and when you will do this, I shall know that professions, faith, and works, have shaken hands.[24]

In the following issue of the *Deseret News* one of the speeches which President Young gave in July 1853 appeared. In later issues more of Watt's reports were published, and Watt and Richards were finally reconciled.

It was not long before Watt's financial situation improved. He was employed as a clerk by Brigham Young, and he also became the reporter for the Utah Legislature.[25] In November the *News* reminded its readers that Watt was the reporter not only for the *News,* but for any event for which correct transactions were wanted.[26] Earlier he had proposed to publish a journal which would include the speeches of the Presidency, the Council of the Twelve, and others.[27] This had the complete support of all the members of the First Presidency. The volumes were published as the *Journal of Discourses* and the profits of the venture went to Watt.[28] The volumes, printed by Franklin D. Richards in Liverpool, were shipped to Watt who sold them at his home. He continued to be the principal reporter for the *Journal of Discourses* until he left the president's office in 1868; thereafter others continued what he had begun.

Richards died on 11 March 1854. Watt reported the graveside services. At the end of the eulogies Watt said that the mourners departed, "leaving the remains of one of the best and greatest men that ever trod the earth, to sleep in peace, until he shall awake to immortality and eternal life."[29]

The close association between Watt and Brigham Young developed only slowly. Watt had become acquainted with Young in

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[24]Richards to Watt, 6 August 1853, Watt papers, Church Archives.
[25]*Deseret News,* 12 December 1853.
[26]*Deseret News,* 24 November 1853.
[27]*Deseret News,* 18 June 1853.
[28]The First Presidency to Samuel W. Richards, and the Saints abroad, 1 June 1853, Preface, *Journal of Discourses,* Volume 1 (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1854).
[29]*Deseret News,* 16 March 1854.

England. He was now the reporter for the Church, and a clerk in Young's office.

In 1852 after attending Watt's lectures on phonography, Brigham Young began the promotion of a new alphabet. George D. Watt, Parley P. Pratt, and Heber C. Kimball were appointed to form a committee to meet with the Board of Regents and to make recommendations on it. In the early discussions of the new alphabet many people took part—Willard Richards, Orson Spencer, W. W. Phelps, Daniel H. Wells, George D. Watt, Brigham Young, and a few others. At first Young was the promoter, but it is unclear what part he played in its development. The committee, primarily under Watt's inspiration, suggested that Pittman's phonetic alphabet, called phonotype, be adopted. Richards rejected it, and he was supported by the other members of the Board of Regents. Phonotype was too similar to the present English language, they complained.[30] In the final revision Watt, using his phonetic training, put the sounds with the new symbols which he had devised. In writing to Young about possible revisions of the new alphabet, he said,

> Dear Bro. I herein submitt for your examination the result of much thought and extensive practice on the new alphabet since the Board of Regents last met. . . .
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> I candidly confess that I never did like the present construction of the alphabet. I was not left as free as I could have wished to be in the construction of it. . . .

In order to make the symbols more pleasing to the pen, he made them more flowing, substituting cursive letters for block letters, but Watt's changes were not accepted.[31] He continued, however, to be one of the principal promoters of the alphabet. He lectured on it, and was on the committee to write up the first reader for the new Deseret Alphabet.

George D. Watt interested himself in other areas, especially farming. He purchased some property in the Twentieth Ward, located in the Salt Lake City avenues and had a rather large, comfortable home there where he spent his spare time raising fruit and some garden crops. He also owned some property in Kaysville where he grazed sheep. He took an active part in the Salt Lake Theater where he even acted on the stage before his friends and family. His first wife died sometime after coming to Utah, and he then married Jane Brown. Later he married Alice Whittaker, the

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[30]Minutes of meetings, November 1853, Watt papers, Church Archives.
[31]Watt to Young, 21 August 1854, Young papers, Church Archives.

widow of Moses Whittaker. After the army arrived in 1857, Jane divorced him and married a soldier, apparently because she could not accept the doctrine of polygamy. In 1859 he took his fourth wife, Elizabeth Golightly, a lovely eighteen year old. He later married Sarah Ann Harter and Martha Bench. He had most of his children by the last three wives and was a kind, loving father and husband who was concerned about his children's welfare.[32]

As the reporter for the Church, Watt was at all the important meetings, especially when President Young addressed the people. In the 1850s Watt did not travel with President Young when he left Salt Lake City, but beginning in 1861 he was at the side of the president on every trip until 1867. Watt gave prayers, preached, reported the sermons, and often wrote brief summaries which were published in the *Deseret News*. Watt worked so closely with Brigham Young that it was natural that he would look to Young as a son would to a father.

