“LIBERTY TO THE DOWNTRODDEN”

Thomas L. Kane, Romantic Reformer

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old her that she had grown “prettier and darker and your eyebrows fatter and fuller limbed.” Soon after, again. 46

ed Elizabeth’s theory of women’s roles after the birth of Elisha in 1856, as give insight not only into their personal dialogues over fashion, sexuality, and the sometimes inevitable, these tensions should not be devoted to each other, as mate letters that flowed between young bride, Elizabeth clearly felt in its beginning. As strong-willed evidence to assert herself (not only their relationship; as she became more assertive, her plan to space their children of marriage along the lines she adopted during Thomas’s life—an 1874 men in polygamous relationships, elaborate her “Theory.” Nevertheless, reform projects in several ways. As a child in his efforts to grappling in and teenagers. Her decision to reinforce his identity on the marriage and Elizabeth encouraged each gender, marriage, and family. The story out of the public eye. In 1857, of a maelstrom that would make

THE UTAH WAR, ACT I

Conflicts that threaten, but ultimately fall short of, war quickly fade from memory. There are no heroes to revere, no commemoratory speeches to make, no battlegrounds to hallow. But these “wars” can be tremendously revealing of a society’s assumptions, attitudes, and priorities. In 1857, newly inaugurated president James Buchanan, upon receiving reports of an alleged Mormon rebellion against federal authorities in Utah, dispatched an army (eventually led by future Confederate general Albert Sidney Johnston) with the limited goals of replacing Brigham Young as governor of Utah and compelling the Saints’ submission to national power. In a broader sense, though, the episode—known as the Utah Expedition or the Utah War—was made possible by the national antagonism toward Mormonism. Indeed, Buchanan’s decision to send an army to Utah, with popular acclaim and bipartisan support, illustrates the limits of nineteenth-century American tolerance of religious difference. Dissent was acceptable within certain boundaries, and heated infighting flourished within American Protestantism during the antebellum era. However, the denial of certain fundamental cultural values, particularly republican government and monogamous family structure, placed Mormons outside of these boundaries and rendered them a target for federal action. 1

The meaning of the Utah War to Americans in the 1850s has been obscured by the shooting war that began at Fort Sumter three years later. Historians typically view the 1850s as the prelude to war; events of that decade must be either preparatory to the sectional conflict or stricken from the textbooks. Such has been the fate of the largely forgotten Utah War, the largest military expedition between the Mexican-American War and the Civil War, even though at the time the conflict captured Americans’ attention and imagination as much as
the events in Bleeding Kansas. Moreover, the events in Utah and Kansas were not unrelated. The oncoming sectional crisis provided the context in which the embattled Buchanan administration decided to send the federal army. Some politicians at the time explicitly connected the two, suggesting that Buchanan's administration cynically saw Utah as a diversionary tactic from the Kansas massacre. Robert Tyler, son of former president John Tyler and a prominent Pennsylvania Democrat, urged Buchanan to move against Mormon Utah in April 1857: "I believe that we can supersede the Negro-Mania [in Kansas] with the almost universal excitement of an Anti-Mormon Crusade." The Utah Expedition promised to unite a nation increasingly divided over slavery.

For most Americans, however, an "Anti-Mormon Crusade" had a logic independent of sectional animosity. Many followed Buchanan in advocating a military response to quell the Saints' reported defiance of federal authority. Nevertheless, most Americans supported the Utah War because of their animosity toward Mormonism. Driven in large part by the culture of evangelical religion and reform, American ministers, politicians, and newspapers focused as much on Mormon religion—especially polygamy, theocratic ambitions of the hierarchy, and allegations of religiously inspired violence—as they did on the treatment of federal officials and the rule of law in Utah. In the name of reform, evangelicals campaigned for a swift, decisive, coercive, and, if necessary, violent solution to the Mormon Question.

For Kane, the Utah War raised fundamental questions about the toleration of religious difference in a pluralistic democracy. From his earliest association with the Mormons, Kane foresaw a potential collision between the Saints and the nation that might provoke the federal government to send an army against them. He feared such a possibility in 1846, and during the controversy involving the "runaway" officials in 1851–52, Kane worried that "a Proconsul, and at least one Regiment of Dragoons or Mounted Rifles" might be sent to Utah. When such a crisis occurred in 1857–58, he traveled to Utah, with private support from Buchanan, and orchestrated a truce between federal officials and Mormon leaders. Ultimately, Kane helped preserve peace in Utah, though the question of the boundaries of acceptable religious dissent in the United States remained (indeed, remain) unresolved. The war's consequences long reverberated in Mormon and western history, reinforcing the Saints' sense of persecution and setting the stage for another five decades of clashes between the Mormons and the federal government. Nevertheless, Kane's mediation ensured that the Mormon Question would be solved in the courts and Congress, not on the battlefield.

Kane's intervention required all of his creative powers. His personal qualifications—well-known devotion to the Mormons, social status, and allegiance to the
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Democratic Party—uniquely positioned him as the only American of promi-
ence who could claim credibility with both the Saints and the Buchanan ad-
ministration. Furthermore, his wanderlust and daring (or reckless) personality
conditioned him to undertake a perilous journey from which most of his friends
and family tried to dissuade him. His sense of himself as a romantic reformer also
propelled his mission. “Others,” he wrote in his diary, “may respect me less for
being alone in the defence of a despised and injured people—but I respect my-
self more.””4 A conversion to Christianity before his departure convinced Kane
that God mandated his intercession for peace. Envisioning himself as shaping
events from behind the scenes, Kane concocted elaborate plots that mixed in-
trigue with manipulation. He carefully constructed narratives that at times bore
little relation to reality but yet proved tremendously influential, as he spun the
government’s actions to the Saints and the Mormons’ positions to Buchanan,
new Utah governor Alfred Cumming, and the press.

Kane’s own exact view of events is difficult to decipher, as he purposely ob-
served his personal role and deftly acted as an agent for both the Buchanan
administration and the Mormons. Although he sought to protect Mormon lib-
erties, he did not simply follow the Mormon party line. Rather, he viewed him-
self as mediating between the excesses of both sides, as he saw the Mormons as
rebellious schoolchildren who needed reproofing and the government as a cruel
schoolmaster who needed tempering.5 During the conflict, he acted as an adviser
and ghostwrote letters for both Young and Cumming. After the war, affectionate
letters passed between him and Young, carefully plotting strategy, while he pub-
licly claimed to desire an end to his association with the Saints. Publicly, Kane
praised Buchanan and Cumming, while privately he saw himself and Young
as the true peacemakers. Baffled, the national press engaged in a lively debate
over his true intentions—whether he acted as an official government agent, a
humanitarian acting on his own principles, or a Mormon spy. Preferring to pull
levers from out of view, Kane ironically found himself a celebrity after the Utah
War, though he obstinately refused to capitalize on his newfound fame. While
the documentary record is voluminous, it must be handled with care, not only to
separate Kane’s spin from reality, but also to invest the meaning and power of
the narratives he created.

After Kane’s campaigns on behalf of the Saints during the late 1840s and
early 1850s, his involvement with the Mormons dwindled. Other priorities—
total slavery, marriage and children, his legal career—occupied most of his atten-
tion during the 1850s. At least a few Mormon leaders stated, perhaps with some
cause, that Kane’s distaste for plural marriage led him to distance himself. In
December 1857, Utah congressional delegate John Bernhisel commented that
Kane "of late years has treated us very coldly; we think on account of our religion which we all very much regret." Bernhisel's assessment exaggerated Kane's detachment from the Saints (and may merely have been a ruse to convince outsiders of his continued status as a disinterested humanitarian). Throughout the 1850s, Kane kept up a warm correspondence with Young and tried to intervene politically for the Mormons at various times. Young hoped that Kane would use his press contacts to place Mormonism within the context of reform. If Horace
Greeley could “once get a glimpse at the truth and recognize in our system a great moral and social reform,” Young thought “he might perhaps advocate our admission” as a state.⁶

Kane particularly lobbied to influence the selection of Utah territorial officials. In 1854, President Franklin Pierce considered replacing Young as governor. Rumors abounded that Pierce would select a non-Mormon, most probably Lieutenant Colonel Edward Jenner Steptoe, then in Utah en route to California with three hundred soldiers and civilians. Though severely ill, Kane pleaded with Pierce to reappoint Young. He starkly presented Pierce’s dilemma: “accepting the unanimous choice of a large American constituency” or “adopting the principle of monarchy and centralism by naming a Viceroy or Governor-General over the Mormons as a subject people.” As no faithful Saint would accept the governorship in Young’s place, Pierce would be forced to decide between “some Utah dissident or excommunicated unfortunate” or a non-Mormon. The Saints would ardently oppose the former course, and Utah held little draw for qualified outsiders (especially since former officials had already glutted the market with Mormon exponents). Furthermore, Young’s polygamy should not disqualify him, Kane wrote, as it was a purely private, religious matter. Kane thus shrewdly appealed to two fundamental Democratic principles: local self-government and religious liberty. Given his refusal to interfere with southern slavery and his protection of the religious rights of Catholics, Pierce’s own principles naturally dictated Young’s reappointment. Such a move would not only retain an effective governor, Kane reasoned, but would implement key tenets of the antebellum Democracy.⁷

Eager to benefit from Kane’s political connections and experience on a more consistent basis, Young asked him in October 1854 to become Utah’s congressional delegate as well as Young’s personal “business agent at Washington.” Bernhisel quickly assured Kane of his willingness to step aside. Should Kane accept, Young would provide him with traveling expenses to establish Utah residency and arrange the election (“you know this people well enough to be certain that they will vote as they may be counselled”). Kane refused, both praising Bernhisel’s effectiveness and asserting that an official connection with the Mormons would diminish his ability to help the Saints, which depended on his image as an impartial outsider. While declining Young’s offer, Kane continued to lobby for his reappointment; when the dust settled, Steptoe had rejected the nomination and Young remained in his post without an official reappointment.⁸

A series of other irritants—continued uproar over plural marriage, conflicts over Indian affairs, complaints over mail service—troubled Mormon-federal relations even in the comparatively peaceful period between 1852 and 1855. The
deaths of two of the three territorial federal justices in 1855, both of whom had proved friendly to the Saints, heightened tensions, as the new appointees, particularly William W. Drummond, clashed immediately with the Mormons. Besides offending local sensibilities by sharing his judicial bench with a prostitute he had brought from Washington after abandoning his family, Drummond tried to restrict the powers of Utah’s probate courts. Seemingly an arcane battle over judicial jurisdictions, Drummond’s efforts directly challenged the Saints’ domination of Utah, as the territorial legislature had given the Mormon-controlled probate courts exceptional authority over criminal and civil matters, allowing the Saints to bypass the territorial federal courts on most issues.8

