

The Child is Father of the Man

Arthur H. King

The word "humble" is supposed to occur at this point. Mr. President, Sir; Professor Broadbent; Brothers and Sisters; my wife and I are deeply glad to be here this evening. I think principally because when we came to the U. S. A. we found affection. It seems to me as to so many other Europeans that affection is a great quality of the American people generally. It may be partly due to their immigrant origins, but it is to be noted; and the principal pleasure that we have on an occasion like this is that it is a demonstration of affection that we meet.

My thanks are due to the Faculty Lecture Committee; to the BYU Women, who have done a very great deal and very charmingly to make this a good occasion; to Dr. Foxley who pleased me greatly by playing some Purcell; to Dr. Woodward and the Chamber Choir, who succeeded in reminding me of what it was like to be at a formal banquet at Trinity College, Cambridge, when it is normal for the madrigal choir to sing from the Music Gallery; and to the Haydn String Quartet. To hear that particular movement of the Emperor Quartet was a great joy to me, because I had two semesters in Germany—one in Bonn in 1930 and one in Marburg in 1935—and Germany is one of the four countries that hold primacy in my heart. To hear the tune of the German national anthem in that way is to hear Germany at its very best; and I am convinced that no country has made such a contribution to music and letters since the eighteenth century as Germany has, going through the greatest suffering and producing the greatest art. My thanks are also due to the delightful way in which we were welcomed (when we left the Wilkinson Center to come here) by Dr. Longhurst's chimes on the carillon. That, too, was a very charming thing for me to hear; because we have a great many bells in England, and you seem to have fewer, and these are one of the things I miss. I would have thought that in a non-Puritanical church (and this is preeminently a non-Puritanical church—otherwise there could be no doctrine of

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spiritbody forming soul)—in this Mormon Church above all, I don't see why the Puritan tradition of hating bells should continue.

And now to turn to my *theme*. I have a text and I am going to read it in the New English Bible version; because it will be a little fresher to us in that, and we know it well, for there it is in Philippians and there it is also in our Articles of Faith, and it runs as follows:

All that is true, all that is noble, all that is just and pure, all that is lovable and gracious, whatever is excellent and admirable, fill all your thoughts with these things. (Philippians 4:8)

And I would make an addendum to that text from a different source—from the poet, W. B. Yeats—which may become clearer when we come to the end: "In dreams begins responsibility."¹ Quite other than some post-Freudians think.

I've taken the *title* of my talk from a short poem that Wordsworth wrote on 26 March 1802, when we were about to leap again into the war with Napoleon.

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die!
The child is father of the man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

He does not mean by that the piety of the natural man who is an enemy to God: man is "naturally" supernatural. Now on that poem of Wordsworth's a comment of an unknown late nineteenth century author which in the amusedly obtuse acuity of its wit is worth quoting:

"The child is father of the man."
How can he be? The words are wild.
The man is father of the child!

Now I want you to take something of a biographical journey with me. (Robert Thomas reminded me that as I was so close now to my anecdotage, I might permit myself some stories.) What I am going to try to do is to go back to my childhood and show how certain major themes ran through my life as the result of the literature I read. It seemed to me that that was a better way of making clear to you the value of literature in one's life than to pontificate in abstracts. I am

¹William Butler Yeats, *Responsibilities* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), epigraph.

thinking first of all of voices that come from before my continued recollection and before I learned to read. I can still hear the voice of my father reading the scriptures. (Incidentally, what is to stop Mormons from getting up every morning at the same time as the earliest person in the family and having scripture reading at breakfast all together, aloud? Some people in my stake are now doing that. That is to be remembered as a possibility.) Anyway, there is my father's voice echoing from the distant caverns of memory, and it will echo right through my life (although he was killed when I was nine years old), reading—I think perhaps the first thing I can remember is the calling of Samuel. That is a passage greatly to impress a quite small child. Reading about the voyages and the shipwreck of Paul, reading the parable of the prodigal son. I can hear my mother's voice and my grandmother's voice reading to me (not my grandfather's—he preferred to be read to; but my grandfather I shall never forget because he used to say, "Boy, get all the education you can; but remember, never get it for anything else than its own sake. Don't get it for success in life. Get it for its own sake." And he was a very poor man. I never forgot what he said.)—But these voices: *Hiawatha*. I can remember my father reading me to sleep (obviously) with *Hiawatha* at the age of five; and that rhythm stuck in my mind until I broke it on my own with *Evangeline*, and then began at the age of twelve to write hexameters, trying to imitate Longfellow, because that was (oddly enough) the first passage of nature poetry I came across.

Now I have an important point to make, and I would ask you all to search your own souls about this: how far does your continued recollection and sense of continuity with yourself go back? Mine goes back to the age of six: I very much doubt whether I've advanced from that age, I still feel fundamentally to be that boy of six. And I have continuity with him, and I remember his life, and I remember his thoughts. And if I ask myself why, the answer is because it was then that I had learned to read and was reading, and that has been a continuity in my life ever since—reading has helped to bind my life together with bonds of "natural piety." I learned to read then, and then of course as soon as I had learned to read—in my generation the obvious way of amusing oneself was to read—I read and read. I have filled every vacant moment of my life ever since with reading. I haven't got a book with me in this side pocket tonight, because this suit is a little small for me since I have put on ten pounds recently; but otherwise it would have been in that pocket.

