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GODBEITES

The Godbeites were not simply another ephemeral Mormon dissenting group. Although their "New Movement" was designed to transform Mormonism in the late 1860s and early 1870s, it had less of an effect on religion than it had on the cultural, economic, intellectual, political, and social fabric of Utah Territory.

The group's direct and indirect bequests were many. Their independent journal, the Utah Magazine, was successively transformed into the Mormon Tribune and, later, the Salt Lake Tribune. As a result, the tradition of an independent non-Mormon press became a Utah reality. Their "Liberal Institute," perhaps Salt Lake City's largest hall during the 1870s, provided a forum for a stream of nationally and internationally renowned lecturers, who in conservative Utah spoke of "liberalism," "radical reform," and even "free thought spiritualism." Similar though smaller centers were established in Beaver, Cottonwood, Jordan, Logan, Mount Pleasant, Park City, and Ogden. Godbeite T.B.H. Stenhouse wrote a seminal Mormon and Utah history, *Rocky Mountain Saints* (1873), while his wife, Fanny, outraged by polygamy, penned the influential anti-Mormon tract, "Tell It All": *The Story of a Life Experience in Mormonism* (1872). Godbeites also challenged Brigham Young's prescriptions for a regulated economy and the avoidance of precious metals mining. Finally, the Godbeite Liberal party was Utah's first opposition political organization. Wrested from its founders' control and radicalized, it challenged the Mormon establishment from the early 1870s to the eve of Utah statehood.

The Godbeites formally declared their opposition to Brigham Young and Mormonism in October 1869. But movement had earlier roots. Its name came from London-born William S. Godbe. Twice shipwrecked as a youth, the sixteen-year-old Godbe walked to Utah following his conversion to Mormonism. He rose swiftly in the church. By the 1860s Godbe was a bishop's counselor, Brigham Young's friend and protégé, and, as owner of the Godbe Exchange Building that housed the Godbe-Mitchell drug and sundry business, was one of the territory's ten wealthiest men.

Godbe was drawn to E.L.T. Harrison, with whom he began a long-standing friendship and intellectual collaboration. Earlier, Harrison and Edward W. Tullidge published the mildly skeptical *Peep O'Day*, apparently the Intermountain West's first magazine. Increasingly, Godbe, Harrison, Tullidge, and others, including Eli B. Kelsey and William H. Shearman, met to discuss religious and public policy. The group was remarkably homogeneous. With the exception of Kelsey, all were British-born and carried with them the ideals of British debate and dissent. All had been merchants. Each described spiritual experiences that propelled him into Mormonism. Moreover, they had above-average education and literary ability, and were attuned to the intellectual currents of the age. Each also became increasingly skeptical of his Mormon faith.

The immediate irritant was Brigham Young's economic and social blueprint for the territory, which called for cooperation, unity, and the subjugation of public and private resources to the Mormon commonwealth. His countermeasures to the coming of the transcontinental railroad also increased their concern. While favoring the railroad, Young understood that it might destroy his ideal Zion. Accordingly, he urged wage deflation to preserve home industries, prohibited trade with non-Mormon merchants, and continued his sanctions against precious-metals mining. Godbe and his coterie were dismayed. They believed such measures were impractical and wrong-headed. They prevented Utah's cultural and economic integration with the East.

There was also a spiritual, or spiritualist, dimension to their dissent. In October 1868 Godbe and Harrison traveled to New York City, ostensibly for business and recreation. They apparently used the occasion to seek direction from a spiritualist medium, Charles Foster. Fifty s_{ances} followed, confirming their religious doubts and mandating a radical restructuring of Mormonism. "The whole superstructure of a grand system of theology was unfolded to our minds," Harrison later wrote. The system included a devaluation of the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, and the rejection of a personal deity, the literal resurrection, and the doctrine of the atonement.