Other disputes between outside federal officials, who now held most of the important Utah positions, and Mormon leaders also increased tensions. Appointees claimed the Saints undermined the relationship of Indians with the federal government and obstructed federal surveys of Utah lands (which Mormons feared could be used as a pretext for mass evictions as Utah’s residents were technically still squatters). In 1856, a religious revival ignited by Kane’s former coauthor Jedediah M. Grant, now a member of the First Presidency, blazed through Utah. Known as the Reformation, the movement accelerated Mormons’ separatist tendencies and predisposed them even further to view events through an apocalyptic lens. The Mormon mindset of persecution, their millennial worldview, and the fiery rhetoric of their leaders created a cauldron of suspicion, fear, and resistance in Utah. The final straw for many of the federal officials came on the night of December 29, 1856, when Mormons raided the office of one of Drummond’s associate justices, excommunicated Saint George P. Stiles, who had also tried to wrestle control of the local judiciary away from Mormon hands. Stiles arrived to find at least some of his judicial papers and law books smoldering in his privy, while the Mormons had disappeared with the rest. As in 1851, an exodus of federal officials ensued; by April 1857, all but one of the key non-Mormon officials had left. Most returned to Washington, where they fed an eager press and public a steady diet of stories of Mormon atrocities. Led by Drummond, the officials alleged the existence of a Mormon rebellion that had defied their authority and threatened their lives.9

Kane heard the Mormon perspective when Young sent him two letters in January 1857 complaining about the federal officials and, with more faith than foresight, expressing hope that the incoming Buchanan administration, to which he presumed Kane had close ties, would prove friendly to the Saints. After asking Kane to lobby the new administration to allow him to remain governor, Young blamed the current friction on the outside officials. In his view, they came to Utah feeling “they are some pumpkins,”—big with the idea of office, they come...
utices in 1855, both of whom had ties, as the new appointees, immediately with the Mormons. Be-cause its judicial bench with a prostitute ning his family, Drummond tried. Seemingly an arcane battle over the control of the Mormon-controlled affairs, often absent, would their patronage to turn Native Americans against the Mormons, and published “every idle report” about the Saints “for the entertaintment of the wiseacres at Washington.” “If they had the power,” Young concluded, they “would cut our throats.” Even the few friendly officials had been sufficiently acquainted with their ways” and “are bound up in the strong traditions, forms, and technicalities.” Reflecting the Mormons’ growing defiance, Young threatened: “Why not kick them out of the Territory say you? That’s just it, we intend to, the very first opportunity.” In Young’s mind, only statehood—with its election of local officials—or the consistent appointment of Mormons to the territorial positions would solve the constant discord.

Young’s request for Kane’s assistance arrived at a particularly inopportune moment. Elisha, triumphant after the reception of his wildly popular book on his Arctic travels, had traveled to England in October 1856 to save his rapidly failing health. By November, he had weakened and sailed for Cuba where Thomas met him on Christmas Day. Jane and John Jr. also went to Havana, and the trio anxiously watched as Elisha lingered before dying on February 16, 1857. An instant outpouring of grief swept through the United States, and the slow procession of Elisha’s body home to Philadelphia, accompanied by Thomas and other family members, became a major cultural event. Newspapers covered the event in minute detail, cities competed to host ever more elaborate ceremonies, and huge numbers of Americans mourned the fallen hero, stricken down in his prime. Though Elisha added little of lasting value to scientific knowledge, he had captured (with the help of his brother’s promotions) the nation’s imagination and was extolled as a “true martyr to science.” Following major stops in New Orleans, Louisville, Cincinnati, Columbus, and Baltimore, the Kanes finally arrived in Philadelphia on March 12 where Elisha’s body lay at Independence Hall before its interment. One banner proclaimed the dominant mood, “Science Weeps, Humanity Weeps, the World Weeps.”

Elisha’s death spun Thomas into a depression and diverted his attention away from Mormon affairs during the crucial months of Buchanan’s decision-making. Apparently to vindicate his brother’s theories of the Arctic, including the existence of an open sea at the North Pole, Thomas proposed an Arctic voyage for himself in late March. Shocked, the Kanes dissuaded him. John Jr. lauded Thomas’s “big soul” but cautioned that it “would kill him to go.” In April and May, Elizabeth chronicled her husband’s descent into depression. She painfully noted, “Tom looks worse and worse as the weeks go by,” though she prayed, “Oh
my darling, may God bring you out of this fiery furnace of trouble a happy Christian.” While Elisha’s death initially distracted Thomas from the Utah crisis, it may have spurred his later actions. Feeling the weight of carrying the Kane name after living his entire life in Elisha’s shadow may have disposed him to pursue his course in the Utah War (which most of his family and friends viewed as foolhardy). Elisha had first come to the nation’s attention, through Thomas’s unrelenting marketing, after embarking on a dangerous assignment as carrier of a secret presidential message from James Polk to his military commanders in Mexico during the negotiations to end the Mexican-American War. Not coincidentally, Thomas left on a similar mission—complete with presidential instructions, mystery, a hazardous journey, and opportunities for heroism—the same year the nation mourned his older brother.

Though preoccupied with the aftermath of Elisha’s death, Thomas made some attempts to lobby Buchanan in March. While Young expected that Kane would wield substantial influence on Buchanan, the Kanes had actually been longtime rivals of Buchanan in Pennsylvania politics. As leaders of different branches of the Pennsylvania Democracy, John Kane and Buchanan had a combative political history. The two men respected each other—Buchanan described John as a “respectable & intelligent man” and as a “gentleman and a man of honour”—and they collaborated at times. For the most part, however, they clashed. Thomas recognized that Buchanan “had never known [me] except as his opponent in our State.”

Inaugurated in March 1857, Buchanan felt considerable pressure to confront the problems in Utah. During the 1856 campaign, Republicans had tied together the “twin relics of barbarism”—slavery and polygamy—that both nationalized the Mormon Question and entangled it with sectional politics. As Kansas bled, Republicans tried to taint the Democratic principle of popular sovereignty by connecting it with polygamy. A tough stance on Utah by a Democrat like Buchanan would mute Republican attacks and protect the broader principle of popular sovereignty from association with polygamy and Mormonism. As the complaints of Utah’s territorial officials captured the attention of the press and public, politicians of both parties flocked to the anti-Mormon standard. Even Democratic senator Stephen Douglas, a former ally of the Mormons, called for Congress to “apply the knife and cut out this loathsome, disgusting ulcer.”

To counteract this groundswell, Kane echoed to Buchanan Young’s complaints about the “misconduct” of Utah’s officials. Appealing to the president’s pragmatic side, he argued that the Saints were ideally situated to assist with the construction of a transcontinental railroad, a “possible achievement for your administration.” While admitting that the Utah problems were “exasperating and in
tricate" as well as politically treacherous, Kane asked Buchanan to consult with him "before taking order upon the affairs of Utah." Recognizing the difficulty of securing Young's wish of a full slate of Mormon officials, Kane concentrated once again on securing the governorship. He also used his ties with the new attorney general, Jeremiah Black, a Pennsylvania Democrat and a friend of Judge Kane, to urge Young's reappointment and to discredit Drummond and the other territorial officials. However, the political atmosphere conspired against Kane's attempts to sway public policy. Mormon William Appleby, an experienced observer of the national political scene, reported to Young, "I have never perceived such an acrimonious spirit prevailing against the Mormons." 16

Kane's lobbying abruptly ended when he "considered himself insulted" by the Buchanan administration. He believed that unnamed anti-Mormons within the administration had turned over to the press his correspondence with the president. Indeed, the New York Times published a scathing front-page letter on Kane written by "Veratus," a correspondent from Washington generally believed to be Drummond, who clearly had access to Kane's letter. Dismissing Kane as a "young man" who had been "cajoled and fed and pampered by the Mormons," Veratus charged that he had consistently misrepresented Mormonism to the nation. Furthermore, his knowledge of the current situation was second-hand, filtered through Mormon leaders, and belied by the experience of the federal appointees. "Certainly nothing but a blind and fanatical zeal for a false doctrine, and false devotion to false believers," Veratus raied, could explain Kane's actions. Veratus concluded with a threat: "As soon as he lectures the President on his duties on Mormonism, I may refer to him again, but trust the necessity will not exist." Blaming (probably with good reason) the negative press on opponents within Buchanan's administration, Kane interpreted the situation as a "personal indignity" to his honor and temporarily cut his ties with the administration. 17

Nevertheless, Buchanan did not lack for advisers; within his cabinet, Secretary of War John B. Floyd led those who argued for forcible action, while Attorney General Black spoke for moderates who favored a more conciliatory approach. Buchanan, however, did not send an official investigation to determine the extent of the Mormon "rebellion," nor did he consult with army general in chief Winfield Scott until mid-to-late May or with congressional leaders (in recess from early March to early December) at all. Remarkably, Buchanan made no public statement on Utah until his first presidential message in December 1857. Much earlier, by late March or early April, he had probably opted for an aggressive position—to replace Young and appoint a new slate of federal officials to be escorted to Utah by a federal army—and he solidified his plans in May. Several factors motivated Buchanan. The national outcry over Mormon polygamy
and theocracy established the necessary context. In addition, the opportunity to protect the principle of popular sovereignty, which Republicans had tried to undercut by linking slavery with polygamy, proved attractive. Finally, the charges of Utah’s territorial officials, and the resulting pressure from the nation’s newspapers, catalyzed Buchanan’s decision.  

On May 21, Kane warned Young of the impending crisis. “We can place no reliance upon the President,” as “he succumbs in more respects than one to outside pressure.” Indeed, Kane scorned, “Buchanan has not heart enough to save his friends from being thrown over to stop the mouths of a pack of Yankee editors.” He hoped to persuade Buchanan to postpone the appointment of a new governor until after the summer, though Buchanan was actively seeking candidates. By July, after several more prominent candidates refused the position, Buchanan selected Alfred Cumming, a fifty-five-year-old Georgian who had been mayor of Atlanta, a sutler in the Mexican-American War, and superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis. The president’s Post Office Department also canceled the mail contract of the Brigham Young Express and Garrying Company, a new firm designed to carry both mail and goods between Missouri and the Salt Lake Valley into which the Saints had sunk tremendous resources over the previous year.  