Even though I had learned to read, my family continued to read to me for many years. My father, as I said, thought that *Hiawatha* was appropriate, followed by *Tales of a Wayside Inn*. Practically all the Quaker sect learnt "Robert of Sicily, Brother of Pope Urbane and Valmond Emperor of Allemain." (Probably no child learns that nowadays.) And then we progressed. My father bought me the *Jungle Book* for my sixth birthday present, and he bought me *Alice in Wonderland* for my seventh birthday present, and he bought me *Alice Through the Looking Glass* for my eighth birthday present, and all of these were carefully read to myself and my younger sister and are a permanent part of our literary lives.

But the two turning points that I want to come to were a little later than that. The first was when I was eight years old. It was a bad winter: it was the winter of the flu of which twenty-one million people died in 1918-19. My father was sitting downstairs with a temperature of 104. My mother was giving birth to my younger brother upstairs. The total area of each small room down below—there were two—was ten by ten. There was an earth kitchen at the back where the rats ran, and I had a little cubbyhole by a window (a small window in this ten foot by ten foot room just to the right-hand side) which looked out on the farm and the fields. This house was afterwards known as Holly Cottage; not at that time—it wasn't worthy of a name at that time—at least we never thought of giving it one. And now my sister and her husband have retired to a Norfolk cottage called *Holly House*², about the field behind which I have written, for this lecture of mine, the following poem:

The Field Behind Holly House

Right at the end, I mean to see that field:
fifty-five hundred miles as crows make wing³
steady, deliberate, straight to their own end.
At any time of year now I am old,
that field I aim to scan: wheat-blades in spring
sprouting to blackbird whistles; grain-stalks' bend
under the claw, as small birds thin the yield
in swarms and swoops of avid pilfering;
the stubble trampled into mud; the brand
of hoar frost on the furrow—a cultured wild,
not the Grand Canyon, or too tame to sing.
The kind of scene to give one peace of mind?

²Burston, Norfolk, England.

³Macbeth, 3. 2. 50-51.

At the south end, one oak takes pride to be
isolate in the hedge, tawny in Fall
and April, ilex-green in August, bare
by my years' time, a sturdy, skeleton tree
that shows its stripped form best at the annual lull,
yet sleeps indifferent to my aging stare.
At the north end, the house end, in its lee,
grows from the ditch a crippled bush for all
titmice—blue, great, cole, marsh—and more that dare
a forage-base for suet or nut. I see
those many miles away the flick of a tail,
flirt of a wing, head's quirk, there—here—here—there.

The black cat through a tunnel of gold or green,
or slinking round the selion hugs his way,
following smaller bodies rarely seen
that save their lives or give them up as prey.
The stoat and weasel similarly pass
from east to west through oats, lucern, or grass,
from west to east. The cycle day by day
by month by season, the will be and has been—
present: right now I mean that field to stay
in all its times, as I in mine, one scene
in every scene, the field that is and was
my eyes and ears, my equal gain and loss.

This field's the one that Judas' crime lays waste;⁴
where Faust despairs,⁵ and the Old Guard goes west;⁶
where Hector runs to kill or shed his blood;
where "country folk would lie,"⁷ but the adder stings;
the field of folk where Lehi,⁸ Langland,⁹ brood;
the field by Mamre,¹⁰ where all Israel clings.
The dark frown conjures, but the white brow sings: —
The soul has found a cross-tree in the wood.
The Lord of Easter, roused by morning's wings,
has risen, and here I stand as Magdalen¹¹ stood.
My days now one to me from first to last
I watch for sleep and wake my future's present past.

Anyway, there I sat that autumn and winter (sometimes with a candle
and sometimes with a lamp) and read practically the whole of Dickens;

⁴Matthew 27:3-10.

⁵*Faust*, Part I, last scene but two.

⁶Waterloo.

⁷*As You Like It*, 5. 3. 23

⁸1 Nephi 8:9

⁹*Piers Plowman*, Prologue, 17-109.

¹⁰Genesis 23:19; 49:29-31; 50:25

¹¹Pronounced "Maudlin."

because at last I had got hold of myself and I realized how much I was getting out of reading. My father's library was not extensive, only about a hundred books; but they were there. Some of them were trash. I read them too, but I have forgotten all about them, except Marie Corelli's dreadful book (*The Mighty Atom*) about a boy of nine who hanged himself, but I did not take that example—the book was in too bad taste. I read through most of Dickens; I suppose that was my first introduction to real literature, and I think you know that Dickens can get across to quite young children.

