Mesmerism and Mormonism

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On 2 May 1842 the *Times and Seasons* reprinted an article from the New York *Weekly Herald* which suggested that Joseph Smith was, unknowingly, practicing animal magnetism:

> Joe believes himself divinely inspired and [a] worker of mircles. He cures the sick of diseases—so it is said:—and although Joe is not aware of the fact, we have been informed by a medical man that his influence over nervous disorders, arises from a powerful magnetic influence—that Joe is a magnet in a large way, which he calls a power or spirit from heaven.[1]

This was the first effort to explain Mormonism in terms of animal magnetism, mesmerism, or their more respectable counterpart, hypnotism. Since Church leaders made repeated efforts to discourage any participation in such experiments, the persistence of claims that Mormonism relied on the powers of mesmerism is ironic to say the least. It was not the first time, nor the last, that Mormons were accused of practices they had clearly opposed. It is another instance of the wide chasm separating the Mormon religion and its history from the images purveyed in popular writings that established the stereotype of Mormonism.[2]

EVOLUTION OF MESMERISM

The belief that the human body possessed magnetic properties is generally traced back to the physician and astronomer

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[1] *Times and Seasons* 3 (May 1842):773.

[2] Two significant studies of the image of Mormonism are David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Masonic, Anti-Catholic, and Anti-Mormon Literature," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47 (September 1960): 205-24; and Leonard J. Arrington and Jon Haupt, "Intolerable Zion: The Image of Mormonism in Nineteenth Century American Literature," *Western Humanities Review* 22 (Summer 1968):243-60.

Paracelsus (1490-1541). It was J. B. van Helmont, however, who taught that this magnetism could be transferred from one person to another. The term "animal magnetism" was introduced to differentiate the magnetic effects of human bodies from magnetism applied to physical objects. Franz Anton Mesmer was most responsible for popularizing the practice of animal magnetism in the eighteenth century. He was so successful that "mesmerism" became a more common label of this interpersonal influence phenomenon than animal magnetism. Initially, Mesmer used magnets to effect cures in patients. Later he believed that magnets only served as conductors of an ether-like fluid emanating from his body. Eventually he dropped the use of magnets altogether and adopted the view that the magnetic power resided within him and was transferred by a subtle fluid to the body of his patient.[3]

It was a disciple of Mesmer, the Marquis de Puysegur, who extended the concept to include mesmeric or magnetic sleep, what we now call hypnosis. While subjects were in this state, Puysegur noted, not only could they sometimes be cured of diseases, but their movements could be controlled, and when they returned to normal consciousness they usually remembered nothing of the trance. A royal commission appointed to investigate these various claims, including eminent men like A. L. Lavoisier and Benjamin Franklin, reported in 1784 that it found no evidence for the existence of a magnetic fluid, but it did not express an opinion as to the reality of cures or the nature of the magnetic sleep. Nevertheless, the general skeptical tone of the report did much to reduce interest in the phenomenon for a generation.

In the early nineteenth century interest was revived by Alexandre Bertrand, a Parisian physician, and by a favorable report in 1831 by the Academy of Medicine of Paris recommending magnetism as a therapeutic agency. It came to be extensively practiced in Europe and America, but because many of the practitioners still held to the unsupported theory of magnetic fluid and because it was frequently combined with belief in astrology, spiritualism, and other fads and bizarre practices, most sober scientists regarded it as quackery or superstition. Everyone had heard of people who had experienced amazing cures, how-

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[3]Theodore R. Sarbin, "Attempts to Understand Hypnotic Phenomena," in *Psychology in the Making,* ed. Leo Postman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 750.

ever, and the behavior of people in a magnetic sleep was used for entertainment of the curious and was a frequent subject of discussion.[4] When the medical consultant to the New York *Weekly Herald* said that Joseph Smith was practicing animal magnetism, therefore, he was making reference to a little understood but widely discussed phenomenon.

MORMON MESMERISM: ARTLESS OR EVIL?

Despite differences in interpretation concerning the source of Joseph's power, many writers perceived him to be a man of unusual influence. Amos S. Hayden, the chronicler of the early history of the Campbellite faith, wrote:

> Whatever we may say of the moral character of the author of Mormonism, it cannot be denied that Joseph Smith was a man of remarkable power—over others . . . he exercised an almost magnetic power—an irresistible fascination—over those with whom he came in contact.[5]

To some the magnetic power of Joseph Smith and his disciples was the exercise of an unconscious, misunderstood power. Others took the opposite position that the Mormons deliberately learned the principles of mesmerism to delude, and even seduce, unwitting victims.

An example of the first interpretation, the naive application of misunderstood power, appeared in an essay written in 1847 entitled "Fascination or the Philosophy of Charming."[6] John B. Newman, the author, argued that "the majority of that deluded sect" were converted by the observation of healing miracles. He told of an incident in which Mormons had confused "apostolic power" with the principles of "fascination" (mesmerism):

> Some three years since, I attended a Mormon lady, who had disease of the heart, with marked success. One day, while operating, an elder of the faith who stood by, remarked that I possessed the gift of laying on of hands. I paid very little attention to his remark at the time; but some weeks afterward, while visiting a friend one evening, I heard a lady explaining the tenets of Mormonism, and triumphantly quoting her own case as an illustration of the fact of their possessing

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[4]*Encyclopedia Britannica,* 11th ed., s. v. "Hypnotism."

[5]Amos Sutton Hayden, *Early History of the Disciples in the Western Reserve Ohio* (Cincinnati: Chase & Hall, 1876), p. 250.

[6]John B. Newman, *Fascination, or the Philosophy of Charming* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1850).

apostolic power, more especially the gift of healing by laying on of hands; she had frequent attacks of tic doloreux, and nothing except the rite of the Mormon church had ever sufficed, for one moment, to alleviate the pain.

She was speaking with considerable animation, and had produced a powerful impression on the minds of those present, but was suddenly arrested in the midst of her interesting and enthusiastic discourse, by an attack of that horrid disease. Finding that she was suffering the most exquisite agony, I rose rather hesitatingly—for I dislike scenes—and offered to relieve her, giving her the assurance that one of the Mormon elders had pronounced me in possession of the gift. The drowning will catch at a straw; and my proposition was assented to, but evidently without any hope of success on the part of the sufferer. In less than a minute—for her system had been prepared by repeated fascinations—she was powerfully under my influence, and the relief was immeasurably greater than it had ever been before. After awaking the lady, I explained the whole matter to those present; and it is very probable that but few of my hearers ever undertook a pilgrimage to the holy city of Nauvoo.[7]

Furthermore, Newman also believed that the practice of "fascination" by Mormons and other religious groups would eventually prove their undoing.