As Buchanan dispensed orders and the army began preparations, Kane and his family left for the Alleghenies, arriving in late June, where they spent the summer seemingly unencumbered by worries about Utah. After receiving Kane’s letter warning of possible federal action, Young replied in late June. Blaming the agitation on Drummond and “some two or three irresponsible and anonymous letter writers” in Utah who had “humbugged” the press, he predicted that the affair would blow over once “they find that Mormon hierarchy has not slain all the respectable gentry or Mormon oppression had pressed them out.” Federal troops “will find nothing to fight if they come.” Even so, the Saints feared that the government would refuse to “extend their favorite doctrine of popular sovereignty to Utah” and would instead “operate against us upon the charges of rebellion, insubordination &c all of which I need not tell you are foul and malignant falsehoods.”  

While Kane’s letter gave Young a sense of Buchanan’s direction, confirmation of the president’s decision arrived in Utah in dramatic (perhaps staged) fashion as the Saints gathered to celebrate the tenth anniversary of their arrival in the Salt Lake Valley at a gathering up Big Cottonwood Canyon. Mormon leaders struck a defiant stance, spurred by a millennial belief that Buchanan’s actions would catalyze the destructive events immediately preceding Christ’s Second Coming. Heber C. Kimball, a member of the First Presidency, exclaimed: “God Almighty
helping me, I will fight until there is not a drop of blood in my veins... I have wives enough to whip out the United States." Since Buchanan had not officially notified Young of his replacement, Young seized on the legal technicality to declare the federal troops to be illegitimate, order the Saints to take defensive actions, and proclaim martial law. He recalled Mormon missionaries and Saints in outlying settlements like San Bernardino, California, and Carson Valley, Nevada (then western Utah). The territorial militia, known as the Nauvoo Legion, began stockpiling weapons and constructing fortifications in the canyons descending into Salt Lake City. As the rhetoric of defiance soared, a branch of the Mormon militia in southern Utah, acting without orders from leaders in Salt Lake City and assisted by local Indians, attacked a wagon train of Arkansas emigrants headed for southern California and slaughtered more than 120 individuals, sparing only small children, in the Mountain Meadows Massacre.21

Meanwhile, the Utah Expedition left Fort Leavenworth in mid-July, hoping to march into Salt Lake City before winter. In September, an army officer traveled ahead to Utah to obtain quartermaster contracts, but he left empty-handed and convinced of the Mormons' determination to resist interference. To hamper the army's advance, units of the Nauvoo Legion harassed the troops by burning supply trains and prairie grass needed for the army's animals. Besides these delaying tactics, the military's intention to reach Utah before winter was doomed by a late start, bureaucratic bungling, and lack of effective leadership until the arrival of Albert Sidney Johnston (though appointed in August, Johnston did not reach his troops until November). The federal army established winter quarters in present-day Wyoming at Camp Scott near Fort Bridger (which Mormon soldiers, claiming legal ownership of the fort, had torched). Embarrassed by the Mormons' raids and huddled near the burned ruins during a frigid winter on half-rations, the soldiers could do little but vow revenge on the Saints.22

Kane later admitted that he had underestimated the seriousness of the Utah situation during the summer of 1857. Upon arriving in Philadelphia for the winter on October 3, he found a letter from Samuel W. Richards, a trusted Saint whom Young had sent to visit Kane the previous month. Kane later recalled his surprise at learning from Richards's message that the "Mormons were determined to resist our troops and were, the most staid and reliable men among them, in an exceedingly unhappy and disreputable state of mind." In his accusations of government persecution and avowals of resistance, Richards reflected the Saints' current mood, which starkly contrasted with Young's June letter. Richards groaned that the "extremely hostile" nation would "in all probability... make an effort to break us up in the Mountains." The Saints, he declared, would "never submit" to interference with their religion, and the government's
policy would "hasten the day when our oppressors shall cease to have power over us."²³

Young also wrote Kane in September and sounded similar themes. Portraying the Mormons as aggrieved victims, he exclaimed that Buchanan’s administration had trampled the Constitution in its campaign to crush the Saints. Young wrote of the Mormon resolve to resist “to the last extremity” the nation’s attempts to quash their religious liberty and “hang, shoot, burn, debauch, lay waste, drive and destroy us as in times past.” Young’s millennialism contributed to his mindset, and he invited Kane to ride out the coming storm with the Saints. If the government attacked Utah, God’s vengeance would “also break upon the whole Country... Then come with all your household and receive the just recompense of daring to speak, act and feel in behalf of an innocent but much abused people.” On the day Young composed this letter—one day after the Mountain Meadows Massacre but before news of it had arrived in Salt Lake City—he also wrote to Mormon Jeter Clinton in Philadelphia. The contrast between the two letters indicates that Young still perceived Kane as an outsider. To Clinton, Young even more militantly warned that if he stopped restraining the Native Americans of the West, “the war cry will resound” and transcontinental migration west of the Missouri River would come to a halt. What Young told Clinton (but not Kane) was that the federal government would have to make peace with the Saints or face the “knife and tomahawk” of the Indians.²⁴

In early November, Kane visited Buchanan in Washington but found the president “reluctant to admit that he had committed any error.” Buchanan brushed aside Kane’s warnings of the potentially disastrous consequences of a military engagement. Kane toyed with the idea of traveling to Utah but concluded “that it was too late in the Season.” Financial and family pressures also engrossed Kane’s attention during the fall. The nationwide financial panic of 1857 reduced his own diminishing resources; on October 26, Elizabeth wrote, “Tom and I have been fretting about the way to live.” Kane had still hoped to undertake an Arctic expedition, but the crisis delivered a “crushing blow” to any possibility he could organize such a voyage. Furthermore, the panic triggered an emotional and physical breakdown of his merchant father-in-law William Wood, whose firm failed. To aid in Wood’s recovery, Thomas and Elizabeth insisted that he and his family temporarily move to Philadelphia, and the Woods stayed there from mid-November to mid-December. Kane’s health problems also flared, and Elizabeth noted his “wretched health” and the “strain he had given his back at lifting, so that he often fainted with the pain!”²⁵

Elizabeth did not write in her diary from November 3 to December 24, when she recorded, “I cannot write about all the horrors we have passed through since
sounded similar themes. Portraying Buchanan's administration as one to crush the Saints, Young wrote in an extremity to Utah, trying to drive them to their knees and receive the just recompense of an innocent but much abused people—one day after the Mountain had arrived in Salt Lake City—he deplorably contrasted the treatment of the Indians.

In Washington, Buchanan brushed aside the consequences of a military adventure to Utah but concluded "that it may have its just consequences and engrossed Kane's financial panic of 1857 reduced his fortune. Elizabeth wrote, "Tom and I have still hopes of an Arcadian adventure" to any possibility he had, as the panic triggered an emotional reaction in William Wood, whose mother and Elizabeth insisted that he must divorce, and the woods stayed there. His health problems also flared, and the "strain he had been under in the past." 23

November 3 to December 24, when we have passed through since I wrote last." Even so, "God has mercifully brought out of them one great blessing already, in uniting Tom and me in the bonds of a common faith." Thomas's conversion to Christianity occurred in the opening stages of a much-vaunted religious revival that swept large northern cities, including Philadelphia, in late 1857 and 1858. Often labeled a "businessmen's revival," it brought large numbers of urban, professional men, like Thomas, into the churches. Any connection with the revival, however, remains conjecture. In all the voluminous records, Elizabeth and Thomas kept, neither detailed the events that prompted his religious change, except to assert a vague connection with Wood's breakdown. Juxtaposed against their usual loquaciousness, this silence raises intriguing questions.

Had Kane, so suspicious of evangelicalism, become caught up in a revival? Had he finally capitulated to the combined entreaties of Elizabeth and her father? Did the potential dangers of the journey to Utah he was considering stimulate soul-searching? More cynically, had he converted to win Elizabeth's support for a quixotic adventure in the dead of winter? The exact combination of larger context, family pressures, mystical experience, intellectual assent to Christian doctrine, and concern for his personal mortality remain unknowable. But both Thomas and Elizabeth saw his conversion as genuine and interpreted his intervention in the Utah War as divinely inspired.

As Wood's condition improved, Kane's thoughts again turned westward. News of the Nauvoo Legion's successful raids against the military's supplies and the reality that the army would not reach Utah that winter had created an uproar and raised the specter of real bloodshed. Buchanan thus asked Congress to send four more regiments to Utah in his annual address on December 8, and the chain of events prompted Kane to resurrect his plan to travel there. The day after Buchanan's address, U.S. Attorney James C. Van Dyke, a Philadelphian and one of the president's closest advisers, wrote Buchanan urging consideration of Kane's plans. Van Dyke announced Kane's offer "to make an expedition to Salt Lake this winter, even at his own expense, if hostilities have not advanced to such a point as would render useless any efforts on his part." Citing Kane's experience in a similar quasi-governmental role during Polk's administration, Van Dyke optimistically noted Kane's influence with Young and the Mormons. He encouraged Buchanan to consult with Kane, who "is full of courage, and if his judgment is correct, he may be able to avert a war of extermination against a poor deluded race." 27

On December 23, Kane and Van Dyke left for Washington to meet with Buchanan personally. Elizabeth recorded, "Tom thinks he may be of service to Him by bringing about a peace between Utah & the U.S." Van Dyke met first with Buchanan, who skeptically questioned Kane's plan, calling it "fraught with
dangers and difficulties on all sides," especially since he doubted that Kane could reach Utah that winter. Pressing for support, Van Dyke informed Buchanan that Kane had decided to go regardless of the president's approval, though his success might depend on the "sanction and approbation of the Administration." 28

On Buchanan's request, Van Dyke and Kane visited Bernhisel, who expressed his own qualms about Kane's proposal. Bernhisel told Kane that he feared the Mormons in the "outer settlements" had "arrived at such a point of hostility to the United States that they would sacrifice you if they discovered your design in visiting them." Kane's safety would be assured only if he reached Salt Lake, because of the "kind feelings of Gov. Young and the better class of the people towards you personally." While the delegate favored a conciliatory approach, he worried that his coreligionists would "resist to the last." The Mormons, Bernhisel predicted, would avoid pitched battles but continue to attack the army's supplies, "and by various annoyances to our army keep up a protracted war and greatly embarrass this Government." Bernhisel and Van Dyke agreed such a course would "eventually prove disastrous to the Mormon people." Bernhisel, however, gave Kane a slight hope for success, as there "was no person here nor there who could exercise such a wholesome influence." Even so, he lamented Kane's timing. Earlier intervention by Kane might have persuaded the Saints "to return to their allegiance to the U.S.," but the preparations for war had hardened the Mormons' position and the window of opportunity, in Bernhisel's view, had likely passed. "So great was the danger" that Kane, despite the slender hopes, was not "justified in making the effort." Seizing on Bernhisel's few positive comments, Van Dyke reported back to Buchanan of Kane's potential influence with the Saints and "made a favorable impression upon him [Buchanan]." 29

The day after Christmas, Kane accompanied Van Dyke to the White House. He recalled, the "President received me in a manner for which, thinking it over, I don't intend to forget that I ought to be grateful." Buchanan intimated some openness to Kane's proposal but nevertheless urged him to "give up all thought of an enterprise which he assured him must be vain, rash and foolhardy and which promised no other possible result than the sacrifice of his own life which would be added to the weight of the public indignation against the unfortunate Mormons." Elizabeth charged that Buchanan only "protested feebly" against Kane's efforts, in reality hoping Kane could solve his predicament. Fearing the possible destruction of the army, Buchanan "saw that blame for pusillanimity would fall upon the Old Public Functionary [Buchanan's nickname] who had hesitated so long and then acted so late." In any case, Kane reiterated that he intended to travel to Utah and the "only question" for Buchanan was whether to equip him with the "proper means of influence there." When Buchanan ac-
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quiesced and offered him an official appointment, Kane refused, explaining that a position as a “Government agent” would compromise his influence with the Saints. He also declined Buchanan’s suggestion to accept government compensation for his “services” or traveling expenses.