Now I'm going to talk about things which arose from my reading of Dickens and ran through my life. And I am going to talk about four main themes which I can denominate a) class, b) death, c) love, and d) creation. And I'll begin now by talking about what Dickens opened up to me about *class*. I think at the age that I read Dickens, although we were extremely poor and my father was a farm laborer at that time, I had no previous idea of class at all. But I read *David Copperfield* and there are several very distressing class events in that. There is the one in which Mr. Mell at Salem House School is dismissed because he has a mother in a poorhouse. And there is David's own shame reflecting Dickens' shame at going to the factory as an eight- to nine-year-old. And then above all there is that superb study of class self-consciousness and class aspiration which is represented by *Great Expectations*, when Pip, the small boy who is brought up by his blacksmith brother-in-law (who is a true Christian) inherits money from a convict (although he doesn't know it); and how the boy's whole sense of values is turned upside down so that he falls in love with a girl—actually also the daughter of the convict though they don't know it—who he thought belonged to a higher class; and how he at last through illness and deprivation and despair comes to realize the value of that blacksmith brother-in-law of his and returns to sensible views on class. This class position of David Copperfield at his lowest and this class position of Pip appealed to me in my position, and I remember making up my mind that I never would do what Pip did—and indeed what David did—and I have not. I was born a lower middle-class boy and I have been a lower middle-class boy and man all my life. I have never sought affected or precious intellectual company. I've occasionally grazed it, but I managed by degrees to develop a healthy contempt for it. The amount of affectation in the world cannot readily be comprehended by someone who has spent most of his life in this valley; but I assure you it is tremendous and appalling, and that is why I wish you would give up

one little piece of affectation that so many of you seem to have, and that is that use of the word "wonderful." Now, this business of class is a serious business still in Britain, and I suppose it also exists here. I feel it when I'm introduced as "Mr." in Salt Lake instead of being introduced as "brother." This doesn't normally happen in Provo, but in Salt Lake it does happen. Even if I'm being introduced to another member of the Church by a member of the Church, it happens occasionally; and it distresses me. I wonder what its significance is. Some of you may remember the very sharp speech that Sister Sharp made down here—was it a year and a half ago?—on this subject of being too proud of one's family or whatever, because after all it is oneself that is in question.¹²

Class, then, is something which in Britain has produced a great deal of affectation over the generations; and it may partly do that here, too. You see, we have been very clever in Britain in taking the more able people in the lower class and bringing them up through into the higher classes so that they shan't be a nuisance. We have deprived our lower classes of their natural leaders. I believe you may be doing this, too. It is essential that there should be intellectual, highly intelligent men among the working classes to help lead them. One of the major reasons why we have such trouble with trades unions nowadays is that we have advanced the natural leaders of the working class into other positions in society where they are no longer interested, where they have no kind of feeling together with the working class any longer.

Following on from my Dickens—when I was fifteen years old I came across Karl Marx's *Manifesto* (1848), and what struck me there is something that again has never left me, because it seemed (and still seems) to me an absolute gospel principle embedded in the middle of that hateful tract: "As long as there is a lower class, I am of it." But in my life I have interpreted that in a deeper way I feel than Marx himself did. As Eliot says, following the mystic tradition, "The way down is the way up." That's why I am troubled and puzzled by the American doctrine of success, because it is so diametrically opposed to my own feelings on the subject. Apart from anything else, if we are ambitious, if we are optimistic, then we are so often disappointed. But if we are not optimistic—if we don't expect anything and we get something—gratitude becomes the main point in our life; and I assure you that gratitude has been the major emotion of my whole life until this very

¹²Marianne Clark Sharp, "Ninety-ninth Annual Commencement Address," Brigham Young University, 16 August 1974.

moment (a moment which I can hardly believe). Gratitude is a fundamental gospel principle. Gratitude is what we have to feel: we have to give it back to the Lord in all things, and that is what gratitude means. We had two German Shepherds. When I brought them back from Pakistan, it was a hot summer. We had to put them in quarantine. They were allowed their runs. At the beginning of their six months in quarantine, they thought that all wasps were flies. At the end of that six months, they thought all flies were wasps.

The reward of optimism is pessimism: the right thing to do is not to think of our future in terms of either optimism or pessimism—preferably from the gospel point of view not think of it at all—because if we think of our future, how can we have our quality in the present? There is no future, there is no past—they don't exist. Only the present exists, and if we are not living now (all of you—those of you who may be inclined to be asleep at the moment), we are not living at any other time—we are not living. That is one of the essential gospel principles, together with gratitude. And I seem to have learned that early, because I had no ambitions. I was born extremely poor; but I had no ambitions, and I was surprised every time something good happened to me. And I continue to be so. One of the most surprising things of all was to be told I was going to give this lecture; and that itself might have been a less than pleasant surprise, but it turned out to be a very pleasant one—at least for me. What one doesn't expect may prove to be a source of gratitude. I say these things at some length because it seems to me that having been brought to the U. S. A. as a kind of missionary in reverse, I had better perform that role by sometimes saying things which seem contrary to the doctrine of success espoused in this country.

Anyway—going down is the thing. "As long as there is a lower class I am of it," but "the lower class" goes deep. It's not simply the working class, it's all oppressed creatures: women, children, animals. I felt this in the dying eye of the deer, and the fish desperately flapping at the bottom of the boat. And going down in this way, one finds oneself like Milton in *Lycidas* at "the bottom of the monstrous world"—far more monstrous than that ridiculous effusion, *Jaws*. And it is at the bottom of the monstrous world that we meet death.