> Fascination . . . will most assuredly crush them, and so well is this fact known, that, perceiving its onward progress, many of them are even now endeavoring to wrest its phenomena to support their own views.[8]

The foremost exponent of the proposition that Mormons deliberately used mesmerism to persuade, delude and deceive was the author of *Female Life Among the Mormons,* Maria Ward.[9] Maria was mesmerized into accepting a marriage proposal from a Mormon elder. "I was like a fluttering bird before the gaze of the serpent-charmer."[10] Her husband learned the art from none other than Joseph Smith. The Prophet had fortuitously (for him though not his followers) "learned all the strokes, and passes and manipulations, from a German peddler, who notwithstanding his reduced circumstances, was a man of distinguished intellect and extensive erudition. Smith

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[7]Ibid., pp. 88-89.

[8]Ibid., p. 165.

[9]Maria Ward, *Female Life Among the Mormons* (New York: J. C. Derby, 1856).

[10]Ibid., p. 12.

paid him handsomely, and the German promised to keep the secret."[11] A footnote observed:

> Joseph Smith was one of the earliest practitioners in Animal Magnetism; and it was the use of this power at that time, that convinced his disciples of his supposed miraculous gifts.[12]

Early in the novel we learn that the Prophet mesmerized a young lady from the dead. After the plot thickens it is revealed that he had earlier mesmerized her to simulate death. The victim of Joseph's machinations recalled:

> I was fascinated by his gaze, so deep, earnest and steady. A strange sensation of drowsiness overpowered my senses. I wished, but could not struggle against it. The consciousness that I was dying came over me; and yet how different from all that I had imagined of death. No pain, no torture, no agonizing convulsions, but all calm, sedate and tranquil. A gradual suspension of feeling and perception, a blending of indistinct images, like objects in a dream, that mingle and then melt to nothingness. Yet I knew that a warm hand closed my eyes, that the same hand moved gently down my extremities; and that was the last.[13]

Not content to heal, the Prophet also gave a display of his power over his enemies. He took a Brother Babcock, seated him in a chair, and proceeded with his gazing and passes. Brother Babcock became palsied, and "every sense and perception seemed closed to external objects."

> "You see now," said Smith, pointing towards Babcock, "you see the power which God has delegated to me, you cannot doubt how immediately with a motion of my hands and a glance of my eyes, I could transform my enemies to lifeless, senseless, lumps of clay; how I could deprive them of their senses, or compel them to my bidding, even to take their own lives."[14]

Fortunately, members of the Church were not subjected to the powers of mesmerism. Its application was reserved for the unbeliever. Those most expert in this practice were selected as missionaries, and the scope of this program was said to have reached at least ten thousand in its diabolical use.

It is probable that the Maria Ward novel influenced others

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[11]Ibid., p. 417.
[12]Ibid., p. 24.
[13]Ibid., p. 64.
[14]Ibid., p. 25.

to read mesmerism into Mormonism. In 1856 "two independent French translations of this novel were sold all over France. . . ."[15] Two French authors, Paul Duplessis[16] (1859) and Hortense DuFay[17] (1863) used the language of magnetism to explain the behavior of Mormons. DuFay's use of magnetic gifts to describe Joseph Smith was much more benign than the version in *Female Life Among the Mormons.* Nevertheless, DuFay, like Ward, wrote that Joseph Smith was taught animal magnetism by a German practitioner. The Prophet's power was said by DuFay to reside in his "fascinating eyes." Duplessis was not as restrained. He created the magnetic-like, spiritualistic personality of Hiram Harris, characterized as the moving force behind the token, figurehead leadership of Brigham Young. The extent to which the two French writers borrowed the themes of mesmerism from Ward is, of course, conjectural. They may have drawn as well from nineteenth century mesmeric theories fashionable in France.

Other novels and plays incorporated mesmerism as an explanation of Mormonism's attractions. Usually this was done indirectly, emphasizing such terms as attraction, fascination, or magnetism, and somehow calling attention to the eyes. Percy Bolinbroke St. John, in *Jessie, the Mormon's Daughter,* writes the following warning: "Beware of their arts; enter not the circle of their fascinations; their charms are like those of the serpent. . . ." At a Mormon meeting the young Mormon at the front was said to have terrible eyes."[18]

The case of Pascal B. Smith illustrates how easily Mormonism became linked to mesmerism in the public mind. In 1848 Harriet Smith secured lawyers to represent her claim that her husband, Pascal B. Smith, was insane, and, hence, incompetent to manage their financial affairs. She requested that the court appoint someone as a guardian of their finances. In the course of the trial it was noted that Mr. Smith had joined a spiritualist group called Universal Brotherhood. The intent of this group was to "establish a Christian church . . . with a view to

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[15]Wilfried Decoo, "The Image of Mormonism in French Literature: Part I," *BYU Studies* 14 (Winter 1974):169.

[16]Paul Duplessis, *Les Mormons,* 5 vols. (Paris: A. Cadat, 1859).

[17]Hortense G. Dufay, *Le Prophète du XIX ème siècle, ou Vie des Saints des Derniers Jours (Mormons), Précéde d'un apercu sur d'autres socialistes unitaires et sur le gènie de la poèsie Anglaise* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1863).

[18]Percy Bolingbroke St. John, *Jessie the Mormon's Daughter,* 3 vols. (London: E. Harrison, 1861), unpaged preface, p. 13.

remedy the great evils of society."[19] It was alleged that the medium for the Universal Brotherhood, James F. Mahan, was unscrupulously siphoning money for personal gain from Pascal B. Smith under the guise of religion. The legal transcript included a relatively obscure reference that Mahan "had been a Mormon preacher or been with the Mormons."[20] Nothing else is said about Mahan's alleged association with the Mormons, except that in the summary statement of one of the prosecuting attorneys, Mahan is repeatedly referred to as "the prophet." Mahan's alleged previous association with the mainline Methodists or even his involvement with the Universal Brotherhood was ignored. Instead the published pamphlet of the court proceedings received the title: "Law Case of Pascal B. Smith Exhibiting the Most Extraordinary Developments, Arising from Mesmeric Clairvoyance, As Related by a Mormon Prophet."