Kane envisioned himself as a broker between the Mormons and the federal government, rather than as an agent or advocate for either. According to Elizabeth, he

plited the Mormons and thought them unjustly accused. At the same time he felt that “Discipline must be maintained!” Like boys in school too long oppressed, they had mutinied. . . . They felt they were stronger than the miserable usher whose duty it was to enter that school-room and govern them — and whom they had locked up in the map closet. . . . To Colonel Kane was presented the problem whether he could induce the boys to open the door them-selves, and admit the ushers of their own free will. He thought he could do it, but it must be in his own way. He would not have the boys’ fine spirit, which he admired, humbled. They must be treated as he thought fair.

In an effort to protect the Mormons’ “fine spirit” while encouraging them to admit Cumming and the army, Kane would carry the following peace proposal to Young: a pardon for the Mormons in exchange for accepting Cumming as governor and allowing the federal army to create a military camp in Utah. Should Kane fail, the unofficial nature of his mission would make it easy for Buchanan to disavow his efforts.

On December 31, Buchanan sent Kane three letters. In the first personal letter, he again suggested a “reconsideration” of Kane’s plan but continued: “If you go, may Heaven protect you! The purity of your motives & the energy of your character are beyond all question.” In the second short letter of introduction, meant for federal officials, Buchanan directed any officers of the government he might encounter to assist him. The third and most extensive letter, designed for Mormon leaders, described Kane’s motivations as “pure philanthropy & a strong desire to serve the Mormon people.” As Kane had requested, Buchanan made clear that he traveled at his “own expense & without official position.” In Kane’s eyes, however, Buchanan went too far in distancing himself. He had asked Buchanan to include a clause promising that Kane’s “personal word would have great weight with you in your exercise of executive clemency,” a power Kane believed would allow him to “reward the deserving but also to menace the refractory.” Not only did Buchanan refuse to insert this clause, but he pronounced his disagreement with Kane’s belief that most Mormons “labor under a mistake” as to the government’s intentions.
The Kane family reacted to Thomas’s decision as they had twelve years earlier, to his plan to visit the Mormon camps in Iowa. Having already lost one son that year to romantic exploits, John strenuously opposed the plan. While Thomas would “carry with [him] all of blessing that a father’s prayers can invoke,” John blamed the Mormons for the conflict and doubted his son could persuade the Saints to back down from their bellicose position. He warned, “if the Mormons once assail our troops, the sentiment of the country will never be satisfied while a Mormon community survives on this continent.” As during the controversies over the Fugitive Slave Law, Thomas’s disregard for his father’s counsel became widely known. Thomas wondered whether his father’s opposition to his journey caused Buchanan’s letters to include “phraseology less definite than his oral pledges.” John chided his son, expressing surprise at the letters’ “strength,” given Buchanan’s “habitual caution.” Indeed, John wrote, had he been president, “I could not have committed myself, even to you, as fully as he has done.”

John Jr., then in Paris, called his brother’s plan “madness” and criticized “how little an idea Tom has of the responsibilities of a married man.” When he received confirmation of his brother’s intention, John Jr. softened somewhat, expressing “great confidence in Tom’s long head and unbounded energy.” John perceptively described his brother’s psychology: “Tom is never so well as when exposed to what would kill most men of his build, and that hard life in open air (no matter how hard) always agrees with him better than the most tranquil of sedentary existence.” Furthermore, Elisha’s death and Thomas’s inability to organize an Arctic expedition “were killing him by inches,” as “Tom’s big soul was preying on his body.” “He is too great a man to occupy himself with trifles,” and the Utah mission was “an object large enough and noble enough to draw his thoughts away from the poor self on which they were fading and I can’t help hoping that his physical man will improve in consequence.”

Elizabeth struggled with Thomas’s decision, though his religious conversion allowed her to reconcile herself to it. While Thomas was still in Washington, Elizabeth fretted about his possible departure, but she told God she would “yield my dear husband to Thy hands if Thou needest him to bring peace to those lost sheep of Israel” as “my Thank offering for Thy infinite goodness in making him a Christian.” When Thomas announced he would give up his clerkship and leave for Utah, Elizabeth gave her husband her “little Bible” and resigned herself: “God’s will be done.”

Notwithstanding her own doubts, Elizabeth briddled at the Kanes’ reaction to Thomas’s decision and their perception of her husband. The past summer, Thomas had researched railroad routes in the Alleghenies for the Sunbury and Erie Railroad Company, which would determine the value of the land his family
owned in the region. Disappointed by his lack of time to finish his report to the company before his departure, Elizabeth worried, “There goes the labour, of mind and body, of Tom’s whole summer besides a considerable sum of money.” She feared that it would reinforce his family’s image of Thomas: “it will pass down as ‘one of Tom’s half-finished schemes,’ one of the times when he has started with steam up on his hobby, worked too hard, and then abandoned it.”

To her diary, she argued, “Tom has plenty of perseverance, and I know how many things he has done—but who will remember these, if the reputation of this sort of saying sticks to him.” Thomas also defended himself, as he “made out for Pat a sheet full of reasons” for his decision, writing, “I cannot stand the thought that my little chicks may be taught that their father ran away and left them and their sainted mother—thoughtless of all duties which he owed them among others.”

When Kane departed for Utah on January 5, he traveled with a high sense of his mission and the desire to shroud his purposes in secrecy and mystery. A former black servant immigrating to California, Anthony Osborne, accompanied him, and Kane took Osborne’s name and posed as a Philadelphia botanist, Dr. Osborne. Besides his penchant for the dramatic, Kane traveled incognito because he feared his prominent association with the Mormons would impede his journey to Utah, given the heightened state of anti-Mormonism. Before his departure, he also prepared a cipher, using the Bible, that would allow him to safely send letters past prying eyes to his family (and on to Buchanan). So that he could meet with the Mormons before encountering the army and bypass snow, Kane traveled to Utah not by the overland route, but by sailing from New York City to Panama, crossing the isthmus by railroad, taking additional boats to San Francisco and then San Pedro and then traveling via the southern overland route from San Bernardino. By January 21, he had reached Acapulco, and he reported in a cipher letter to his father discouraging news from Utah via California newspapers: “I shall probably be too late to make peace, but not too late to prevent the spring massacre.” Along the way, seasickness gave Kane intense headaches and he temporarily lost sight in his left eye.

Kane reached San Francisco on January 28; disembarking at nine at night, he “dove crazily about the strange streets hunting for Mormons two hours before [he] found one,” since most of the Saints had heeded Young’s instructions to return to Utah. The accommodations he found at the “dirty frame house called Oriental Hotel” did not meet his accustomed standards. His dinner consisted of “slices of stale black beef, tallow cheese and cupboard stale soda biscuit” and a “poisonous drink” and he went “supperless to a mouldy bed.” The following morning, Kane left San Francisco aboard a “wretched boat . . . crowded with
U.S. troops, like stock car with cattle." The troops, mainly a mix of "the worst of Irish & the stupidest of Germans," irritated Kane by "taking up every sheltered corner on the upper deck—a few of the choicest playing cards, the rest seasick & disgusting—vomiting & swearing." Some of the soldiers even speculated "of their going against the Mormons." Kane groaned that the nation would "pay such for butchering our own citizens!"\(^{38}\)

After arriving in San Pedro, near Los Angeles, Kane traveled overland to San Bernardino, a once-thriving Mormon colony. Most of the faithful Saints had gone back to Utah, leaving only (in the words of a Mormon missionary a few years later) "apostate infidel Mormons, spiritualized Mormons, 'Josephite' Mormons, and a few well disposed, but lukewarm, and vacillating saints." To find a Mormon escort to Utah, Kane wanted to "make the Anti-Mormons distrust him that their enmity might be a passport to the confidence of the Mormons." Reports of the Mountain Meadows Massacre had whipped anti-Mormonism in San Bernardino, already potent, into fever pitch, and Kane succeeded too well in arousing suspicion. Concerned citizens formed a Vigilance Committee to investigate the strange botanist seeking to hire men to accompany him to Utah. A local Saint, Ebenezer Hanks, wrote that Kane's "appearance has created an alarming excitement among the people," who "adopted resolutions to resist the stranger, and know his designs, which they believed were strictly opposed to the views of the General Government and to prevent his passing through." According to Elizabeth, when the committee visited Kane, his "bold front" successfully "bluffed them off," and his explanations partly won over the local district attorney. Kane used harsher tactics with the head of the Vigilance Committee, a notorious anti-Mormon, "telling him that he had three fellows watching who would shoot if he made his appearance in the town that day." Hanks painted a less dramatic portrayal, writing merely that Kane's behavior "gained the applause of the respectable portions of this community." Rather than threaten the committee's leader, Kane convinced him after an hour-and-a-half meeting of his "integrity and uprightness," which led to a unanimous resolution by the committee: "God speed Him."\(^{39}\)