Spiritualism was almost a perfect solution for the Godbeite doubters. Its parallels with Mormonism eased the pain involved in their transfer of commitment. Both movements affirmed the eternal nature of the individual and taught the validity of spiritual experience. Each had an upstate New York genesis. Moreover, their new spiritualistic view allowed Godbe and Morrison to validate their previous religious experiences. These now seemed mere preliminaries to their new, higher revelation. There also was an additional advantage: nineteenth-century spiritualism had a liberal, intellectual content that fit the Godbeite mood.

Returning to Utah, Godbe and Harrison at first chose not to emphasize their refined religious views. Instead, the two founded the Utah Magazine and increasingly used the forum to call in question Brigham Young's temporal policy. Their converts included T.B.H. Stenhouse, editor of the pro-Mormon Salt Lake Telegraph, and his wife Fanny; John Tullidge, musician brother of Edward; Fred A. Perris, merchant; Joseph Salisbury, labor leader and writer; George Watt, church recorder and formerly Brigham Young's personal secretary; and Henry Lawrence, partner in a leading Salt Lake City merchandising firm.

By early October 1869 there was no longer a question about the magazine's tone. Church officials apparently issued a caution, and followed it with mission calls to Harrison, Kelsey, and Shearman, apparently to test or renew their commitment to the Mormon Church. Several weeks later, the Utah Magazine answered with "The True Development of the Territory," an essay that argued for Utah mineral development. More than expressing a difference of opinion, it meant to force the issue by publicly repudiating Brigham Young's leadership. Indeed, the New York séance revelations promised that the issue of mining would be the means of overthrowing the Mormon theocracy. The Godbeite leaders were excommunicated on 25 October 1869.

At first the New Movement looked formidable, bringing together Godbeite intellectuals and several prominent anti-Mormon merchants in a "reform" of Mormonism. A "Church of Zion" was organized. Relying on the Mormon organizational model, Godbe and Harrison proclaimed themselves "counselors" in the First Presidency and vainly hoped that Joseph Smith III, the son of Mormonism's founding prophet, might assume primary leadership. That role eventually went to Amasa Lyman, a disfellowshipped Mormon apostle. But the Godbeite Church, never more than several hundred strong, floundered when faced with the increasingly frank religious expressions of its leaders. Their "advanced" and spiritualistic theology simply had little appeal. The Godbeites did not gainsay the obvious and conceded their "church" was simply a vehicle for broad religious association. Eventually, the phrases and topics of traditional religion were quietly dropped and left behind.

This spirit characterized Godbeite reform. With the exception of the books of the Stenhouses, the tone of their reform was respectful and moderate--at least in comparison with previous Mormon dissenter agitation. Not until the Tribune and the Liberal Party passed out of Godbeite hands did those institutions become strident. The Liberal Institute, the Godbeites' last refuge, continued to argue into the middle 1880s for cultural pluralism and the integration of Utah with the American mainstream. At their institute, itinerant mediums and "harmonial" lecturers provided a continuing counterpoint to Utah's prevailing culture, even embracing such daring causes as racial and sexual equality and a prescient theory of governmental social intervention.

See: Ronald W. Walker, "The Commencement of the Godbeite Protest: Another View," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 42 (Summer 1974); and Walker, "When the Spirits Did Abound: Nineteenth-Century Utah's Encounter With Free-Thought Radicalism," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 50 (Fall 1982); Walker, "Edward Tullidge: Historian of the Mormon Commonwealth," *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976); and Walker, "The Stenhouses and the Making of a Mormon Image," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974); Walker, "The Keep-A-Pitchinin: Or the Mormon Pioneer Was Human," *Brigham Young University Studies* 14 (Spring 1974); and Walker, "The Liberal Institute: A Case Study in National Assimilation," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10 (Autumn 1977); Beverly Beeton, "I Am an American Woman: Charlotte Ives Cobb Godbe Kirby," *Journal of the West* 27 (April 1988); Davis Bitton, "Mormonism's Encounter With Spiritualism," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974); and Ronald G. Watt, "Sailing The Old Ship Zion: The Life of George D. Watt," *Brigham Young University Studies* 18 (Fall 1977).

Ronald Walker