More serious efforts to account for the rise of Mormonism occasionally brought in mesmerism in one way or another. As early as 1838 David M. Reese in *Humbugs of New York* lamented: "Multitudes who believe in 'Animal Magnetism,' subscribe to 'Phrenology,' are the willing victims of every form of 'Quackery,' . . . multitudes of such, have gathered around this *Mormon Oracle,* and drank in wisdom from his 'golden bible!' "[21] J. B. Turner, *Mormonism in All Ages* (1842) sees Mormonism as one of a series of delusions; in the same series was "animal magnetism." Charles McKay, who wrote one of the earliest reliable histories of Mormonism, also produced *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions* (1850), with a substantial section on "the Magnetisers." This was guilt by association, Mormonism and mesmerism finding themselves together on the same rubbish heap.

In 1867, Pomeroy Tucker published *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism.* After recounting Brigham Young's succession to the leadership of the Church following Joseph Smith's death, Tucker notes that Young's "peculiarities of character were similar to Joseph's. He was shrewd, bold, and resolute, possessing an almost intuitive knowledge of men. He soon attracted attention, and became influential with his brethren.

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[19]*Law Case of Pascal B. Smith Exhibiting the Most Extraordinary Developments Arising from Mesmeric Clairvoyance, as Related by a Mormon Prophet* (Cincinnati, 1848), p. 13.

[20]Ibid., p. 9.

[21]David M. Reese, *Humbugs of New York* (New York: J. S. Taylor; Boston: Weeks, Jordan & Co., 1838), pp. 264-65.

They were involuntarily swayed by his strong, electric will. . . ."[22]

THE HYPNOTIC PROPHET

About this same time mesmerism was invoked as an explanation for one of the famous miracles of early Mormonism. The event took place in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831. Ezra Booth, Symonds Ryder, a Mr. and Mrs. Johnson and others went to visit Joseph Smith to examine the claims of Mormonism. In the course of the conversation it was disclosed that Mrs. Johnson had a paralyzed right arm as a result of a stroke. An 1876 account of the event described the subsequent developments:

> A few moments later, when the conversation had turned in another direction, Smith arose, and walking across the room, taking Mrs. Johnson by the hand, said in the most solemn and impressive manner: "Woman, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I command thee to be whole," and immediately left the room. The company were awe-stricken at the infinite presumption of the man, and the calm assurance with which he spoke. The sudden mental and moral shock—I know not how better to explain the well-attested fact—electrified the rheumatic arm—Mrs. Johnson at once lifted it up with ease, and on her return home the next day she was able to do her washing without difficulty or pain.[23]

By 1888 an important addition occurred in the description of the scene.

> Moving backward a few steps he looked intently into the eyes of the lady, as if to get her under his mental control.[24]

The latter author summarized the alternative explanations.

> The case is well authenticated; and those who seek to explain it away will be compelled to base themselves upon mesmeric influence or the unconscious nervous co-operation of the lady affected, rather than in cunning upon the part of Smith. It seems to have been simply a case where his audacity was rewarded with an accident of fortune it by no means deserved.[25]

In 1894 I. Woodbridge Riley traveled to Salt Lake City to gather material for a master of arts thesis and a subsequent

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[22]Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1867), p. 132.
[23]Hayden, *Early History,* p. 250.
[24]J. H. Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1888), p. 122.
[25]Ibid., p. 121.

doctoral dissertation on Joseph Smith. He was not content with earlier explications of the psychology of the Prophet. "Sectarians and phrenologists, spiritualists and mesmerists have variously interpreted his more or less abnormal performances, —it now remains for the psychologist to have a try at them."[26] He was not really a trained psychologist—as an academic discipline psychology was in its infancy, and Riley's training had been minimal—but in his primitive effort to explain Joseph Smith on psychological grounds he was a pioneer psychohistorian. He relied heavily on genetic explanations, based on reports and rumors about the Prophet's family, and on the substantial role of hypnosis as a source of deception, both self-deception and the deception of others. By Riley's time hypnosis had acquired greater credibility in the explanation of phenomena previously explained by the discredited mesmerism. Hypnosis did not rely on explanation which emphasized the activation of magnetic fluids or the mystical power of the mesmerist. The psychological state of the subject, not the hypnotist, was the key to successful hypnosis. It was James Braid who was responsible for the greater respectability of hypnosis over mesmerism. Braid "did not believe that hypnosis was a cure-all, but like any other medical treatment, had its indications and contraindications."[27] According to Riley there were two difficulties with Maria Ward's mesmeric theory of Joseph Smith's power: exaggeration and anachronism. "The theory is interesting," he said, "but it overexplains. Joseph had immense influence long before this country was permeated by a distorted mesmerism."[28]

Although Riley did not see mesmerism as an adequate explanation for the Prophet's behavior, he was quite willing to suggest a linkage that disparaged Mormonism without endorsing mesmerism. Citing an anonymous pamphlet, he suggested that Joseph Smith knew the value of Anna Little, who had "mastered the science of animal magnetism," and kept her "in the sanctuary of the Communicant Sisters." Furthermore, Riley saw in anti-Mormon descriptions of the Mormon temple ceremony similarities to "the real doings around Mesmer's 'baquets Magnetiques.' " While discounting the trustworthiness

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[26]I. Woodbridge Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1902), pp. ix-x.

[27]Sarbin, "Hypnotic Phenomena," p. 759.

[28]Riley, *Founder,* p. 235.

of these accounts, Riley ignored the credibility issue when Mormonism could be identified with the occult and abnormal. Riley alluded to the use of mesmerism by the "Mormon Prophet" in the law case of Pascal B. Smith, which as we have seen offered no evidence of any such use. He noted that the account of the law case was published in a city "where city ordinances early prohibited public mesmeric exhibitions, and where there was some complaint of the difficulty of keeping female servants out of the clutches of the Mormons."