Thomas's statements and Elizabeth's diary contradict Hanks's peaceful depiction. Kane referred to the Vigilance Committee as a "Lynch Committee" and a "mob." Elizabeth recorded that Kane's assurances and threats failed to satisfy the committee; believing that the house where he stayed "was entirely surrounded by spies," he spent one night outdoors. Fortunately for Kane, Francis Jessie Clark—a former wife of Heber C. Kimball who had run away from polygamy with another man but remained a believer in Mormonism—recognized Kane from his sojourn with the Saints in 1846 and, unbeknownst to him, secured his
The troops, mainly a mix of "the worst of the worst," Kane traveled overland to San Bernardino. Most of the faithful Saints had heard of a Mormon missionary's fateful journey. The remains of the soldiers evoked a sense of dread that the nation would "pay a high price for the vigilance of the Mormons." To Kane, the Anti-Mormons distrusted the confidence of the Mormons. Kane had whipped anti-Mormonism in Utah, and Kane succeeded too well to form a Vigilance Committee to hire men to accompany him to Utah. Kane's "appearance has created an impression that the believers were strictly opposed to the prevent his passing through." According to Kane, his "bold front" successes partly won over the local district of the Vigilance Committee. He had three fellows watching who in the town that day." Hanks painted Kane's behavior as "gain[ed] the approval of the community." Rather than threaten the latter an hour-and-a-half meeting of his unanimous resolution by the committee contradicted Hanks's peaceful disposition as a "Lynch Committee" and circumstances and threats failed to satisfy the "enlivened" Kane. Kane, Francis Jessop, who had run away from polygamy in Mormonism—recognized Kane to him, secured his belongings before the arrival of the Vigilance Committee. Haunted by a fear of hell, Clark told Kane, "If by saving you, I could do a service to God's church on earth, I would feel that I did not need a drop of water to cool my tongue when I shall lift up my eyes in torments." Observing Kane's "very poor" health, Clark and other local Saints found reliable Mormon escorts (including Clark's current husband) and whisked him out of town. While at San Bernardino, Kane wrote home of his diminished hopes for peace: "The day may be, and probably is past to make peace, but not to save our poor fellow. Have no fear for my life, the cloud and pillar will be my escort. I swear I will arrive in time." With his small escort, Kane left San Bernardino on February 6, reaching Williams' or Cottonwood Camp (near the Mormon settlement at present-day Las Vegas) on February 14, where Kane and his companions met Apostle Amasa Lyman with another group of Saints. Lyman then accompanied Kane, suffering from sickness, to Salt Lake City. The New York Tribune later dramatically reported that during his journey through the Mormon settlements, Kane "was repeatedly compelled to conceal himself under the merchandise conveyed by his companions, in order to avoid falling into the hands of outlying parties of Mormons, who would have killed him as a secret agent or spy of the Federal Government." This seems doubtful; Kane journeyed with a Mormon apostle (though his continued disguise meant that most Saints would not have recognized him as their longtime defender). Nevertheless, as one of the first non-Mormon travelers through the region since the Mountain Meadows Massacre six months earlier, Kane likely found the local Mormons in southern Utah in a high state of tension and suspicion.

On February 17, while in southern Utah, Kane, writing as Osborne, sent Young a letter that messengers hurried to Salt Lake City. "I trust you will recognize my handwriting," he wrote. Kane urged Young "to postpone any military movement of importance until we meet and have a serious interview." Raging snowstorms three days later hampered Kane's advance but also convinced him of the impossibility of an imminent military movement (by either the Saints or the federal army). Even so, he continued to push on; "traveling both night and day," he reached Salt Lake City on February 25.

Young, who first learned of Kane's mission from his letter the previous week, expressed his "joy and surprise" at Kane's arrival. That evening, Kane met with a group of leading Saints (including the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve) at Young's home. Apostle Woodruff described Kane as "very pale and worn down" and "very formal in his introduction." Kane announced himself as an ambassador from Buchanan who was "fully prepared and duly authorised" to discuss the president's position toward the Saints. Urging a conciliatory policy,
Kane advised the Mormons to “think of our soldiers who are among the snows outside of these mountains” and “take immediate measures to insure their safety, supply their wants, and bid them all a cordial welcome to your hospitable valley.” Following his speech to the entire group, Kane requested a private interview with Young and the two left for a half hour.43

During their personal meeting, Kane pressed his recommendations. Overstepping his authority, he offered Young the “personal apology of Mr. Buchanan” and agreed with the Saints’ assessment that the actions of the federal government had “been so precipitate as to be legitimately open to misconception.” However, Kane reasoned, “it ought never to be too late between persons of honor and good intentions to remedy a mere misunderstanding,” and he urged Young to “believe and to accept his assurance of the fact that no disrespect had at any times been contemplated or intended” by Buchanan. Young, however, rebuffed Kane’s attempts to satisfy him of Buchanan’s intentions and declared: “I should not turn to the right or left or pursue any course ownly as God dictated me.” Criticizing Buchanan’s “injudicious and hasty” actions, Young called the president a “man of straw” whose actions revealed that “he can act in blind conformity to the prejudices of others, if they are not to be believed his own.” Discouraged, Kane initially protested that Young’s obstinacy meant the failure of his own efforts. According to Young, Kane “finally said if I would dictate he would execute,” and Young assured him “as he had been inspired to come here he should go to the army and do as the spirit led him to do and all would be right.”44

Following this private meeting, Kane returned to the larger group, balancing praise of the Saints (congratulating them on their “great empire” in Utah and their manly conduct in the current crisis) with acclaim for Buchanan (an “excellent President”). Young told Kane: “Brother Thomas the Lord sent you here and he will not let you die. No you cannot until your work is done. I want to have your name live with the Saints to all Eternity. You have done a great work and you will do a greater work still.” Other Saints viewed Kane’s mission with substantially more skepticism. Apostle George A. Smith saw Kane (though a “warm friend”) as a pawn of Buchanan, who had cynically sent Kane to persuade the Saints to “not destroy” the soldiers at Camp Scott “until he [Buchanan] can get sufficient reinforcements to them to destroy us.” Smith succinctly rejected Kane’s conciliatory message: “Bah!”45

Over the next few weeks, Kane made little progress with Mormon leaders as he prepared to travel to Camp Scott. He stayed first at William C. Staines’s newly constructed mansion and later at Young’s Lion House, where he experienced what “comfort and good living were.” On February 28, Young announced from the Tabernacle pulpit the presence of Dr. Osborne, a “gentleman from Washing-
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orne, a “gentleman from Washin-
lon.” Like Buchanan, Young distanced himself publicly from Kane (while meet-
ing with him privately). Young explained, “His errand was of no particular mo-
ent to the people or himself; that he had come on his own responsibility and
at his own expense, to see and learn the situation of affairs here.” While Kane
counseled with Mormon leaders, he also found time to reminisce with Woodruff
about “old times” and the “travels of Dr Kane in the polar regions,” and share
scandalous tidbits with George A. Smith about the “fathers of the Revolution.”
At some point, Kane asked “what would be the result if he spoke against the Mormons.” Heber C. Kimball ominously intoned that “his mind would become barren” and he “would droop & die away. But as long as you will stand up for the truth you will be fruitful and feel well.”

Mormon leaders also justified their decision not to follow Kane’s advice and assist the army. Woodruff, for example, wrote Kane a letter (unfortunately lost) covering “6 pages of foolscap” “giving a reason of our hope and faith and the cause of our defending ourselves in these valleys of the mountains.” The Saints envisioned a nightmarish scenario, “Illinois & Missouri over again,” should the army enter Utah. Martial law would be proclaimed and the Mormons would be subject to the whims of the “drunken, quarrelsome and licentious” soldiers. Federal judges would persecute “the prominent men with arrests & prosecutions without end” and try them “with juries composed of enemies, and finally would call on the soldiers to see every man hanged the Saints loved.” To assuage their concerns, Kane promised Young and his “immediate friends” a presidential pardon and stated “upon my honor as a gentleman” that the federal army would not impose martial law. Kane gradually sensed a thaw in the Saints’ attitude. Young became more “frank and confidential . . . more independent of the fear that I would misconstrue [his statements] myself or misrepresent them to others.” Indeed, in Kane’s last few days in Salt Lake City, Mormon leaders discussed with him future projects, including the transcontinental railroad, a firm to carry the mails between Missouri and California, and Kane’s own proposal to build “Artesian wells at certain points along the Southern Desert route.”

Before leaving for the army camp, Kane, probably with Young’s assistance, prepared a report for Buchanan in which he first elaborated one of his principal themes of the conflict: the division of the Saints into a peace party led by Young and a war party that opposed any attempt at conciliation. Bernhisel had conditioned Kane to fear the zealotry of the “outlying” settlements, and Kane’s own experiences led him to perceive the existence of a division among the Mormons. The actual existence of a “war party,” however, seems doubtful. All contemporary reports of such a division stem from Kane, who never gave specifics on the war party’s leadership or composition. For Kane, the division reflected more than just his perception of the situation in Utah; it was also a deliberate rhetorical construction designed to lead to a peaceful settlement. Indeed, his consistent use of the narrative in both public and private statements suggests that it was a mixture of genuine belief, misperception, and calculated creation.

Whatever his actual views, Kane used the narrative of a Mormon peace party and war party, with Young’s apparent consent, to transform the Mormon leader in Buchanan’s eyes from a dangerous fanatic to the crucial linchpin of any pos-
sible diplomatic resolution. Though in reality Young had rejected his advice, Kane still assured Buchanan, "you will be rewarded for the humane efforts which you have made to avert the calamities of war," as Kane's "timely coming has prevented the effusion of blood, and contributed to strengthen the hands of those—and they are not few here—who seek to do good and . . . confirm the bands of the Union." His arrival, Kane claimed, had tempered the Mormon war spirit and "operated emphatically to prevent an impending movement hostile to our troops." He strongly praised "the mistaken Brigham Young," whose "commanding influence" and restrained rhetoric had controlled the "imprudent zeal" of the war party. In his telling, Kane credited Young with protecting the soldiers; during the winter, "there has not been an hour in which our army has not been in danger—though they have lived and slept in peace through the whole winter guarded by his arm." Kane's reports of such a division provided Buchanan with the intellectual fig leaf that would permit him to work with rather than prosecute Young.