Death seems at least to get rid of class distinctions. I met death in Dickens. It made more impression on me than anything else in Dickens. The death of Little Nell, the death of Paul Dombey, the death of Barkis in *Copperfield*, the death above all of Dora. I remember reading that the winter of 1918-1919. I don't think I have ever got over it. I certainly mourned in an access of grief for several months at the

time. And yet, you know, when I read Dickens again before I gave this talk, I found and remembered a death, which impressed me more than all those deaths, and that was the death of Jo in *Bleak House*. Jo was a boy with no home, not even in the slums. No parents, no nobody. There were tens of thousands of his kind when Dickens was alive, in your country as well as mine. Jo, as he cannot fail to do, dies. A good young doctor is looking after him. He has made some friends, and I am going to read the account of his very brief death, because it brings together what I said about class and about death; which are deeply linked, you know, because a class society is a society dead to the gospel.

“—It’s turned wery dark, sir. Is there any light a comin’?”

“It is coming fast, Jo. . . Jo, my poor fellow!”

“I hear you, sir, in the dark, but I’m a gropin’—a gropin’— let me catch hold of your hand.”

“Jo, can you say what I say?”

“I’ll say anythink as you say, sir, for I knows it’s good.”

“OUR FATHER.”

“OUR FATHER!—yes, that’s wery good, sir.”

“WHICH ART IN HEAVEN.”

“Art in Heaven—is the light a comin’, sir?”

“It is close at hand. HALLOWED BE THY NAME!”

“Hallowed be—thy—”

“The light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead!”¹³

I give you a testimony of death. I think it is terrible that people no longer die in their own families, but die in hospitals. I can understand all the reasons for it, but I still think it is terrible. One third of the children who were born in the nineteenth century also died as children: died in their families, died at home, with others at their bedside.

My father was killed when I was nine, under a bus. The last thing he said in his life was, “Get me out of here.” The policeman came and knocked on the door, and I remember the heavy knock and wondering what was there. And yet, even at the age of nine, I felt as I did my boots up to go to school—as I tried to go to school—that morning, how much I loved him and how much he loved me and how his death made that

¹³Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1953), p. 439.

clear—much more clear than anything else could make it. I lost my small brother in pneumonia a year and a half later, and I can still remember his little leaden face before they put him in the coffin. I had good reason to remember him fifteen years later, when my own only son died at the age of one week, at 4:00 A.M. on Easter morning. And I remember then the same feeling as I had had about my father, and that was gratitude—I was grateful for that week. My late wife died after four years' struggle with cancer. I can still remember how she felt when her lips were already cold and her forehead still warm. Then the death of my mother at the ripe age of eighty; but she had been senile for the last two weeks, and she died with a curious smile on her face which, of course, in my objective way, I knew was a question of the relaxation of muscles—no more. But these things always take on significance. At each of these deaths, I felt love and gratitude, and I wonder how many of us sufficiently feel how profoundly grateful we should be to death for the way it intensifies our lives as nothing else could do. And how we need to prepare children for death, as Dickens' deaths prepared me to take as I should the deaths that came to me. Going back to Dickens after those many years, after fifty-six years (I had read him incidentally in between but never read him *en bloque* like that), I realized that he is a great writer of the gospel, and we do ill in our Church to ignore him. He has the quality that Tolstoy found in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*: above all, the quality of human sympathy, which is of supreme importance in writing. Those who hate mankind may express themselves well on the surface, but they have nothing to do with the gospel.

One more point about death—a very different point—which is what happens when you live in a world that doesn't understand or realize death. I'm transported to the walls of Troy, and there is Helen on the walls, and she is looking at the Greeks assembling. And as she looks round, she doesn't see her brothers, Castor and Pollux, and she says, "I wonder where they are. Why are they not here?" And then she has a purely egocentric and (for Helen) characteristic thought. She thinks, "I suppose they are not here because they are ashamed of me." And then Homer produces two wonderful lines: "But they were already lying under their own country's earth, in their dear Lacedaemon" (Homer, *Iliad*, 3.236-44). Those who are egocentric have no understanding of death, have no comprehension of how it is always round the corner and one of the things which we have to take into account throughout our lives if our lives are to be of quality.

Now I said that what I was going to do was to move through four subjects, and this is the time where I come to the most important one

that I have to talk about; because, as I have tried to show you, the experience of death is perhaps the greatest experience of *love* that we can have in this world. And therefore it is natural that out of the depths of death I should rise to this. Children learn love of various kinds earlier than most parents realize. I fell in love with a little girl—I remember intensely—at the age of six. It didn't surprise me, therefore, to find that Dante first met Beatrice when he was nine and she was nine, too. I fell in love with a little girl at that age. It lasted about a year. And then I met a girl at the place where we went down to spend our holidays. I met her only a few times for three weeks each year, but I thought of no one else in the interim: the age of twelve, age of thirteen, age of fourteen, and then at the age of fifteen I saw her one evening, the first evening I had got down there. And that was, I suppose, one of the major climaxes of my life. I shall never forget it. I moved away from that few moments of meeting so full of feeling that I did not know what to do with it. Luckily I was alone, and I rushed off to the woods. I shouted and sang up and down those woods, because what I had discovered for the first time was something I suppose that I didn't know was the priesthood and the power of the priesthood until I had got into this Church. But as it was it was just, as it were, streaming wasted through me. It was an exaltation of a kind which can rarely come later in life. It was an exaltation which began my true intellectual life, because that summer I started to read intensively the higher things. I was, luckily, reading *As You Like It* at that time and the wonderful interplay between Rosalind and Orlando. And, at the same time—I'll have to come back to this experience and say more about it in my last section—but in the meantime, do remember how old you were when you were as old as your own children, because so many people underestimate all the time and have no idea of how mature their children are. They forget how mature they were themselves, and this causes difficulty and damage. Well, that ecstasy remained with me for about three years. This experience of love that I then gained, I gained in life first before I gained it in books. But then, when I came to it, I knew what Act II, Scene 2, of *Romeo and Juliet* was all about, and it remains to me today one of the greatest lyrical sweeps of the human spirit—the balcony scene between Romeo and Juliet. It never palls. It has an extraordinary strength and flow and sweetness. It is the greatest expression of young love that has ever been. Lust cannot be seen anywhere near it: it has nothing to do with lust.