Riley found in the heir apparent to mesmerism, hypnotism, the key to Joseph Smith's power. Without documentation Riley alluded to Smith's "apparent hypnotic influence over people." In many respects Riley's interpretations were more compatible with mesmerism than hypnosis. The examples offered, in the most general of terms, of the Prophet's "suggestive successes" include the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, the early faith healings, and his ability to retain a large congregation for hours—obviously, for Riley, as a result of "a real collective hypnosis." In an appendix entitled "Polygamy and Hypnotism" he proposed "to show that some of his [Joseph Smith's] illicit purposes were effected through hypnotic influence." But beyond the feeble examples already mentioned, all he offers is Lucy Kimball's account of her original reluctance to become the Prophet's plural wife, his insistence that she would receive a manifestation that would reassure her, and the eventual spiritual experience that did just that. For Riley this was a perfect example of "post-hypnotic suggestion, with deferred hallucination."[29]

In the 1910s a wave of anti-Mormon propaganda and occasional violence swept across Great Britain. Based on the charge that polygamy was continuing, the participants in this anti-Mormon crusade were especially concerned about the conversion of English girls. In newspaper articles, in sermons, in rallies, in all kinds of public anti-Mormon meetings the warning was sounded. Among headlines in the London *Daily Express* were "The Mormon Trap," "The Deadly Menace to English Girls," and "Polygamy Still the Real Faith."[30] If there were not explicit charges of hypnotic powers in many of these warnings, they often implied that the Mormons exerted a

[29]Ibid., p. 414.

[30]Nicholai Sorenson, "The Winds of Adversity: Anti-Mormonism in Great Britain, 1910-1925," unpublished paper, History 497, 17 April 1974, pp. 24-25.

mysterious, unholy influence. One of the most popular movies of the time was *Trapped by the Mormons,* in which the Mormon missionary exerts an obvious hypnotic force upon a beautiful, helpless maiden; camera close-ups repeatedly showed the missionary's eyes in a powerful, transfixing stare.[31]

About 1919 a London publisher brought out *In the Grip of the Mormons* by "an escaped wife of a Mormon elder." In it one of Joseph Smith's first converts was his wife Emma, who listened to him "with fear and an undefined, reverential awe that paralyzed her reason." Due to his "powers of fascination," she was helpless: "The combination of terror and superstition had been so overpowering that she remembered nothing but a conflicting of different passions in her heart, a dizziness and pressure of the atmosphere, when all was dark and blank, and she was half inclined to believe more than human agency had been present and deprived her of consciousness." As the Prophet continued his preaching, adding to his followers, he felt his own powers: "As his bold, fiery eyes rested on them, he knew their hearts quailed before him."[32]

MESMERISM: MORMONS AND EX-MORMONS

From the 1840s to the 1910s, those who saw mesmerism in Mormonism, used it to explain the appeal of Joseph Smith in particular and Mormon missionaries in general. They also, as we have seen, saw it as an explanation of the faith healings claimed by Mormons. That either the conversions or the healings might have been authentic was seldom considered. Ironically, the mesmeric interpretation was given unwitting encouragement by some Mormons, and it found its strongest advocate in one ex-Mormon.

Not that the Mormons ever said that Joseph Smith had mesmeric powers. But he was described as being a strong "personality and influence" (Mary Alice Cannon Lambert), as having an "engaging" personality (Jane Snyder Richards), as being "highly charged with the Holy Ghost" (Joseph Lee Robinson), as having "personal magnetism" (William Taylor), as having an electrifying handshake (Emmeline B.

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[31]*Trapped by the Mormons* was recently acquired by the Church Historical Department.

[32]*In the Grip of the Mormons* by "an escaped wife of a Mormon Elder" (London: n.p., c1919). This is the same book as [Orvilla S. Belisle], *The Prophets; or, Mormonism Unveiled* (Philadelphia and London: Wm. White Smith, 1855).

Wells), as having eyes that could look right through a person (Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner). Parley P. Pratt said, "There was something connected with the serene and steady penetrating glance of his eye, as if he would penetrate the deepest abyss of the human heart, gaze into eternity, penetrate the heavens, and comprehend all worlds."[33] A nonbeliever at all disposed to explain Smith's influence on the grounds of mesmerism, exercised consciously or unconsciously, would find reinforcement in these statements from the Prophet's devoted followers.

More influential and more direct were the words of apostates who, looking back, saw their own conversion to Mormonism as coming from some strange, mysterious power. The most widely read such account was *Tell It All* by Fanny Stenhouse.[34] By the 1870s she, along with her husband, T. B. H. Stenhouse, had abandoned the Mormon faith. Her book is thus an apology, not only giving her reasons for apostasy, but also explaining her conversion in the first place. In essence she says that the Mormonism she heard in England in the 1840s was not the Mormonism of today. But it is obvious that hypnotic or mesmeric attraction entered into her early conversion and loyalty to Mormonism. Even before she encountered Mormonism firsthand, her parents were "led astray by the fascinations" of the new religion. Then the wife of a Baptist minister warned her about the Mormon missionaries: "There is a strange power with them that fascinates the people and draws them into their meshes in spite of themselves."[35] She describes a meeting in which a new member was confirmed. A short testimony meeting followed, and one Mormon was seized with "a nervous trembling" and began to prophesy. Stenhouse explains:

> When we consider the excited state of her [the new member's] mind, and—if the statements of psychologists be true—the magnetic currents which were being transmitted from the sensitive nature of the man into the excited brain of the new convert, together with the pressure of half a dozen hu-

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[33]Examples drawn from a convenient summary, Hyrum L. and Helen Mae Andrus, *They Knew the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974).

[34]Fanny Stenhouse wrote two books: *Exposé of Polygamy* (New York: American News Co., 1872), later reworked and transformed into *Tell It All* (Hartford, Conn.: A. D. Worthington, 1874), which itself went through many editions. Ronald W. Walker has shown the extent to which the book was plagiarized or fictionalized in "The Stenhouses and the Making of a Mormon Image," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974):51-72.

[35]Stenhouse, *Tell It All,* p. 41.