While Kane journeyed to Salt Lake and negotiated with Mormon leaders, Elizabeth deeply felt his absence in Philadelphia. The day after his departure, she wrote, "I hope, I am sure, I did my duty to him in trying to help him and to be cheerful," and she felt "quite cheery to think God has mercifully given me so many things to occupy me." In the same entry, however, she noted that one-year-old "Elisha almost upset my attempts at composure today by struggling forward to go to his father's room." More practical than her husband, Elizabeth worried constantly about their finances and his future employment. She felt the ramifications of his decision immediately, as she had to "give up" one of her servants in late December 1857 (the other servant was released on March 1). On February 2, she had only nine dollars in ready cash and wrote, "I wish I could earn money!" Elizabeth defended herself to her journal: "It seems as if I were so extravagant to have used all Tom left with me, but every bill he left, has exceeded his estimate," and she yet owed $140. While she waited for some payments due her husband, she had to rely on money from Pat, who (acting as Thomas's attorney and accountant) refused to let her tap into stocks Thomas owned. Eager to make better use of her time, Elizabeth asked Judge Kane to recommend some "mental occupation for at least two hours a day" that would result in money or "some finished work." A return to study medicine was not possible "without a master, and without models or pictures." Judge Kane dissuaded her from taking on "copying, or other occupation producing money" and instead suggested she study mathematics. Elizabeth felt no such inclination but dutifully accepted his recommendation. She also read extensively, including several books on California, Utah, and Mormonism.49
In mid-February 1858, tragedy again struck the Kane family a year after Elisha’s death, as John contracted pneumonia. The family doctor warned that he would “certainly recover if he were a younger man, but as it is he has age and weakness against him.” By February 19, the family knew John was dying, and he succumbed two days later. Elizabeth cried: “Oh Tom, my poor Tom, how can you bear it! There is no way of breaking the shock to you, my darling.” If Thomas had remained in Philadelphia, she thought, the shock of his father’s death, given his “enfeebled” health, would have killed him. “So I must try to be grateful that you are away gathering strength for the battle.” Even so, Elizabeth’s vision of her husband receiving such news far from the comfort of home vexed her in the coming months. On June 5, she worried that he had delayed writing because “he has broken down under the shock.” A few days later, however, she received a letter and recorded: “He had heard the news, and wrote like a Christian should. My darling, my darling!”

John’s death threatened the future livelihood of both Thomas (formerly employed as his clerk) and Pat (whose law practice depended on his father’s position). As John lay dying, Elizabeth’s thoughts turned to the future; knowing they could not “Go West” while Jane lived, Elizabeth contemplated the idea of Thomas becoming the land agent for the McKean and Elk Company. Pat had a different scheme, and he and various family friends lobbied Buchanan to replace John with a personal ally. In such a scenario, Pat might “get the Reportership, Tom the clerkship, or that at least he will be a kind and friendly Judge.” In April, however, Buchanan appointed John Cadwalader; Elizabeth sighed, “No chance for Tom there.” Pondering her husband’s limited options (she ruled out legal work and full-time writing as damaging to his health), Elizabeth wondered whether she had acted wrongly in discouraging “Tom from a political career.” While she respected his patriotism, she concluded she “never could bear him to mix in party politics—vile they are.” Hoping that Thomas would not accept an “office as a reward from Buchanan,” Elizabeth declared that she would rather endure poverty and “leave an unspotted name to our children” than have her husband pursue politics, which would threaten his “physical and moral” health. Elizabeth turned to her faith for comfort: “as Tom gave up his employment for Christ’s sake, He will take care of him.”

Throughout Kane’s absence, Elizabeth found solace in his conversion to Christianity. She exulted, “What a close tie it makes between us!” Though empowered to act as her husband’s guide in his new faith, she nevertheless worried that “Tom, a Christian and studying Christ’s word as his guide, will be farther than ever beyond me.” Reflecting on their married life, Elizabeth recognized that she had also changed religiously, as she used “to go twice a Sunday to...
uck the Kane family a year after nia. The family doctor warned that man, but as he is he has age and amily knew John was dying, and he "Oh Tom, my poor Tom, how can to you, my darling." If Thomas he shock of his father’s death, given n. "So I must try to be grateful that ." Even so, Elizabeth’s vision of her comfort of home vexed her in the at he had delayed writing because days later, however, she received a , and wrote like a Christian should.

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curch, to believe all clergymen right reverend, and all they said worthy of im- plicit credence . . . and to have a slight horror of all but Protestant Christians.” Her husband’s heterodoxy had increased her own toleration, and she mourned all the “petty persecutions I must have inflicted unconsciously on Tom.”

Even with her strong belief in the divine inspiration behind Kane’s journey, Elizabeth still bemoaned his absence and anxiously awaited his return. On February 3, she wrote: “I try, for Christ’s sake, to relinquish you cheerfully, but it is a hard struggle. Last night I yielded to the temptation of recalling how tenderly you always cared for me when my head ached, how you would take off my shoes for me, and when I was in bed, come and lay your darling head by mine and soothe me to sleep with loving words. But I found I began to cry, so I forced my thoughts off.” In April she lamented: “I have been wearying for news from Tom. I am almost at the end of my slender stock of fortitude!” Her daily life, she wrote, "turns on the arrival of the ten a.m. and 5 p.m. trains by which newspapers come. There is no news, and I come back sick at heart. How long, how long!” She looked for all possible ways to send Thomas letters. A man “going to California” agreed to take a letter, as did a “Mormon who is going to try to get through the army.” She finally received letters from Thomas en route to Utah, including two in cipher, in April. Her inability to find the same edition of the Bible he had used for the cipher, as well as his “many mistakes,” caused Elizabeth, John Jr., and Pat to struggle over the letters for the next three days before they finally broke the code. In early May, when letters from Camp Scott dated March 3 arrived in the East with no mention of Tom, she “cried for hours like a coward,” fearing he had died. Two days later, Pat received a letter from Osborne with a California newspaper slip announcing Kane’s safe arrival in Salt Lake City. “So far, thank God, he is safe!” In late May, she referred to herself as “widowed” and worried that “absence may have cured him of his love for me. Even if he continues to love me—he has also learned to do without me.”

As Elizabeth fretted in Philadelphia, Thomas had completed the first portion of his journey by reaching Salt Lake City, proving Buchanan and Bernhisel incorrect. Though he had easily entered into the confidence of Mormon leaders, he had not persuaded them to send supplies to the army as a gesture of peace or abandon the course that promised a clash when the snows melted. The prospects for peace looked dim as Kane left on an equally difficult task, to somehow persuade either the military or civilian leaders at Camp Scott to signal a willingness to negotiate with the Saints.
THE UTAH WAR, ACT II

On March 8, 1858, Kane left Salt Lake City to travel through deep snows toward Camp Scott, escorted by a group of Mormon scouts led by the notorious Porter Rockwell. Over the next two months, he caused a furor within the army camp, clashed with Colonel Albert Johnston and other military officials, persuaded Governor Alfred Cumming to accompany him without the army to Salt Lake City, and brokered a settlement between Cumming and Brigham Young that foreclosed the possibility of armed hostilities. During the next two years, Kane worked behind the scenes to influence the press and President Buchanan to preserve his view of the proper resolution to the conflict, which rested on an alliance between Cumming and Young (to the exclusion of the army and other federal officials). Kane's intervention proved crucial in avoiding a military clash between the Mormons and the federal army and in keeping the peace in the succeeding years.

Young's defiant stance changed abruptly as Kane left for Camp Scott. The day before his departure, news reached Salt Lake City "of a massacre of the Saints" in Oregon Territory. In 1855, Young had sent a group of missionaries to establish a settlement at Fort Limhi along the Salmon River (in present-day Idaho), both to expand the northern boundaries of Mormon influence and to proselytize Native Americans. In April and May 1857, Young dramatically emphasized the colony's importance. Though still recovering from a prolonged illness, Young invested five weeks in traveling to Fort Limhi with most of the senior leadership of the church, the only time he left Utah between 1848 and his death in 1877. Tensions with the local tribes, however, only increased with time. On February 25, 1858, a force of northern Shoshones and Bannocks (incited in part by a mountain man and, possibly, a government contractor buying cattle for the Utah Expedition)
The settlement, killing two men and wounding several others. Messengers tried to raise a force to rescue the remainder of the Mormons.

Viewing it as a "small affair," Kane seriously underestimated the importance of the news to the Saints. Rather, he thought the Mormon war faction "exaggerated [it] out of its true proportions," using the event to further tar the federal government. However, the tidings shattered some of Young's millennial expectations. He had considered Fort Limhi as a possible site of refuge or even way station to the Pacific Coast should the Saints be driven from Utah. In addition, he envisioned a possible alliance between the Mormons and western Indians against the federal army. Rather than protect the Saints, inspire Native Americans to join the Mormon cause, and preserve Oregon as a possible sanctuary or way station, God had allowed the settlers to suffer an ignominious defeat. The day after Kane's departure, Young dispatched two messengers, including one of his sons, who rode "all night" to deliver a hurried proposal to him.

Young's letter, which he entrusted Kane to deliver to Johnston, offered the army substantial supplies—a herd of two hundred cattle and fifteen thousand twenty thousand pounds of flour—as an olive branch to the military leaders. Writing to Buchanan, Kane portrayed the offer as the triumph of Young over the war party; he interpreted the letter's implicit message as: "Go on. Things have not changed. I am still strong enough and confident enough of my power to wish and work for peace." While Kane represented the letter to Buchanan as evidence of Young's continuous desire for peace, in reality it reflected a change in Young's thinking, spurred by the troubles at Fort Limhi. Whereas Young had initially spurned Kane's suggestion that the Saints send supplies to the army as an overture for peace, he now adopted Kane's plan as his own. Young's attitude had shifted decisively from defiance to conciliation, and he began to search for any alternative to war. Kane's mission now seemed the most promising way to avert the oncoming crisis.

The atmosphere at Camp Scott, however, offered little hope for Kane's success. After his arrival, Kane captured the mood in a report to Buchanan:

A mixed society of about 2000 womanless men—soldiers, officers, teamsters, professional gamblers and professional anti-Mormons had been feeding on hard liquor whiskey and (a great deal of tobacco) & camp followers had been compelled to halt within less than the distance between Philadelphia and Washington from the little capital where they had promised themselves... enjoyment and luxury and compelled to pass an entire winter in extreme discomfort and a state of idleness & inaction sufficiently shocking to contemplate. Imprisoned within their camp bounds... they cd. [could] do nothing against the Mormons. They cd. [could] only talk against them.
Even the civil officials most inclined toward a peaceful solution railed against the Mormons. In early March, Jacob Forney, the new superintendent of Indian affairs who later became a staunch supporter of Cumming's conciliatory approach, wrote to Attorney General Jeremiah Black that "Human History furnishes no parallel to this system." "True Mormonism," in Forney's estimation, consisted of polygamy, violence, and sedition. The army harbored even more ill will toward the Saints. Captain Jesse A. Gove reflected the entrenched anti-Mormonism of the troops; even before the winter, he asserted, "Murders are as common among them, to all those who do not bow to Mormondom, as the sun rises." Johnston shared his troops' animosity, ordered all Mormons to be "treated as enemies," and ridiculed their "insane design of establishing a form of government thoroughly despotic, and utterly repugnant to our institutions."  

Kane rode into this firestorm late on the night of March 12. So exhausted that he had to be lifted off his horse, he was taken to a tent and "fell immediately into a deep sleep." News of the arrival of "no ordinary expressman" from Salt Lake, "well and warmly clad in furs," swept through the camp. The next morning, reports spread, identifying the mysterious horseman as a brother of Elisha Kane, "that noble man whose name sends a thrill of pride and vain regret through the heart of every American citizen."  