And there were many other experiences, like the wonderful experience of Florizel and Perdita in *Winter's Tale* of which I have no

time to tell you. And so it went on through my life until I was reading Dante, Goethe, and others who have had that feeling. But what is that feeling? That's the point. It seems to me that the onset of sexual love so-called, and I think we should call it so even in its highest reaches, nevertheless is the onset of a deeper appreciation, if it happens rightly to one, of all love. And it is one of my greatest convictions that all love is a reflection of the Divine love, no matter how twisted and perturbed it may be: it is some kind of reflection of the Divine love, and all love is ultimately the same in that sense. Curious that Freud should think so, from a rather lowly point of view. But it remains true in the higher point of view. It is the love of God, and we are lucky to have that kind of genitive in English, because it means the love we have for God and the love that God has for us. And it is the love of parents for children and children for parents, and brothers and sisters and husband and wife—it is this love. It is the one love, ultimately. I am not one who believes in the separateness of Agape and Eros. I am one who believes that only in the Eastern Mediterranean (which was bored stiff with its physical experience) was such a division possible. But for us in the Mormon Church who believe in the oneness of spirit and body in soul, there is one love and it is Divine love in all its forms.

I am going to read to you what I think to be the greatest passage in all literature. It is the reconciliation scene between Cordelia and Lear, and it is one of the demonstrations of how profoundly Christian Shakespeare is. Nothing matters in this play after that. Does it matter really that Cordelia was hanged and that Lear dies? This is the reconciliation. This is a human image of the atonement. In many respects I think our human love is an image of the atonement in that way.

CORDELIA

How does my royal lord? How fares your majesty?

LEAR

You do me wrong to take me out o' th' grave:
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.

CORDELIA

Sir, do you know me?

LEAR

You are a spirit, I know. Where did you die?
.....

to him are these: "*Guarda mi ben. Ben son, ben son Beatrice*"—untranslatable because of those three "ben." "Look well at me, I am, I am Beatrice." Cordelia: "And so I am, I am." The simple repetition of love.

But for us Mormons, love is not just an ecstasy, not just an intense feeling. It's a driving force. It's something that carries us through our life of joyful duty. And here is another passage from Dickens which I loved when I was a child, which helped me to understand because if there was a Christian marriage it was that between Arthur Clennam and Little Dorrit at the end of that novel; and indeed Dickens says that the light shone through the image of the Savior in the stained glass window upon them as they stood there at the altar. The passage is practical, but it is profound and has all this feeling behind it. They finish signing the register and go out of the church. This is the end of the novel:

They all gave place when the signing was done, and Little Dorrit and her husband walked out of the church alone. They paused for a moment on the steps of the portico, looking at the fresh perspective of the street in the autumn morning sun's bright rays, and then went down.

Went down into the modest life of usefulness and happiness. Went down to give a mother's care, in the fulness of time, to Fanny's neglected children no less than to their own, and to leave that lady going into Society for ever and a day. Went down to give a tender nurse and friend to Tip for some few years, who was never vexed by the great exactions he made of her, in return for the riches he might have given her if he had ever had them, and who lovingly closed his eyes upon the Marshalsea and all its blighted fruits. They went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar.¹⁴

I come to my final section. This is the most difficult section, but it is a section which subsumes all the rest, and that is the sense of *creation*: the sense of God's creation, the sense of our being created as artists, as fathers and mothers. One morning in April, 1916, my father put me on the back of his bike where I had a little seat and said, "Off we go." And then he turned in the wrong direction, for I thought he was taking me down to Quakers' meeting. It was a Sunday. "No," he said, "We are going somewhere else today." And we rode for about eight miles, and we stopped at a wood. (It is now a housing estate. I went to

¹⁴Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 826.