> man hands upon her head, it is not at all astonishing that when the hands were lifted off she should firmly believe that she had been blessed indeed.[36]

At another meeting Mrs. Stenhouse heard a Brother Edwards bear his testimony:

> His voice thrilled with an earnestness which seemed to us something more than the mere excitement of the soul. A burning fire seemed to flash from his large, expressive eyes; his features were lighted up with that animation which gives a saint-like halo to the earnest face when fired with indignation or pleading soul-felt truths; while his whole frame seemed to glow with the glory of a land beyond this earth. . . . The effect of this exhortation was magical. We forgot all our outward surroundings, in the realization that the great work of the Lord was so gloriously begun and that it would surely go on, conquering and to conquer.[37]

She even describes the ordinance of anointing the sick in similar terms:

> There was something peculiar about this laying on of hands. It was not a mere gentle touching, but a thorough manipulation. The two hands were placed firmly on the top of the head and then drawn energetically down the body while vigorous "passes"—as magnetizers call the action—were made repeatedly over the affected parts.[38]

What Mrs. Stenhouse wanted was a naturalistic explanation of the phenomena that had impressed her as an investigator and convert to the faith. It was all a "mystery" to her then, she explains:

> I knew then nothing of the miraculous power of faith—not religious faith, but often just the reverse, which has so often relieved and cured diseases and infirmities which have baffled the power of the most skilled physicians. Moreover I knew nothing then of that peculiar magnetic power which scientific men now have proved belongs to certain constitutions and can be used for curative purposes.[39]

She does not for a minute believe that they were really miracles, for she is confident that "scientific inquiry would readily show that the effects were only natural results of natural causes."[40]

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[36]Ibid., p. 51.
[37]Ibid., p. 59.
[38]Ibid., p. 82.
[39]Ibid., p. 83.
[40]Ibid., p. 86.

Mesmerism for Mrs. Stenhouse is a *deus ex machina,* a naturalistic explanation for the success of Mormon proselyters, for the healings and sincere testimonies she has witnessed, and above all for her own conversion and early belief. It places the responsibility beyond herself; she was not duped, but was the victim of a mysterious power. Although she did not originate the supposed connection between Mormonism and mesmerism, her work, which went through several editions, probably did more than any other to give it currency from the mid-1870s on. The mysterious powers of attraction, the intense, expressive eyes, the irresistible fascination of the missionaries, the miraculous (actually hypnotic) healings—these, as we have seen, become the commonplaces of anti-Mormon literature for a whole generation.

MESMERISM AND ANTI-MORMON LITERATURE

One of the most prolific of anti-Mormon writers during this period was Winifred Graham, whose books, all novels except one, sold by the hundreds of thousands. For many readers the image of the Mormon was that portrayed by this author. In her *Eve and the Elders* the opening scene has the heroine Eve coming upon a Mormon elder in the park who was being heckled and on the verge of being driven out. She was "drawn by curiosity. . . , fascinated by the sight of his strained, white face." When she met the missionary, an Elder Penrose, she found that "his face contained a charm that was indefinable." His eyes sought hers, and she "felt the magnetism of his glance —strong and appealing." Actually, there is some complexity to this plot, for Elder Penrose turns out to be secretly chafing under the tyranny of Mormonism. But the description of other elders goes along the same line. A very successful proselyter Elder Solomon Flittler, "would go to any lengths to win converts. He never considered the truth, and promised the girls anything under the sun if he thought he could persuade them to emigrate." His conquests were numerous, for he sought impressionable girls. . . ." He was "a kind of conjurer who could produce the most wonderful gifts from unseen sources." Eve finds herself "drawn by a strange destiny into a web from which she could not break free."[41] The plot continues through murders (blood atonement), escapes, threats, and eventual

[41]Winifred Graham [Cory], *Eve and the Elders* (London, n.d.), chapters 1-6.

marriage of the heroine and the elder, who renounces Mormonism. Winifred Graham's *Ezra the Mormon* contains the same stereotypes. Ezra, the Mormon elder, was "the very nature to attract Thora—[he was] a man in whose eyes the power of dominion shone." In a later scene when Thora's father attempted to separate the two young people, he brought down his cane on the Mormon elder's shoulder, who "made no signs of feeling pain; he just stood and fixed his assailant with an eye of steel." The elder slipped his arm through Thora's. "The girl looked dazed and helpless. She tried to speak, but her trembling lips failed to frame a word. 'She's mesmerized,' half shrieked her father."[42] Again, the plot moves from England to Utah, with the girl and the elder drawn through a series of adventures, including the unspeakably hideous endowment ceremonies and threats of blood atonement. But enticement, attraction, fascination, and magnetism are prominent throughout, set against the countercurrent of attempted escape.

That a concept so useful, seeming to explain so much, continued to crop up in more recent treatments of Mormon history should not be surprising. Vardis Fisher's *Children of God* portrays a Joseph Smith by no means lacking in admirable traits of character, but including as well some stereotypes from the mesmerism tradition. At one confrontation between the young Smith and a Palmyra mob one man "tried to laugh but only snickered; and another, slowly withdrawing, with his gaze on Joseph's face, spoke out of sudden awe. 'Look at his eyes! Men, look at his eyes' " Soon the men left, and "Joseph was left alone, a man courageous and fearless, whose eyes, whose strange intense directness, had abashed his enemies." Later, he took the three prospective witnesses of the Book of Mormon into the woods. "There, with bared head, he stood motionless, gazing at the sky, his eyes so bright and hypnotic that Dave looked anxiously at Oliver. . . ." In other incidents the same pattern is repeated, as when Sidney Rigdon and Joseph entered the woods to pray. "Rigdon watched him with a skeptical stare. When he saw the pallor in Joseph's face and the far-seeing hypnotic brightness of his eyes, he was convinced, and he listened attentively when the prophet spoke."[43]

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[42]Winifred Graham [Cory], *Ezra the Mormon* (London: Everett & Co., 1908), p. 19.

[43]Vardis Fisher, *Children of God* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1939), pp. 30, 47, 80.

The standard biography of Joseph Smith, Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History* refers to Smith's "magnetic influence over his friends" and his "talent for making men see visions." Referring to the tesimony of the three witnesses and the fact of their later departure from the Mormon Church, Mrs. Brodie notes that Joseph Smith had no reason to fear that they would deny their testimony "for he had conjured up a vision they would never forget." She recognizes his "magnetic" sway while attempting to see him as growing into a role quite unconsciously.[44] Ultimately, the Brodie interpretation sees the Prophet as self-hypnotized. The combination of personal sincerity and deception earlier claimed for converts is now claimed for the Prophet himself.