Kane made a dramatic appearance on horseback at Johnston's tent that morning. Captain John W. Phelps, an artillery officer, described the scene: Kane, "without looking right or left... moved straight forward" to Johnston's tent "and seemed as if he wished to ride into it instead of stopping out side, so near did he urge his horse to the opening." When Johnston answered Kane's call, he could only partially leave his tent, "being stopped apparently by the man's horse whose head was nearly in the opening, and looking up in a crouched attitude, his own head being near the horse's head." Kane identified himself and asked Johnston's permission to confer with Cumming, a request that Johnston granted. Phelps observed that Kane lacked "proper deference" for Johnston. Fitz-John Porter, Johnston's adjutant and close friend, was similarly unimpressed by Kane's "theatrical" antics, writing that while Kane supposed the soldiers to be "an admiring audience," they were in reality "laughing at his conceit." When Kane left, Porter snickered that he was "led—like an ass—because an ass."  

Thus began a conflict between Kane and Johnston that simmered throughout his stay at the camp and became a wedge between the military officials and Cumming. Kane spent his first day closeted with Cumming, creating an intense curiosity around the camp. Since some recognized him as a famous, or infamous, Mormon sympathizer, any goodwill aroused by his relation to the fallen hero Elisha quickly dissipated. The camp debated whether he was a peace commi-
peaceful solution railed against by the new superintendent of Indian Affairs as contrary to the best interests of the Indians. The army harbored even more fear of the Mormons, as the soldiers feared for their personal safety.

The tensions between Kane and Johnston rapidly escalated until Kane challenged him to a duel, though the exact events are clouded by contradictory accounts. Johnston initially assigned an aide, Captain Cuvier Grover, to watch over Kane, both to protect him and his property from violence, if he is a Mormon, and to have an eye upon [his] movements. After Cumming told Grover that Kane was an accredited Agent, Grover apparently abandoned attempts at surveillance. Porter explained that Johnston's order (probably referring to Grover), who had been "in personal attendance" of Kane, said to another soldier sent to take his place, "keep an eye on the d—d Mormon." Kane and Cumming overheard the remark, which Cumming viewed as an intentional insult by Colonel Johnston to his guest, and hence to himself, and proposed to resort to a challenge. Albert G. Browne Jr., a reporter for the New York Tribune, described the source of the conflict somewhat differently. According to him, Johnston sent an order to invite Kane to dinner—"no slight compliment in a camp where the rations were so abridged"—but the soldier defied orders and arrested Kane.

In either case, Kane perceived the situation as more of an arrest than an invitation. He wrote, "The character of the invitation . . . was I believe regarded by those around me as an Arrest and a personal indignity of the gravest order." Kane's response illustrates the importance of public reputation in the culture of honor. Whether he had actually been arrested was irrelevant; what mattered was what others believed. Infuriated, Kane scrawled a letter to Johnston that demanded a "full explanation and retraction" as he could not "pass over such an indignity without becoming redress." His letter contained the code words and ritualized demands that unmistakably signaled the beginning of an affair of honor.

As a Southerner, Johnston and Cumming were no strangers to dueling. Though generally opposed to the practice, Johnston had once felt compelled to answer a challenge and was wounded in the ensuing duel. Cumming's brother had participated in a well-known series of duels in Georgia. Nevertheless,
neither Johnston nor Cumming seemed particularly enthusiastic about Kane's demands. Cumming apparently did not want to exacerbate the already tense relations between civil and military authorities at Camp Scott. Though he sympathized with Kane, he seems to have declined to act as Kane's second and refused to deliver the letter. (Each participant in a duel had a second, who served as intermediaries between the combatants and ensured that each man abided by the conventions of the duel.)
Kane soon forced the issue with Johnston himself. In a meeting with Fitz-John Porter, whom Kane cast in the role of Johnston’s second, he justified his delay in issuing a challenge, asserting that he had not wished the conflict to interfere with his official duties. The previous day, Kane had delivered Young’s offer of supplies to Johnston. Not amused with Young’s (accurate) description of the army’s lack of supplies, Johnston declared that he would not receive assistance from the rebellious Mormons (though Cumming saw the proposal as a genuine gesture of peace). Having discharged this duty, Kane pursued the matter of personal honor. Johnston clearly did not want a confrontation and explained that he had not issued any order to “constrain” Kane’s movements, but had in fact sought to protect his property and “prevent any inconvenience to him or molestation.” His order, though, had been “incorrectly communicated,” leading to a temporary “surveillance in a slight degree.”

Kane accepted Johnston’s explanation, interpreting it as both an apology and a “humiliation” on Johnston’s part, which satisfied the exigencies of personal honor. They had not duelled, he explained to his father and Pat, because “gentlemanly propriety” and “every sense of Christian magnanimity orders me to spare a man whose apology has humbled him as much as this unfortunate’s.” However, if Johnston publicly criticized him, should “his letter writers and newspaper men dare to falsify the facts,” Kane wanted his relatives to use their extensive newspaper connections to denounce Johnston in the national press. He believed that the duel challenge had “strengthened my hands to do good” and gave him the upper hand in his relationship with Johnston, which after that time was outwardly, if icily, cordial. Following the resolution of the Utah War, Kane told Elizabeth that his challenge had contributed to peace, as “the result was Johnson’s [sic] apology, and indirectly, the success of his efforts.”

Kane’s actions would be easily explainable if he were a southern gentleman. Very few northerners, however, were still issuing challenges to duel by this time. His initial actions at Camp Scott probably reflected his penchant for dramatic entrances. In addition, he may have seen the challenge as a negotiating strategy, a way to alienate Cumming from the military leaders. His conduct also demonstrates his affinity for the culture of honor. Elizabeth explained, “Under certain circumstances Tom approves of duelling—as a terror to evil-doers whom the law cannot or will not reach.” While she opposed the practice, Elizabeth described her husband as “of the ‘Church Militant,’ always generous, always unselfish, humble sometimes,” but also “fiery and impetuous.”

With his honor secure, Kane turned again to official business, urging Johnston in both a letter and a lengthy meeting on March 16 to reconsider his rejection of the Mormons’ supplies. In Johnston’s view, the only proper overture of peace
from the Mormons would entail capitulation to federal power, not a cynical ploy to embarrass the army. Johnston lectured Kane that the Mormons held the key to peace and that “Young should consider the calamities he is bringing upon his people.” In response, Kane argued that the “very unhappy” Young desired peace but had to conciliate the Mormon war faction. According to Kane, Johnston’s rebuff of Young’s proposal “would prejudice the object of his [Kane’s] mission, and indicate no desire for peace on our side.” Porter found Kane’s portrayal of a Mormon division persuasive: “His admissions of B. Y.’s weakness and of the existence of two parties was an important one to us.” Kane also hinted at future Mormon tactics; should the army advance, the “Mormons will destroy everything and take to the mountains.” Finally, Kane and Johnston clashed over the treatment of a Mormon courier—Lewis Robison, the Nauvoo Legion’s quartermaster—who had been “fired upon” while waiting outside of Camp Scott for Johnston’s response to Young’s letter.19

The following day, Kane met with Mormon scouts outside Camp Scott and sent a letter to Young that expounded for the first time the primary narrative he created to persuade the Saints to accept a peaceful solution. While he explained Mormon actions to the federal government by referring to the division of the Saints into a peace party and a war party, he sought to pacify the Saints by emphasizing the animosity between the military officers and the civilian officials, particularly Cumming. He thus blamed the shooting at Robison “solely on the military power unauthorized” and praised Cumming as a “faithful and determined exponent” of Buchanan’s policy, with the “force of character enough to cause his wishes and opinions to be obeyed and respected.” After asking Young to send William Kimball (a militia leader with whom Kane had become acquainted in the Mormon camps in 1846) to meet with him, Kane advised: “Be calm. There is no change. Justice will be done you in due time.”16

Even though Kane urged calm, the arrival in Salt Lake City on March 19 of his initial report, with little encouraging news, spurred the Mormons to action. Throughout the winter, Young had alluded to abandoning Salt Lake City and the settlements in northern Utah. Eastern press reports speculated on a variety of possible destinations, including Mexico, Central or South America, Vancouver Island, Washington Territory, or Russian Alaska. Envisioning that Nevada’s White Mountains might contain undiscovered valleys capable of holding half a million people, Young primarily looked closer to home. Such a move, he believed, would protect the Saints from the invading army, or at the very least, influence public perceptions on a grand scale. The image of the suffering Saints, again driven from their homes, could possibly turn American sentiment against Buchanan and the army.27
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The day before the arrival of Kane’s report, a council meeting approved Young’s proposal to abandon Salt Lake City but made no definite plans. Three days later, however, Young proclaimed the “Move South,” instructing all Mormons in northern Utah to leave their homes. Eventually, thirty thousand Saints obeyed, temporarily gathering at Provo. In Nephi, eighty-five miles south of Salt Lake City, one Mormon recorded the explanation he received: “this sudden move is on account of the news from the army Col T L. Kane went out and came back to the boys . . . [H]e told them that the soldiers had had fresh supplies and were determined to come.” As a result, Young decided to “save the effusion of blood” by allowing the army to occupy a deserted Salt Lake City.18

Kane’s visit with the Mormon scouts outside of Camp Scott not only catalyzed the Move South, but also aroused further suspicions among the army of his loyalties. He had arranged to fire his weapon as a signal of his return to the camp; however, a dark, stormy night created confusion, and the pickets misunderstood Kane’s firing as a precursor to a Mormon attack. As a consequence, the “whole of the garrison of Fort Bridger were aroused and called to arms by an alarm from the sentinels.” Soldiers soon surrounded Kane, who was fired upon at “two paces” but escaped unscathed. Gove scoffed that Kane was the “most astonished man you ever heard of . . . a more frightened individual I never saw.” Though the soldier who shot at Kane claimed he did so accidentally, “we all think he did it on purpose, as Mr. Kane thinks it hit his collar.” Disappointed only that the bullet had not found its target, Gove concluded, “The military authorities think him a spy and there is no doubt about it, and the sooner he gets out of our reach the better.” Porter, who still considered Kane “an ass though a gentleman,” similarly scoffed, “Pity they did not rid him of life — it would have saved one fool from troubling us.” Kane tried to smooth over the uproar by giving the shooter a “present of five dollars” and “money enough to treat the whole guard.”19