see it—took my wife there—there was nothing to show her.) We went into the wood; and there, suddenly, was a great pool of bluebells stretching for perhaps a hundred yards in the shade of the oak trees. And I could scarcely breathe because the impression was so great. Then it was just the bluebells and the scent. Now it is the recollection of the love of my father who chose to do that that morning—to give me that experience. I'm sure he had been there the day before, found it and thought, "I'll take my son there." As we rode there, and as we rode back, we heard the distant thunder of the guns at the Battle of the Somme, where thousands every day were dying. That overwhelming experience of a natural phenomenon, a demonstration of beneficent creation at the same time as one could hear those guns on the Somme, has remained with me almost more clearly than anything else in my life. And again it was an experience that I had before I met it in literature, but when I did meet it in literature, I knew it—I recognized it. I knew what Wordsworth was writing about, and Wordsworth is a good step to greater men. I often think it's better to read Wordsworth in the original, for example, than Goethe in translation because they have so very similar a message for so much of them, except of course that Wordsworth is so much narrower. Those of you who have not read the *Prelude* by Wordsworth, which is the greatest autobiographical poem there is, should do so. I've no time now to go through the landscapes of that. I've no time to discuss in any kind of detail what landscape is about because, obviously, landscape is not just about itself. It's "a type and symbol of eternity," as Wordsworth called it. Those of you who don't know it might do well to look at a passage of the *Prelude* which was written separately and is often printed separately in anthologies and is easy to find. It is an account of how Wordsworth and his companion (this was back in 1792) were walking across the Alps. They were looking forward to the tremendous experience (they were Romantics, you know) of crossing the Alps. And alas as they were walking along the road, they met a Swiss and they asked him where they were. And to their disappointment they discovered that they had crossed the Alps without even knowing it. And so in a state of great disappointment they continued. But then comes the greatest passage in all of Wordsworth to describe it:

[DEFILE OF GONDO.]

The brook and road
Were fellow travellers in this gloomy strait,
And with them did we journey several hours

At a slow pace. The immeasurable height
 Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
 The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
 And in the narrow rent at every turn
 Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
 The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
 The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
 Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
 As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
 And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
 The unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens,
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light—
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features
 Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;
 Characters of the great Apocalypse,
 The types and symbols of Eternity,
 Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.

(621-640)

Those of you who ever feel any doubt about Joseph Smith, knowing that he spent so long getting right that account of the vision of the Father and the Son, would do well to remember that Wordsworth produced a perfunctory account of his experience in his *Descriptive Sketches* of 1792. Thirteen years later he had his experience ready. He didn't know what it was until then. It took him those years. It took Joseph Smith about eight. The greatest experiences of our lives may not be clear to us, even in their most important significance, when they first happen to us. They are there for us to keep and treasure and observe and watch and know and live with. I firmly believe that as I walk through my life, I live with all my years coming along with me. They are there and there and there; it must happen to you too, but the point is it is important. In a moment of leisure, in a moment of meditation, you are there or there or there. There may be twenty or thirty or forty or fifty years in between; for me it's sixty years sometimes now. But it's still there—the whole of life traveling forward with you. Not only do we come here trailing clouds of glory, we don't lose them. I know Wordsworth was disappointed, but he made a rather formal marriage, and after that he seemed to have had no particular inspiration left except very occasionally. But you know these clouds of glory are there the whole time. They are there for the whole of our lives. The longer we live, the greater the trail if we remember and if we remember in the right way.

I could go on to talk about the greatest of writers and to suggest that that is what we do well to be accompanied by—the greatest of

writers. There is no time for inferior writing. There is no time indeed for grumbling about how bad literature is when what we are basing the grumbling on is bad literature. The great thing about great literature is that the greater it is, the greater the scriptures are to us, as a result of reading it. Why? Because the scriptures are even greater. We have a different sense of dimension when we know great literature and its part in our lives. Where *Lear* ends, *Job* begins. Where *Lear* ends, the *Prodigal Son* begins; and so on. Our testimony of the scriptures, our sensitivity to the scriptures is inordinately assisted by our experience with the greatest literature, and I mean the greatest literature. No one can find that great literature is contrary to the gospel. When I say great literature, I mean Homer, I mean Vergil, I mean Dante, I mean Shakespeare, I mean Goethe;¹⁵ and Goethe was a bit doubtful still when I was a boy. It takes a long time for this to grow. Now I am convinced of Goethe. Eliot, too, spent a lifetime before being convinced of Goethe, and I think his conviction was formal. Mine, I assure you, was genuine. The whole of our literature in Europe and the United States and anywhere else in the West since Goethe is Goethe's aftermath, just as the whole of Greek literature was Homer's aftermath, and the whole of the great period of English literature was Shakespeare's aftermath, and Italian literature is still Dante's aftermath. We can't expect (publishers would like to see it every week) great literature more than once every few hundred years at its greatest height. And what's the good of reading modern trash when we've left Goethe and Shakespeare and Dante and Homer and Vergil unread? And I assure you that even in translation they are greater than the other things. That's all I have time to say—my testimony of the value and place of great literature. Now, don't get me wrong, even the greatest of literature doesn't always tell the truth. Only the scripture always tells the truth. Only the scripture is inspired in that way; but unless you are familiar with great literature, you are missing something—missing something that could help the gospel, can help your own soul and can help you realize: what? What I said just now and will repeat: how great, how ineffably great the scriptures are.