MORMON ATTITUDES TOWARD MESMERISM

While many non-Mormon, or ex-Mormon, writers were attributing the powers of Mormonism to mesmerism, many Mormon writers were relegating the powers of mesmerism to the devil. At the very best Mormons were cautious and skeptical about mesmerism. The *Times and Seasons* issue of 15 March 1843, reflected this concern:

> With several hundred different religions, all clashing and in commotion, the speculative theories of Miller, with his wild enthusiasm; the deceptive pretensions of mesmerism; the poison of infidelity; the plans of Fourier, and the ten thousand other notions that are deluging the earth, and cracking the human brain, render it indeed necesssary that God should again speak and point out the way of salvation and happiness with certainty to the human family, and bid the dire commotion cease.[45]

Less than two months later Joseph Smith objected to "a lecturer on Mesmerism and Phrenology . . . performing in the city."[46] However, the record is not clear as to whether Joseph objected to his phrenology, his mesmerism, both, or some other characteristic of the man. In 1843 the *Nauvoo Neighbor,* under the

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[44]Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), pp. 73, 74, 78, 86.

[45]*Times and Seasons* 4 (15 March 1843):137. The same statement appeared in the *Millennial Star* 4 (January 1844):140.

[46]Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932-51), 5:383. The handwritten version included the following stronger words, which were omitted from the published version: "thought we had been imposed upon enough by such kind of things." Joseph Smith History, ms., Church Archives.

rather hostile caption "Mesmeretic Idiots," gave "important cautions to those who wish to examine this subject practically":

> Never allow yourself to be mesmerized by a person not in perfect health.
>
> Never allow yourself to be acted on by a person inferior in his mental powers.
>
> Never allow a rough, uncouth person to act on you—he will frequently induce nervous diseases the most difficult to cure.
>
> Never allow a stranger, especially one of the opposite sex, to mesmerize you.
>
> Never allow yourself to be acted on by more than one mesmerizer.
>
> Never remain in the mesmeric condition more than thirty minutes.
>
> By all means never allow your brain to be tampered with by ignorant mesmerizers; in an evil hour they may render you idiotic for life.[47]

Cautious participation in mesmerism seemed permissible under certain circumstances.

Notwithstanding, it is clear that during the Nauvoo period there was little sympathy for mesmerism. In 1844 a New York newspaper, the *Attican Democrat,* reported the case of a Harvey Hawkins who, with the help of mesmerism, was able to reveal the location of $1,000 buried in the woods near Alexandria. The *Nauvoo Neighbor* took a rather dim view of the sensational mesmeric revelation. "We should suspect that Harvey knew something about the money before he went into a mesmeric sleep."[48]

One of the earlier attributions by Mormons of the power of the devil to the practice of mesmerism occurred in 1845. The *Nauvoo Neighbor* printed an account from *Blackwoods Magazine* of an amateur mesmerist who was surprised by his newly found powers. The origin of his power was no mystery to the editor of the *Neighbor*:

> We can inform Mr. Blackwood that there is a power in mesmerism, and that power is the same that John saw come out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. Devils working miracles; that's all.[49]

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[47]"Mesmeretic Idiots," *The Nauvoo Neighbor* 1 (19 July 1843):3.

[48]"Mesmerism," *The Nauvoo Neighbor* 2 (21 August 1844):3.

[49]"A Man a Mesmerizer in Spite of Himself," *The Nauvoo Neighbor* 3 (11 June 1845):1.

Before Elder John Taylor left Wales in 1846 to join the Saints in the wilderness, he sketched an outline of an essay on mesmerism and requested T. D. Brown, the editor of the *Millennial Star,* to complete the project. The intent of the article was "to guard the Saints against the frauds and impositions of men, and the power and influence of Satan."[50] Taylor conceded that there was power in mesmerism, questioned the secular explanations of magnetism as the source of the power, and implicated the devil in its operations. Evidently, Taylor's concern was stimulated by his observation that some of the members were meddling in mesmerism:

> I have met with some who were Saints that had been magnetized by unbelievers, and they partook of their spirit and have fallen from the simplicity of the gospel. Again I have met with Saints who have magnetized others, not knowing that they were doing wrong, and the persons have received no material injury, because the magnetizer himself had not a bad spirit; but let him continue to do it and he would loose [sic] the spirit of God, and so would those who were operated upon.[51]

John Taylor made his position very clear:

> We shall not ourselves go to magnetizers, nor suffer ours to go to them, to be benumbed for amputation, excision, or healing; . . . if God does not heal us, the Devil cannot.[52]

Other articles appeared in Church publications with a similar message.[53]

The identification of the devil with mesmerism intensified with the growth of spiritualism beginning in the late 1840s.[54] Spiritualism incorporated many of the techniques of mesmerism. Clairvoyance, table-rapping, seances, table-tipping and spirit mediums became virtually synonymous with mesmerism. Much of the criticism by Mormons of mesmerism after the onset of

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[50]John Taylor, "Mesmerism," *The Millennial Star* 9 (15 February 1847):49.
[51]Ibid., p. 52.
[52]Ibid.
[53]John Davis, "The Cholera and Mesmerism in Wales," *The Millennial Star* 11 (10 July 1849):264-66; *The Millennial Star* 11 (1 November 1849):335; "The Cheltenham 'Ecce Homo,' " *The Millennial Star* 15 (17 September 1853): 618-20; J. L. Barfoot, "Dialogue on Mind," *Juvenile Instructor* 14 (1879):106.
[54]See Davis Bitton, "Mormonism Encounters Spiritualism," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974):39-50. The association with spiritualism also resulted in a loss to mesmerism of support in scientific circles. E. G. Boring, *A History of Experimental Psychology,* 2nd ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1950), pp. 122-23.

spiritualism was directed at the claims of spiritualism. When the spiritualistic and the occult were divested from phenomena circumscribed by the concept of mesmerism, there was occasional evidence of openness to more naturalistic explanations. An 1850 article in the *Deseret News* under the heading "A New Form of Mesmerism" illustrates this contention:

> It is said that certain clock makers at Bristol, Connecticut, in making some chronometers lately, found it impossible for the workmen to keep awake when they were setting instruments agoing. It is necessary, in regulating them, to count the beats in a minute by a regulator, and change the hair-spring until both go nearly in time; then the screws in the balance are turned until the greatest maximum is obtained, when they are rated and the rate registered. The workmen find no difficulty with the parts, but when the whole movement is going, any person who sits down and counts the beats, or watches the motion of balance, invariably becomes drowsy. Attempts have been made with other clocks, but they do not produce the same sensation. The clocks are of polished work, and gilded by a peculiar galvanic process, which, if the facts be as here stated, may have something to do with the effect. What is curious is, that the person who is put to sleep continues to count the beatings of time with his hand or foot. The writer in the Boston Post, who gives an account of the matter adds:—"It affords me some amusement to visitors to see a company of men at work and half of them asleep, yet laboring to keep themselves awake. On Saturday last a collier came to the factories with a load of coals, and was admitted into the finishing room, to see the clocks. One of the workmen desired to make the experiment; accordingly the old man was put to count; striking on the bench with his hand in time with the clock, he went to sleep in three minutes, and was kept under the influence for nearly an hour. His dog, that had followed him into the room, upon discovering his situation exhibited alarm and ran about howling in a most dismal manner; all this did not disturb the sleeper, but the moment the clock was stopped he awoke, and was surprised to find that so much time had passed."—There is some great principle established in these phenomena that is truly mysterious.[55]

Orson Pratt thought that some had been rendered more susceptible to the acceptance of mesmerism by the adoption of "scientific phraseology" which seemed to confer the "authority" of science on the practice.