As he had asked Richards' advice before, he now often asked Young's counsel and advice. Once he had problems with a small access roadway next to his property. He had accidentally sold the right of way to a Mr. Tobin and wanted to buy it back. "Bro. Brigham," he wrote, "It looks cold and formal, to say the least of it, to write you a letter when you are within a few feet of me, but when I try to tell you in words the words wont come. The Tobin affair which I have troubled you so much I wish to lay before you as it is in truth." He asked Brigham if it would be appropriate to take the case before the high council.[33] President Young's reply, if written, has not been preserved, but the case was taken before a bishop's court, and Watt was allowed to repurchase the passageway for $579, instead of the $1,000 he had anticipated.[34]

At another time when he desired to take Sarah Ann Harter as his fifth wife, he wrote his "Dear President and Friend" concerning this "matter of considerable moment." Explaining that he had courted Sarah and received permission to marry her, Watt noted that her parents had confided that she had been previously married to a soldier. The man had left her, and her parents presumed that he had been killed. Watt closed by saying, "I wish to make her my wife if it would be right for me to do so, and if you can give your

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[32]Watt to his wives and children, 26 January 1867, Brigham Young University. See also Stringham and Flack, *England's First "Mormon" Convert: The Biography of George Darling Watt.*

[33]Watt to Young, n.d., Young papers, Church Archives.

[34]Bishop's court papers, 6 February 1865, Watt papers, Church Archives.

free consent to our union; not otherwise."[35] Brigham consented, and they were married.

At one time Watt had been instructed to take the speeches down in longhand. In a letter to Young he said, "Dear Brother - Father, It is my greatest earthly happiness when I know that my labors are satisfactory to you and receive your hearty sanction." He agreed reluctantly to record the speeches in that fashion, although it was more arduous than shorthand, and it required little or no exercise of the mind. With his comments about his reporting he gave insight into his own character. He said,

> Already my mind has become almost stereotyped in this line of thought, so much so, that much of my time I am unfit for social society and conversation. Earthly wealth is but dust in the balance to me compared with this work which I think I am designed to perform in my lifetime, and the impression that I work for dollars and cents has yet to be made upon my mind; and Sire, I consider that I have nothing in this world that I do not own to your goodness as the dispenser, under God, of his mercies spiritual and temporal to His Saints, what I have of this worlds goods I hold in trust to be accounted for at any time.[36]

In a letter in 1854 to Young which included a pedigree of some of his ancestry, Watt asked for advice concerning a claim which his brother-in-law said he had to an estate in Ireland.[37] Young replied that he could go to Britain and claim the property if he wanted. However, Watt chose "to remain here and fulfill the duties of my calling, learn to accumulate property, and thereby properly know the value of it." In 1866 Watt again desired to claim it. "I shall feel perfectly satisfied with whatever you advise concerning it, and shall gladly and with a free good will regulate my future course accordingly."[38]

Undoubtedly Brigham told him that he could do as he wished because in February 1867, accompanied by Brigham Young, Jr., he left Salt Lake City en route to Britain. It was a business trip, but he was also expected to preach the gospel. He arrived in Liverpool late in March and after spending a few days there went to his sister's in Preston where he spent the remainder of his time except for preaching at a conference a month after his arrival. Evidence is lacking as to why he did not go to Dublin, but presumably his

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[35]Watt to Young, August 1866, Young papers, Church Archives.
[36]Watt to Young, 9 September 1865, Young papers, Church Archives.
[37]Watt to Young, 15 January 1854, Young papers, Church Archives.
[38]Watt to Young, 10 November 1866, Young papers, Church Archives.

brother-in-law was handling the case for him. From his letter in the *Millennial Star* it appears that he spent most of his time defending Mormonism among his sister's friends. In his last letter he declared the truthfulness of the restored gospel and bore a fervent testimony of it.[39] On 23 May 1867 Watt left for America. His short stay indicates that he did not obtain the estate. He was back in New York in July where he wrote Brigham Young, telling him about the possibility of obtaining a catalog of "Phonetic Fonts" from the Phonetic Institute of Cincinnati. He closed by saying, "I long to be by your side, and pray, if it can be so ordered in the Providence of God, that I may never leave it in time nor eternity."[40] Less than one year later George D. Watt left Brigham's office, never to return.

