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Helen Mar Kimball Whitney 1881 Autobiography

On 30 March 1881, Helen Mar Whitney wrote a frank autobiographical letter to her children relating her parents' conversion to Mormonism and also her own baptism. She discusses in intimate detail her feelings when she first learned of the doctrine of plural marriage from her father, Heber C. Kimball. Helen Mar reveals in a straightforward manner the struggle and conflict that she and her mother confronted when Joseph Smith asked Helen Mar to marry him as a plural wife. She adds to her autobiographical letter a poem detailing this period of turmoil. Helen Mar continues her story two years after the Prophet's martyrdom when she married Horace K. Whitney in the Nauvoo Temple in 1846. She mentions Horace's plural marriages and leaves her posterity a brief testimony and exhortation to remain faithful to God and his plan. Helen Mar admits that despite her earlier struggles and present trials she would not change anything for the eternal promises she received. An interesting aspect of this letter is Helen Mar's signature at the end. She signed it "Helen Mar Kimball Whitney," and then went back and added "Smith" to her name. The original letter, "Autobiography, 30 March, 1881," is located in the Archives Division, Church Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. It consists of three leaves (27 cm) written with pen on a semitransparent type of writing paper.

Salt Lake City March 30th 1881

My great Grandfather Kimball and his brother came from England and both assisted in gaining the Independence of the United States—My father was the son of Solomon Farnham Kimball, who was born in the State of Massachusetts in the year 1770. He married Anna Spaulding, who was born in New Hampshire, in the town of Plainsfield, on the banks of the Connecticut river, She was the daughter of David and Speedy Spaulding—My father Heber Chase Kimball was born June 14th 1801. in the town of Sheldon, Franklin Co. Vermont. Nov 27th 1822. He married Vilate, daughter of Roswell and Susannah Murray. My mother was born in Florida, Montgomery Co. New York June 1st 1806. She bore ten children. Their first child was a daughter who died when ten months old. I was their fourth child born in Mendon Monroe Co. N. Y. August 22nd 1828. & the last daughter my mother ever bore. Their fifth child, a son, was born & died in Mendon just previous to their hearing this Gospel preached, which they received & gathered up to Kirtland Ohio in the fall of 1833. I was then five years old, & William, my eldest brother, was over seven. I was baptized by Uncle Brigham Young in a branch of the Chagrin river, my father cutting the ice for that purpose. He & Brigham Young then belonged to the Quorum of Twelve Apostles. Years passed away and we were living in the City of Nauvoo. Just previous to my father's starting upon his last mission but one, to the Eastern States, he taught me the principle [p. 1] of Celestial marriage, & having a great desire to be connected

with the Prophet, Joseph, he offered me to him; this I afterwards learned from the Prophet's own mouth. My father had but one Ewe Lamb, but willingly laid her upon the alter: how cruel this seemed to the mother whose heartstrings were already stretched untill they were ready to snap asunder, for he had taken Sarah Noon to wife & she thought she had made sufficient sacrifice, but the Lord required more. I will pass over the temptations which I had during the twenty four hours after my father introduced to me this principle & asked me if I would be sealed to Joseph, who came next morning & with my parents I heard him teach & explain the principle of [p. 1] Celestial marriage—after which he said to me, "If you will take this step, it will ensure your eternal salvation and exaltation & that of your father's household & all of your kindred.

This promise was so great that I willingly gave myself to purchase so glorious a reward. None but God & his angels could see my mother's bleeding heart—when Joseph asked her if she was willing, she replied "If Helen is willing I have nothing more to say." She had witnessed the sufferings of others, who were older & who better understood the step they were taking, & to see her child, who had scarcely seen her fifteenth summer, following in the same thorny path, in her mind she saw the misery which was as sure to come as the sun was to rise and set; but it was all hidden from me.

I thought through this life my time will be my own The step I now am taking's for eternity alone, No one need be the wiser, through time I shall be free, And as the past hath been the future still will be. To my guileless heart all free from worldly care And full of blissful hopes—and youthful visions rare The world seemed bright the threat'ning clouds were kept From sight, and all looked fair but pitying angels wept. They saw my youthful friends grow shy and cold. And poisonous darts from slanderous tongues were hurled, Untutor'd heart in thy generous sacrifice, Thou didst not weigh the cost nor know the bitter price; Thy happy dreams all o'er thou'rt doom'd alas to be Bar'd out from social scenes by this thy destiny, And o'er thy sad'nd memories of sweet departed joys Thy sicken'd heart will brood and imagine future woes, And like a fetter'd bird with wild and longing heart, Thou'lt dayly pine for freedom and murmur at thy lot; But could'st thou see the future & view that glorious crown, Awaiting you in Heaven you would not weep nor mourn, [p. 2] Pure and exalted was thy father's aim, he saw A glory in obeying this high celestial law, For to thousands who've died without the light I will bring eternal joy & make thy crown more bright. I'd been taught to receive the Prophet of God And receive every word as the word of the Lord. But had this not come through my dear father's mouth, I should ne'r have received it as God's sacred truth.

Two years after the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum I loved and married your father, Horace Kimball Whitney, eldest son of Bishop Newel K. and Elizabeth Ann Whitney. He stood proxy for Joseph & I stood for Elizabeth Sikes. We were sealed in the Nauvoo Temple over the alter on the 3d of Feb. 1846. & we soon after crossed the

Mississippi river on the way to these Rocky Mountains. Since coming here I have given him Lucy B. Kimball & Mary Cravath to wife. By him I have borne eleven children, who I hoped to see crowned in the Celestial Kingdom. We have lived happily together for over 35 years & still we are spared as monuments of God's mercy. I have long since learned to leave all with Him, who knoweth better than ourselves what will make us happy. I am thankful that He has brought me through the furnace of affliction & that He has condescended to show me that the promises made to me the morning that I was sealed to the Prophet of God will not fail & I would not have the chain broken for I have had a view of the principle of eternal salvation & the perfect union which this sealing power will bring to the human family & with the help of our Heavenly Father I am determined to so live that I can claim those promises

Now, my children, I ask Him to bless and preserve these lines that my children & my grandchildren & their children's children may read them & may they all live so as to accomplish they designs of our Maker

Before they have broken this seal the writer of these few lines will most likely have passed onto another stage of action, but I shall live until I have finished my Earthly mission and rejoice in the day of salvation & may all my loved ones enjoy these blessings is the prayer of your affectionate mother. Helen Mar Kimball Smith Whitney.