> The devil has invented various names for his manifestations in order to get the people to swallow them down; the same as

[55] "A New Form of Mesmerism," *Deseret News,* 19 October 1850.

> the doctors. When they wish to administer some nauseous kind of medicine, they sweeten it up a little. So the devil has sweetened up these things in such a way that he has got almost all these manifestations under the name of science. If you want to see a species of devilism made manifest, it comes out under a scientific phraseology, under the specious name of electro-biology, animal magnetism, or some such popular name—names that have been given to real sciences, which have their laws, founded in nature, are now given to these supernatural manifestations. Why does Satan use these artifices? Because the people at the present day have become naturally scientific or a great many of them have; and the devil thinks if he can only invent a real, nice, beautiful name, with some resemblance to a scientific name, a great many of these persons will swallow it down, and think it all right.[56]

But it was not simply the legitimization of mesmerism by its association with accepted jargon that influenced some. Brigham Young cited examples, hypothetical and real, of the power of seduction by mesmeric demonstration. "I know of many whom Mesmerism has led out of this church; they would see the sick healed, and attribute it to the power of God; would fall under its influence, embrace and practice it, and thus give the devil power over them to lead them out of the kingdom of God:"[57]

Mormons were by no means perceived to be powerless in the face of mesmerism. Quite the contrary, President Young taught that the faithful Latter-day Saint could not be magnetized and he defied spiritualists to exercise mesmeric powers in his presence. It was when members of the Church did not possess the light of revelation that they were unable to discern between the powers of Satan and the powers of God.

For President Young there was another key besides the light of revelation to judge the value of mesmeric demonstration. His practical bent moved him to apply a pragmatic test.

> As I have said to my friends here, in speaking about Spiritualism, I have seen the effects of animal magnetism, or some anomalous sleep, or whatever it may be called, many a time in my youth. I have seen persons lie on the benches, on the floor of the meeting house, or on the ground at their camp meetings, for ten, twenty, and thirty minutes, and I do not know but an hour, and not a particle of pulse about them. That was the effect of what I call animal magnetism; they

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[56]Orson Pratt in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855-86), 13:70. Hereafter cited as *JD*.

[57]*JD*, 3:156.

> called it the power of God, but no matter what it was. I used to think that I should like to ask such persons what they had seen in their trance or vision; and when I got old enough and dared ask them, I did so. I have said to such persons: "Brother, what have you experienced?" "Nothing." "What do you know more than before you had this; what do you call it—trance, sleep, or dream? Do you know any more than before you fell to the earth?" "Nothing more." "Have you seen any person?" "No." "Then what is the use or utility of your falling down here in the dirt?" I could not see it, and consequently I was infidel to this.[58]

Obviously, while calling attention to the lack of useful, practical results in the revivalistic experiences, Young was willing to explain the behavior itself by involving the term "animal magnetism"; he was giving a naturalistic explanation to something the revivalists themselves thought divine. At the same time he did not carry this notion to its logical conclusion: never did he suggest that Mormon healings were merely mesmeric illusions, and once he explicitly rejected the claim of some that the New Testament miracles were accomplished by "psychology, electro-biology, mesmerism, etc."[59]

Actually, Brigham Young was willing to concede some truth to mesmerism. In 1846 he heard a lengthy explanation of the experiments of animal magnetism by a Dr. Jewett, who said it had "nearly cured him of infidelity, and he thought the mormons would understand the principle." Young's answer falls far short of condemnation: "Pres. Young told him that he understood it [the principle of animal magnetism] perfectly, that the Saints believed in the Lord's magnetizing, that God magnetized Beltshazzar so that he saw the hand writing on the wall, etc."[60] Ten years later Young said in a sermon:

> The principle of animal magnetism is true, but wicked men use it to an evil purpose. I have never told you much about my belief in this magnetic principle. Speaking is a true gift, but I can speak to the glory of God, or to the injury of his cause and to my condemnation, as I please; and still the gift is of God. The gift of animal magnetism is a gift of God, but wicked men use it to promote the cause of the devil, and that is precisely the difference.[61]

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[58] *JD,* 14:113. See also 14:90.

[59] *JD,* 13:140-41.

[60] Journal History, 3 March 1846. Brigham Young also used the language of mesmerism on one occasion to support the importance of the laying on of hands in healing the sick. *JD,* 3:157-58.

[61] *JD,* 3:370.

Mesmerism, said Young, was an "inverted truth" which originated in holy, good and righteous principles, which have been inverted by the power of the devil."[62]

But the recognition that animal magnetism was a true principle if properly used, and that it explained the trances of revivalists and at least one scriptural miracle, fell short of an endorsement. As practiced in his day the principle was associated with spiritualists and "evil men." He did not encourage the Saints to participate in these experiments.