Now there are two main aspects of this creative process. One is its intensity. When I rushed out into the wood at that time after meeting that girl again at the age of fifteen, that evening I had as full an apprehension of the intensity of the creative force of the universe and of the feeling of gratitude as I could have. "This is in me! Astonishing,

¹⁵There are, of course, other great writers. These are meant to represent the best, the reading of whom leads us to a greater understanding of the scriptures.

it's in me!" It's something to live up to. I wonder how I should have felt then had I known that I held the priesthood in the true Church. My mother always said she wanted me to be a priest. I didn't quite see how that was going to be fulfilled, but it was fulfilled. One *is* that intenseness, but it's extraordinarily difficult to feel intenseness from outside. But what can be felt is what sometimes comes to us as another aspect of the universe—not simply the intense activity down to the least particle of it, but its peace—the vast sabbath of the universe. In his greatest lyric poem, which may well be the greatest short lyric poem ever written, a few lines indeed, Goethe has seized that. I've been playing around for three months trying to get these few lines right in English, and of course I haven't succeeded. I suppose I've got about a hundred versions. But I will first of all read you this, and then I will read you the original German because I think you will get something of the music of it even from me. Let me first then give you the translation so that you know more or less what it's about and then I'll give you the German.

Mountain and evening sky
Make peace.
Light airs in the high
Branches ease,
Breathe, and are through.
No birds now sing for the solemn wood.
Patience: soon you should
Be at peace, too.

*Ueber allen Gipfeln
Ist Ruh.
In allen Wipfeln
Spuerest Du
Kaum einen Hauch.
Die Voegelein schweigen im Walde.
Warte nur: balde
Ruhest Du auch.*

The peace of death, the peace of love, the peace of the most intense activity of creation, are all aspects of the peace of God which passeth understanding.

We are Mormons: I've already allowed the practical to intervene at the end of *Little Dorrit* and I will allow the practical to intervene again. This time for you to take away something to help sensitivity and to help observation. There are other elements I could have explored and haven't had time for. I'll just mention a couple and then we will finish. First, is the whole question of morality. I have never been in

doubt at any time of my life that morality is a prime function of literature. Literature is there to teach. How it teaches is another matter. It may be thought of as teaching through sweetness. But unless a great writer is a teacher, he is not a great writer. And the moral issue is clear, and the moral issue to us in this Church is clear. Very often bad men have good moments. Very often bad men have aspirations. Very often bad men are struggling not to be bad, and in these cases they may well produce great work. I have no brief for Michelangelo's private life, but I say that when he was painting the Sistine ceiling—when he knew that Eve had a spirit body and painted it—he was under some kind of inspiration. We have to remember that, but we have to remember also that there are great writers who have managed to maintain a high level through a great deal of their lives. There is a lot of gossip about Shakespeare, but we really know very little about Shakespeare's private life. We know he didn't like drinking—hated it. I've only time just to mention that to you, but it is a profound conviction of mine and I will assert it and I will defend it at any point. People talk to me about great writers and they are not talking about great writers. They are thinking of Oscar Wilde as "great." Every epigram of Oscar Wilde's contains self-love, and when he tried to write a serious poem he spoiled himself very badly, and that *Ballad of Reading Gaol* is a disgraceful piece of self-pity, because that is one of the great characteristics of bad men: self-pity. And self-pity is the dominant feeling of most modern literature in most countries: try it out in Faulkner, try it out in Hemingway—self-pity. Watch out for self-pity. Anybody who expresses self-pity to any considerable extent in his work is suspect. What is a self to have a pity about? But that's another problem.

The other thing I want to remind you of is a great protection and defense to us in this dreadful situation in which we are constantly being pushed to be of the world and are nevertheless struggling to remain only in the world without being of it. That is irony. Look for irony in the scriptures. It is there. It is there in the Old Testament, it is there in the New Testament, it is constantly there in Christ's dealings with the Pharisees. It is superbly there in the account of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. You look at those two missives that Joab sends to David. You look at the first verse of chapter 11 and then look at the last four verses of chapter 12, and then look at the last verse of chapter 17. By juxtaposition—irony. By silence—irony. Learn to look. Learn to see what is not said because it is being said more effectively because it is not said.

Here are two quotations about drink. One is from the *Journal of John Woolman*. One is from *Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography*.

. . . I perceived that many white people do often sell rum to the Indians, which, I believe, is a great evil, First they being thereby deprived of the use of their Reason and their spirits violently Agitated, quarrels often arise which ends in mischief, and the bitterness and resentments Ocasioned hereby are frequently of long continuance: again their Skins and furs gotten through much fatigue & hard travels in hunting, with which they intended to buy cloathing, [these] when they begin to be Intoxicated they often Sell at a low rate for more rum, and afterward when they suffer for want of the necessaries of life, are angry with those who for the Sake of gain took the advantage of their weakness; of this their Chiefs have often complained at their Treaties with the English.

Where cunning people pass Counterfeits and impose that on others which is only good for nothing, it is considered as a wickedness, but to sell that to people which we know does them harm, and which often works their Ruin, for the sake of gain manifests a hardened and Corrupt heart; and it is an evil which demands the care of all True lovers of Virtue [in endeavouring] to Supress. . . .¹⁶

(John Woolman)

. . . if it be the design of Providence to extirpate these savages in order to make room for cultivators of the earth, it seems not improbable that rum may be the appointed means.¹⁷

(Benjamin Franklin)

I ask your attention to these two books, both of which are among the most important books in American literature. Most of you have probably read the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. Do yourselves now the credit of doing something which is immensely more to the sympathy of Mormons and that is the *Journal of John Woolman*, who sought the Spirit daily and hourly in order to make sure that he got the message of the Spirit and not another message; who was never clever, who was never anything but himself, and was himself because he never thought about himself from the beginning of his life to the end. It was he who really started the American Emancipation movement by gradually throughout his life persuading the Quakers first to stop trading in slaves and then to stop buying them, and finally to stop

¹⁶John Woolman, *A Journal of the Life, Gospel Labors, and Christian Experiences of that Faithful Minister of Jesus Christ, John Woolman* (New York: Collins, Brother, & Co., 1854), p. 104.