There were no visible signs of difficulty between Watt and the president that year. In November Watt wrote to Martha, his last wife, who was in Manti, informing her that the president had granted him permission to go after her.[41] He wrote again in April and then on 6 May wrote a letter from the tabernacle while he was reporting. He left the president's office on 15 May. In the next letter to Martha, dated 17 May, he said,

> I am now no man's servant. You are anxious to know why? I cannot tell you fully until I see you; I will say this much; the president had said he could not get rid of me, and that I was determined to stay there whether or not and make him pay me $5.00 a day; I immediately put on my hat and left, and I am now free from the toil and labor of pen work.[42]

Several years later, in reflecting on his sudden departure, Watt said that he had had only one thought and that was "to die in the harness for the triumph of truth and God's kingdom on earth. I was suddenly and unexpectedly *crushed,* by a public charge of meanness and sly robbery, by one against whose affirmation I had no appeal." There was only one man who could fit that description. Watt continued:

> I could only see my character as an honest man gone among my friends and brethren, my future to do good defeated, over thirty years of labor and struggle a blank, and branded as a scoundrel to the end of my life. I have since discovered that I might have taken a more reasonable view of the matter. But feeling outraged and abused, I was chagrined and insensed. I did not take time to reason.

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[39]*Millennial Star,* 29:284-85, 297-302, 315-17, 332-35, 427-30.
[40]Watt to Young, 9 July 1867, Young papers, Church Archives.
[41]Watt to Martha Watt, 28 November 1867, Watt papers, Brigham Young University.
[42]Watt to Martha Watt, 17 May 1867, Watt papers, Brigham Young University.

> But in strict accordance with my impulsive nature kicked over the bucket and spilled the milk.[43]

Watt's choice of words leads one to believe that the charge was over a financial matter. The clerks drew on the tithing store for their needs, and this was debited to their accounts in the trustee-in-trust ledgers. Their salary was credited to their accounts in the ledgers sporadically, which meant that the clerks sometimes had more debited to their accounts than credited. Sometimes the clerk would overdraw his allotted amount, and some of the clerks never did completely pay for their tithing store debts. Watt's account was credited in 1857 leaving him with no financial obligation, but because of his growing needs he acquired goods from the tithing store, thus accumulating a debt. He was paid again in December 1865, but his salary did not cover the $16,000 debited to his account. Other clerks had debts for amounts almost as much, but Watt probably had never concerned himself with what the others owed.[44] The profits from the publication of the *Journal of Discourses* had probably provided him with only a small sum which made him even more dependent on his salary at the office, but with his growing family the salary did not take care of his needs. Conceivably it was to erase his growing debt that Watt considered his claim to the Irish estate and as noted above asked Young's advice, for he said that he had been wrought upon by some spirit of late to do something about the land. The estate was worth £1,500. Earthly possessions meant little to him except to do good and roll on the kingdom of God, he said; but undoubtedly he had to be concerned with his growing indebtedness to the Church.[45] The sale or rent of the estate would make it possible for him to forget his financial problems and continue undisturbed in his calling. But the trip was financially a failure, and his debt was still not paid. It grew until it was over $20,000 in 1868. Presumably Watt was concerned with this debt, but he could do nothing to erase it unless he received more money for his services. He likely approached Brigham Young on the subject, an argument ensued, and Watt left the office; thereafter his pride would not let him return. Officially there was no mention of his departure, except a pencilled notation in the trustee-in-trust ledger stating, "On May 15, 1868, Geo. D. Watt left the office."[46]

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[43]Watt to John Taylor, 5 December 1878, Taylor papers, Church Archives.
[44]Trustee-in-Trust ledgers, 1857 to 1868, Church Archives.
[45]Watt to Young, 10 November 1866, Young papers, Church Archives
[46]Trustee-in-Trust ledgers, 1867-1869, Church Archives.

At first he stayed at home tending his small acreage in the avenues in Salt Lake City. He was especially concerned with his mulberry trees and his silkworms. He then went into the mercantile business with Robert Sleater and William Ajax.