The closest that any Latter-day Saint came to the non-Mormon allegations regarding Joseph Smith's magnetic powers was contained in an article published in the *Juvenile Instructor* at the turn of the century. N. Y. Schofield, a Mormon phrenologist, had been exposed to the claims of mesmerism during his schooling at the American Institute of Phrenology. He wrote:

> One of the many distinguishing characteristics of the prophet was the wonderful magnetic influence he unconsciously exerted over others.
>
> In looking for the physiological source of this mystic power in Joseph Smith it is important to bear in mind that God always works upon natural principles. . . . If therefore a positive effect be traced to its probable cause we should expect to find in the Prophet's mentality an unusual development of that particular organ which determines the strength and measure of that subtle force we call magnetism . . . locating the seat of magnetic power in the "little" brain or cerebellum, we find the organ remarkably strong in the present instance.
>
> . . . The cerebellum is conspicuously large giving rise to the fair and logical inference that in raising up Joseph Smith to be a leader, expounder, defender and martyr, the Lord designedly endowed His servant with a special measure of these mental and physical attributes, the natural function of which is to attract, repel, and influence according to will or expediency, the thoughts, emotions and actions of other men.[63]

This is an interesting attempt to have it both ways, a kind of naturalistic supernaturalism. God, fully understanding that the Prophet would require magnetic powers, created a large cerebellum in Joseph Smith that the last dispensation might be ushered in. The essential point does not rest upon the assump-

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[62] *JD*, 3:156.
[63] *The Juvenile Instructor* 37 (15 May 1902):308-9.

tions of mesmerism; in the same vein Schofield might have said that recognition of what the Prophet would need led God to create in him a high intelligence and an articulate tongue. Still, it is clear enough that Schofield, influenced primarily by phrenology, ascribed some truth to mesmerism.

Such minor eddies should not take us away from the main stream. Throughout its history Mormonism generally opposed mesmerism. There were many reasons for this opposition. Mesmerism was frequently associated with spiritualism, was often practiced by charlatans, seemed to offer a competitive, naturalistic explanation for miracles, and was perceived as a threat to free agency. It should be added that throughout its history mesmerism was also faced with substantial scientific skepticism and opposition. The Mormons liked to see themselves as scientific, especially when the conclusions of science coincided, as in this instance, with their religious position. John Taylor's early skepticism of the theory of animal magnetism underlying mesmerism was in spirit close to the scientific skepticism of his contemporaries.

HYPNOTISM

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the language of mesmerism, except as metaphor, gradually disappeared from the scene, and theories of hypnosis assumed the role of explanation. Yet Mormons showed little variation in attitude, continuing to regard hypnotism in the same terms as the earlier mesmerism. To the popular mind they were simply two words for the same phenomenon, and hypnotism continued to be handicapped by many of the questionable associations and sensational, exhibitionist uses that had handicapped its predecessor. Besides, as we have seen, popular writers interested in the attractions of Mormonism used the terminology of hypnotism in the same general way that they had used that of mesmerism. In 1901, a hypnotist had been visiting the settlements in Emery County. This led someone to ask whether Latter-day Saints should participate in the experiments. The *Deseret News* answered:

> We say, most emphatically, that it is not right to engage in that practice, nor to come under its influence. There is no harm in fairly investigating the claims of hypnotism to be a science, or in learning what it is and does. But revelation is very clear as to the means to be employed in the Church, for

> the healing of the sick and the suppression of disease. When there is not sufficient faith to obtain relief, we are to nourish the sick with all tenderness, with herbs and mild foods but not from the hands of an enemy, and the Elders are to administer the ordinance provided for the purpose. . . .
> . . . it is not proper for Elders or members of this Church to experiment on people, in the fashion of the pretended "professors" who travel through the land as conjurors and stage performers, to astonish and draw money from the credulous. Let them alone.[64]

In addition to the inappropriateness of hypnotism as a means of treating illness and its use "to astonish and draw money from the credulous," there was another basic reason why Latter-day Saints were warned against it. As Apostle Francis M. Lyman explained in 1903:

> Hypnotism is a reality, and though some who claim to have this mysterious power are only tricksters, yet others do really hypnotise those who submit to them. From what I understand and have seen, I should advise you not to practise hypnotism. For my own part I could never consent to being hypnotised or allowing one of my children to be. The free agency that the Lord has given us is the choicest gift we have. As soon, however, as we permit another mind to control us, as that mind controls its own body and functions, we have completely surrendered our free agency to another; and so long as we are in the hypnotic spell—and that is as long as the hypnotist desires us to be—we give no consent in any sense whatever to anything we do. . . . Hypnotism is very much like the plan that Satan desired the Father to accept before this earth was peopled. He would make them do good and save them in spite of themselves. The Savior, on the other hand, proposed to give free agency to all, and save those who would accept salvation.[65]

Thus, abuses by the unethical and/or incompetent, the use of hypnotism as show business, the honest concern with the issue of free agency and skepticism of hypnosis as a healing power also led church leadership to oppose hypnosis. Moreover, the historical tie between mesmerism and hypnotism did not enhance the image of the latter. More recently the involvement of the ethically competent professional has doubtless played some role in the formation of a more neutral church position vis-à-vis hypnosis and the professional. In a letter addressed to Dr. Leslie Cooper on 7 October 1974, Church Com-

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[64] *Deseret News,* 29 January 1901.
[65] *Improvement Era,* April 1903.

missioner of Health, Dr. James O. Mason, noted that the First Presidency had cleared the following statement on hypnosis: "The Church regards the use of hypnosis under competent, professional supervision for the treatment of disease as wholly a medical question. The Church advises members against participation in hypnosis demonstrations."

Given the general rejection of mesmerism and hypnotism by Mormons (at least until the very recent cautious changes noted above), what stimulated writers to connect these with Mormonism? Mainly, we feel, they offered a naturalistic explanation of Joseph Smith's success as a leader, of the proselyting success of Mormonism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and of the miraculous healings and gifts that Mormons testified to. To portray the Mormons as foul and disgusting was not consistent with their success or the experience of those who heard the missionaries. To portray them as outwardly attractive or at least inoffensive while calling attention to their strange and mysterious powers of attraction seemed to combine a description with a warning. The "seduction" of converts was explained. A factor like "brainwashing" or mesmerism seemed at once to recognize the sincerity of many Mormons and to hold forth the promise that educational and social crusades might be the solution to the Mormon problem.[66] At least one ex-Mormon, Fanny Stenhouse, found the approach highly useful in describing her own experience: she could reproduce her early enthusiasm for the Mormon religion and even recognize the sincerity of other converts while offering a naturalistic explanation that in effect absolved her of responsibility for her early decisions. Finally, both Mormonism and mesmerism made good copy; to connect them capitalized on a widespread popular interest in the strange and exotic. If the two "delusions" could be simultaneously smeared by being brought into contact with one another, this was for many of the writers all to the good.

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[66]Gail Farr Casterline, " 'In The Toils' or 'Onward for Zion': Images of the Mormon Woman, 1852-1890," Master's thesis, Utah State University, 1974, p. 25.