¹⁷Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Random House, 1944), p. 137.

having them and releasing those they had. A humble man to be classed with Thomas à Kempis and Dame Juliana of Norwich: they all three wrote with great limpidity.

My final message to you is perhaps an enlightening message, and I hope never again shall we have Polonius quoted at general conference or anywhere else. Polonius was a wicked old man and is so presented to us. He was a coarse and vulgar old man. He was capable of saying to the king, "I'll loose my daughter to him"—meaning, using the image of loosing a sow to the boar or a mare to the stallion. That is the coarse image that it is: that he would loose her to Hamlet so that they could get some knowledge of what was in his mind. The only good thing about Polonius is his poor daughter's grief at his death. Now let's take a look at this "famous" speech of Polonius':

. . . Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportioned thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.
Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel,
But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
Of each new-hatched unfledged comrade. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel, but being in,
Bear't that the opposed may beware of thee.
Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice.
Take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgment.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy—rich, not gaudy.
For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
And they in France of the best rank and station
Are of a most select and generous chief in that.
Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For loan oft loses both itself and friend
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
This above all: To thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

(Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1. 3. 59-80)

The sentiments of that speech, perfunctory as they are, given on a comic occasion when Laertes is trying to get away to the ship (he has already had a farewell speech with his father and now all this is being added unto him)—are directly opposed to the sense that Shakespeare has of the generous man, the magnanimous man. This is a miserable and meanly prudential speech. Moreover, it is perfunctory advice from a worldly father to a worldly son who has no intention whatever of

carrying anything out, and the father knows that but he is doing the correct thing on this occasion. Now look at some of those things there. What is there? Look at it—not just hear the burble in your ear but look at it. “Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel.” What an extraordinary image of friendship—grappling your friends to your soul with hoops of steel. What an uncomfortable and possessive process in the extreme. Five lines further down: “Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice.” Prudentiality. And then so characteristic: what gets more than anything else in this speech? Costume. “Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy.” What very English advice this is. Spend all the money you possibly can on your clothes, but make sure they are neat and not gaudy because your affectation must be not seeming to have any affectation. Last line but one: “And it must follow . . .” and how does it follow? “. . . as the night the day,” but the night is the symbol of a very different kind of thing from the day and makes the sentiment ludicrous. And of course it is ludicrous because, of course, if you are the kind of man Polonius is and his son will be, and all such people are, it follows that you may be honest enough in expressing your falseness to others because that is your “To thine own self be true.” If the false man is true to himself, what is he? “As the night the day,” then, is not “as the day the night”—it’s very different. Go away and think about that. Think about Polonius stabbed behind the arras with the comment of Hamlet on it afterwards: “I’ll lug the guts into the neighbor room.”

I want to finish on a different note, and this is really my *final* note. Your laughter, even, sounds a little weary. I and Patricia have in common a fifth-great-grandmother and she was the daughter of a man who spent nearly twenty years in jail because of his faith, being constantly put there by the minions of Charles II. And here is an extract from her last letter. Her name was Susannah Martin (born Garton) and we shouldn’t have known anything at all about her but for the genealogical program of the Church. And we share her—Patricia and I—as we share so many hundreds of others of seekers, seekers, seekers: the technical term for those who didn’t yet know what their religion was. Sometimes I feel that our forebears for generations were seeking and that Patricia and I have found. This is Susannah’s last letter, which was put into the Annual Register because she died suddenly of an apoplectic stroke, as they then called it, and had no time to have the kind of recorded deathbed that Quakers then had. So this letter was in lieu, and there is only a little bit of it and there’s only one phrase of it that is important, and it’s so important to us. And I hope

you will feel that my lecture tonight and my conversion to the Church, and my marriage to my wife all come together in these lines of our fifth-great-grandmother written in 1735:

For I can say it is good to Serve the Lord, and to give up the strength of our Days to Honour him with it, who hath given it unto us; and having Tasted and felt how good the Lord is to them that are given up to follow him, I have wrote these few lines for the Encouragement of those who I may leave behind, when I may be in the Silent Grave, That they may be given up to Serve the Lord in their Day. . . .

You can imagine what feeling my wife and I felt when we first read that extract in the minutes of the meeting, because we felt that we had been raised up, as she said, to serve the Lord in our day; and we have done her work and the work of her father and her husband and all her relatives, and we now know that they wait for us on the other side.

And so it is with those great writers of whom I have tried to speak tonight: they have left it for us. Let us not leave it unread. Let us think of great literature as a way—a special way—of appreciating the scriptures. “I am the way, the truth and the life,” says the Lord. “No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” That is true; but it is also true that great literature, and it is only *great* literature that can do it, can bring us nearer to Him in whose name I now say it.