While involved in this partnership, Watt was asked by Brigham Young to travel throughout Utah preaching sericulture. The raising of silkworms was part of President Young's plan for promoting Mormon self-sufficiency and the cooperative movement. Agriculture had always been Watt's avocation, and during the mid-1860s he had spent considerable time raising mulberry trees and silkworms, and spinning silk. Watt, however, was not the right man for this assignment. He was still bitter over the experience that led to his leaving the president's office, and his own business venture was bringing him into conflict with the cooperatives which he was supposed to advocate. In his talk at Wellsville he deprecated the cooperatives and even complained about the riches of Church leaders. He boasted of his own accomplishments in the raising of silkworms, and grumbled about Brigham Young's shortsightedness on the manufacture of silk.[47] Repercussions came quickly and at a meeting of the School of the Prophets Watt admitted his imprudence. Several of the brethren at the school complained about Watt's choice of words, but Brigham Young said that so long as a man's intentions were good his indiscretions could be overlooked.[48]

Watt's mercantile business did not flourish. He sold a variety of goods: ink, brushes, pails, hats, mirrors, and many other things. He specialized in coal oil and bought a considerable number of cooking stoves which the partners got for a reduced price.[49] According to family tradition, one day when the partners came to work there was a notice on their door advising people not to patronize the business because of its gentile business connection in Chicago. Although Watt never mentioned this in extant documents, it was a tactic used in other towns at the same time. Because of his outside pressure, the business failed.

It was some time after leaving the president's office that Watt became interested in the Godbeites, a schismatic LDS group. In October 1869, when a committee of the Twelve Apostles was sent to interview the leading Godbeites, they found him among the dis-

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[47]John King to Young, 25 March 1869; J. A. Leishman to Young, 1 April 1869, Young papers, Church Archives.

[48]Historian's Office Journal, 3 April 1869, Church Archives.

[49]Memo from S. H. Epperson and David Van Wagenen to Brigham Young, 3 June 1869, Young papers, Church Archives.

sidents. Judging them to be in darkness, the committee disfellowshipped the entire group, Watt included. Less than a week later these Godbeites were summoned to the School of the Prophets where all were restored to fellowship except William Godbe and E. L. T. Harrison.[50]

In December of that same year in a farewell speech at the Twentieth Ward, Watt reviewed the highlights of his spiritual career. He had been in the Church nearly thirty years, he said, and had received his sacred temple blessings in Nauvoo and again in Salt Lake City. Referring to the Godbeites, he said that some recent experiences had taught him a lasting lesson, and he desired to be faithful to Mormonism.[51]

Three months later he appeared before the School of the Prophets, and in a soul-searching confession admitted to having been "under the devil's harrow." He hoped that he would be humbled sufficiently to once again be of use to President Young. Watt blamed his waywardness on a stubborn disposition. His mixture of English and Scottish blood could not be driven, he said, but would respond to sympathy and kindness. "He hoped to hang on to the old ship Zion and endure to the end."[52]

Watt was struggling to stay in the faith. When his mercantile business failed, he decided to leave Salt Lake and move to his farm in Kaysville, but this decision proved detrimental to his spiritual well-being. It meant that he would leave his old friends who understood him and Salt Lake City which had a more tolerant intellectual climate, and journey to the small town of Kaysville where he would have to make new friends in the closeness of a provincial atmosphere. He had been tainted too much with the title Godbeite to be accepted there. It could have been different with an understanding bishop, but Christopher Layton, Watt's brother-in-law, prophesied that George D. Watt would apostatize from the Church.[53] Watt retreated to the sanctity of his home.

From Kaysville he wrote two letters to Brigham Young. In the first he criticized the cooperatives. In explaining his own deeds he said,

> I alone am responsible for my individual acts. I have not troubled you or any other person for counsel or advice touching the road I

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[50]Journal of Wilford Woodruff, 17 October 1869, 18 October 1869, 23 October 1869, Church Archives.

[51]Twentieth Ward Historical Record, 5 December 1869, Church Archives.

[52]School of the Prophets minutes, 26 March 1870, Church Archives.

[53]Watt to Young, 23 August 1871, Young papers, Church Archives.

have chosen to walk since I left your office, but of my own accord and free choice I set my mind upon a purpose, and my stupid head would not suffer me to retrace my steps, but on I went through mire and clay up to the eyes, asking no help from any man, bearing my own burdens, trusting in God alone for deliverance, and confessing all my folly and sins unto Him. It has been a hard road to travel, but I have found him a sure help in time of need, . . . I have been under the devils harrow now for two years. It has been my chief business to extricate myself, and have been of little use to the cause of truth, to myself, to you, to anybody else all this weary time. I hope and pray with the sad experience I have past through that I have got a little more balast to steady me, and that the latter part of my days may be spent more to the glory and honor of God than the former.[54]

In the next letter Watt complained about the teachers and especially Bishop Layton. "Espionage, or adversity only stiffens my neck, and sets me in defiance, while generous kindness and smiling friendship melts my soul into tears of gratitude and resolves of eternal affiance." In closing he said, "Brother Brigham I have for you the deepest respect, and sympathy. I have always held you to my heart as a very dear friend."[55]

Recognizing his need for spiritual help he received a patriarchal blessing from Church Patriarch John Smith less than a month later. Patriarch Smith told him that his life had been preserved, and that he needed to be prudent and seek to know the will of the Lord. He still had a work to perform, and his name would be held in honorable remembrance by his descendants. "And I say unto thee let thy faith fail not and thy days and years shall be prolonged until thou art satisfied with life."[56]

But he let his faith fail. He could not adjust to the provincial life, nor the farm life. Farming before had been an avocation, but now as his vocation it was too difficult. It was a dry farm and the soil depended on rain or snow for nourishment, and sometimes not enough came. At times his family had little to eat, and one winter three of his children died of flu. With his struggle against the elements and in just trying to survive he probably tired of the inward struggle, and by 1874, he was definitely a Godbeite. In April of that year the *Salt Lake Tribune* heralded the talk which was to be given by George D. Watt at the Liberal Institute on "Why I joined

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[54]Watt to Young, 27 July 1870, Young papers, Church Archives.

[55]Watt to Young, 23 August 1871, Young papers, Church Archives.

[56]Patriarchal blessing of John Smith to G. D. Watt, 17 September 1871, Church Archives.

the Mormon Church and why I left it."[57] In his speech he told of his early life, membership in the Mormon Church, his passage to the spiritualism which the Godbeites promulgated, and his disapproval of the Mormons' cooperative movement. The newspaper lamented that he had said nothing of his position as a reporter or the association with Church leaders.[58] Watt had gone too far, and on 3 May 1874, he was excommunicated.[59]

He now began a counter-struggle. Four times he made application to rejoin the Church but was denied. His beliefs differed greatly from those of the orthodox Mormon. He said he did not believe in a personal God, nor in a personal devil. He no longer accepted the scriptures as infallible guides. Man had not fallen but had steadily progressed. Of his own struggle he told John Taylor,

> My mind gradually lost its fixedness to the one purpose, and merged into a state of mobility. I have wandered over the arid and hopeless wastes of infidelity, and I have wrestled with the ghostly mirage and to me, unprofitable manifestations of modern spiritualism, I have rummaged among the dusty records resurrected from the filthy rags of mummied myths.

He had at last found comfort and spirituality in what he called "exact science." In concluding this lengthy epistle, he said,

> I have doubtless exhausted your patience. I have had to write what I have written to satisfy myself. I have opened to you my heart, and explained to you imperfectly my present faith; that if I am again permitted to enrole myself as a member of your church I may do so as an honest man, and not as a sneak and an embicile. If I cannot do this with the full confidence of yourself and your brethren that I will conduct myself discreetly and honorably, while I am enjoying the privileges and hopes engendered by such a position, I would rather remain as I am than be received with jealous distrust.[60]

His life extended only three years beyond the date of this letter, to 24 October 1881. The Salt Lake *Herald* in its obituary said that he was honest, truthful, and sincere, although perhaps misguided. "Being a self-made man of strong character, and exercising vast influence, there is not a little in his career which is remarkable."[61]

His last years in Kaysville with only his family at his side are tragic because it was his association with the Mormon Church and

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[57]*Salt Lake Tribune,* 12 April 1874.
[58]*Salt Lake Tribune,* 15 April 1874.
[59]*Deseret News,* 5 May 1874.
[60]Watt to Taylor, 5 December 1878, Taylor papers, Church Archives.
[61]Salt Lake *Herald,* 25 October 1881.

its leaders which had given his life so much meaning and made him influential. His family gave him great support, but his need for importance had been best filled by being at Brigham Young's side. His impulsiveness, pride, and even his need for approval proved detrimental to his spirituality, his psychological makeup, and his reputation among his contemporaries who forgot his great accomplishments.