Shaken and discouraged, Kane prepared dispiriting reports to Buchanan. Given the military’s hostility, he could no longer advise the Mormons “to admit this army and its followers indiscriminately within their Valley,” as he doubted the officers “will be able to control their soldiers — much less their disorderly retinue of Camp followers.” Kane also complained bitterly about Johnston’s refusal of Young’s offer of supplies and his insistence that Young must experience “the utmost humiliation of himself and his confederates.” Young would interpret this “grave mistake,” Kane warned, as a “Declaration of War to the knife,” and the Mormon war faction would use it as an “instrument of prejudice” against Young. Kane also complained of the actions of Judge Eckels, a Buchanan appointee of the previous summer. Eckels’s sin was that he had organized some of the ardently anti-Mormon camp followers (“this very vile material”) into a grand jury
to hear Mormon crimes; Kane knew the Saints would interpret such actions as evidence that the government looked to repeat the persecutions of Illinois and Missouri.20

From his arrival at Camp Scott, Kane had taken for granted the army’s opposition to his efforts, a presumption that his actions toward Johnston had reinforced. Accordingly, he had focused on winning Cumming over to his quest for reconciliation between the Saints and the nation. His description of Young as the head of a Mormon peace party proved particularly crucial, as it transformed Young in the mind of Cumming (and later Buchanan) from an irrational zealot to a moderate, a potential partner in negotiation and the government’s indispensable ally in the pacification of the Mormons. Kane persuaded Cumming to travel to Salt Lake City unaccompanied by the army to claim his governorship and signal his genuine desire for peace. According to his wife, Cumming intended to go to Utah to establish federal supremacy, claim his office, and “order the troops to disband.” Should the Mormons reject any of these provisions, he would then “have recourse to the aid of the military.”21

Kane’s relationship with Cumming deepened a rift between Cumming and the military leaders. Though tensions between Cumming and Johnston had begun at Fort Leavenworth in 1857 and festered over the winter, one early observer noted that Kane’s time at Camp Scott “produced an irreconcilable difference of opinion between the civil and the military authority.”22 The image-conscious Cumming saw in Kane’s proposal an opportunity to upstage Johnston and the army and become the leading man in the Utah War drama. His ambition coincided with his political ideology; a southern Democrat, Cumming believed that popular sovereignty should be applied in Utah. Should the Saints submit to federal authority, he pledged to avoid meddling with their domestic relationships and religious practices. (While most southern Democratic leaders supported the Utah Expedition, they also generally opposed anti-polygamy legislation in the 1850s, wary of the precedent it would set for federal intervention in slavery.)

In his public narrative of the Utah War, Kane strenuously obscured his own role in Cumming’s decision to enter Utah without the army. Indeed, Kane, Cumming, and Forney all claimed that Cumming had made such a decision with no influence from Kane. Kane’s private writings, however, belie such statements. Among Kane’s scribbles in his diary at Camp Scott are several arguments he used to persuade Cumming to take the journey. Cumming could engage in “peace negotiations,” neutralize the Saints’ anger at Johnston’s refusal of Young’s offer of supplies, and “rally my friends & the peace party generally.” In a private account three months later, Kane stated that Cumming agreed “that I should
would interpret such actions as the persecutions of Illinois and
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Cumming agreed "that I should
order him in every respect as I thought fit, and that until I brought him back to
camp, he would obey me in every respect in all things implicitly." The timing
of Cumming's decision also suggests Kane's influence, as Cumming first wrote
Secretary of State Lewis Cass of his intended journey on March 24. For public
consumption, however, Kane emphasized Cumming's autonomy, to strengthen
his narrative of the deep and preexisting divisions between the peaceful Cum-
ming and the bellicose military leaders. Such a portrayal contributed to the solu-

FIGURE 13. Utah governor Alfred Cumming.
(Reproduced by permission from the Utah State
Historical Society.)
Kane now envisioned to the Utah War: an alliance between Cumming and Young that would legitimize a truce, ensure tranquility in the coming years, and protect the Mormons from more domineering federal officials.  

Even with Cumming's decision to go to Utah, Kane remained skeptical of his eventual success. To Elizabeth on March 24, he wrote, "Disappointment, wifie—except in having saved our troops—which perhaps I ought not to have done, when I think of the heavy odds against the Mormons, and the fierce spirit of this very party longing to assail them." Nevertheless, he expressed satisfaction with his mission: "I have tested my prowess enough to be sure what is in my blood; and, when I come home to hide my head in our beloved obscurity—it will not be a humble one, except in the sense in which you yourself have prayed for me to bow it."  

The following day, Kane left Camp Scott to inform William Kimball of Cumming's decision and make the necessary plans. Accompanied at first by a military escort, he then traveled toward Echo Creek alone. An intense snowstorm limited him (on horseback) to eight miles in as many hours, "so completely benumbed were my animals by the force and coldness of the wind." At dusk, he finally encountered a Mormon who led him an additional thirty miles to a small camp where Kane "slept in the falling snow that night, and the next, and the next."  

The conference between Kane and Kimball focused on the Move South and Cumming's upcoming journey. On Young's behalf, Kimball asked Kane's advice on the Saints' abandonment of northern Utah: "Which is the better, that plan or fighting?" Kane's response is unrecorded, though he later commented positively on the reemphasis the Move South placed on the image of the suffering Saints. Kane gave Kimball instructions to stymie any opposition from the Mormon war party toward Cumming, again indicating that Kane's narrative of the division of the Saints into two parties was part his genuine perception of the situation and part his rhetorical construction. Finally, Kane gave the Mormons an escape clause should Young find the plan unacceptable. In such a scenario, Young should send a large group of Mormon soldiers to forcefully, but without violence, compel Cumming and Kane to return to Camp Scott. This final condition demonstrates that Kane and Young had not agreed on a scheme to induce Cumming to go to Utah; rather, Kane acted on his own initiative in conceiving and executing the plan. Writing to Buchanan, Kane put his own contingency plan in Kimball's mouth, relating that Kimball had predicted that he and Cumming would either reach the "friends of peace" in Salt Lake City or "be met at an early stage of our journey by a repulse of too formidable and peremptory a character."
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to make it encumbent upon us to offer any forcible resistance to it.” Though
he had orchestrated the possible Mormon responses, Kane already blamed the
Mormon war faction for any opposition he and Cumming would encounter.
Following their meeting, Kimball rushed to Salt Lake, arriving on March 28,
and the news of Kane’s plan halted the urgency of the Move South.26

After Kane’s return to Camp Scott, he and Cumming closely guarded their
decision until April 2, when Cumming informed Johnston and asked for nec-
necessary supplies and transportation. Explaining his decision, Cumming revealed
Kane’s influence: “I have assurances that B. Y. wishes for peace, and that he finds
it difficult to rule his people.” Johnston opposed Cumming’s plan unless he had
“some invitation or impression made to you that your presence is desired.” In
reply, Cumming stated that the Saints expected him and that he had “nothing
to fear, unless from some of those wild fanatics, who are opposed to a peace and
would be glad to see a collision with the Government—and who are not respon-
sible to the authorities in S. L. C.” Fearing obstruction from extremists at Camp
Scott, Cumming asked Johnston to keep his plans confidential.27

By the following day, however, rumors circulated throughout the camp about
Cumming’s decision, exasperating Kane and Cumming. Gove dismissed Cum-
ning’s actions as “childishness”: “If Gov. G. has been so far fooled by this nin-
clopoo of a Mr. Col. Kane, he is a bigger fool than I thought him to be.”
Forsay, one of Cumming’s few partisans, wrote of the “almost universal belief”
that the governor had an advance agreement with Young and “had assurances
through Col Kane of a grand reception.” To his patron, Attorney General Black,
Forsay portrayed Cumming’s decision quite differently, asserting that Cum-
ning started “in opposition to the advice of Col Kane, (who acknowledged that
his mission was a failure) and without any assurance from any source by a favour-
able reception.” Forsay thus repeated the narrative Kane had created, empha-
sizing Cumming’s manly decision to go to Salt Lake alone.28

Fitz-John Porter, privy to Cumming’s private discussion with Johnston,
shrewdly dismissed this notion. “Too late Governor to give the impression you
are heroic,” he wrote. “You run no more risk in going—if as you said you were
invited—than I do staying here—unless injured by outsiders. To give this im-
pression Mr Kane strive to hide your game—but no use—it is seen through.”
Porter now suspected Kane had either fabricated or been duped into believing
the existence of a Mormon division: “The Mormons are ordered to differ in
opinion from the leaders—to create a sympathy for the latter.” He charged, “Col
Kane is a Mormon and is working for the Mormons.” Accusations continued to
swirl during the absence of Cumming and Kane throughout April. The gover-
nor's wife Elizabeth complained of the "backbiting & defaming" that simultaneously accused Cumming of making a "dishonorable compromise" with Young and of foolishly marching into his own imprisonment in Utah.

Before leaving, Kane prepared reports to his family and Buchanan that paired the peaceful allies, Young and Cumming, against the warmongering army and dissident Mormons. The army's belligerence caused Kane to fear Cumming's "being picked off by the peace haters of the Camp who might think this their shortest cut to interrupt negotiations in progress." Army officers and civilians at Camp Scott had tried to dissuade Cumming through more peaceful means, telling him he was "rushing on certain death" and calling his plans "madness, simple madness." Kane linked the language of honor and masculinity to contrast Cumming's "natural and manly character with that of the bragging, drilling, parading, bugle playing, musket firing crowd of braves by profession by whom he is surrounded!" Carefully portraying Cumming as sufficiently anti-Mormon, Kane referred to his "bitter prejudices" against the Saints and averred that he would "be hard" on the Mormons but would "set the thing straight." By contrast, Kane heartily criticized Judge Eckels ("this bloody mouthed judge") and the military leaders for aggravating relations with the Mormons. He compared the soldiers to "a pack of vicious Coyotas" who had "done their utmost to incense them [the Mormons] by threatening, indicting, indiscriminately eloquently corresponding and equally promiscuously swearing and firing at them."

In a letter probably intended for publication, Kane also critiqued the army's bellicose mood through envisioning the consequences of war. Should the army advance, the Mormons would "employ their force entirely in impeding the march of our soldiers and delaying their advance" until they had completed the Move South and torched Salt Lake City. Even with the Saints in flight, the army would probably precipitate a confrontation. Redeploying his earlier motif of the suffering Saints, Kane predicted a doomsday scenario in which innocent victims—particularly women and children—would bear the brunt of the agony. After fanning the flames, Mormon leaders would either go into hiding "or take shipping for England, the Sandwich Islands or Heaven only knows where." Younger Mormon men would wage guerilla warfare, though the army would quickly track them down. Kane added a new wrinkle to his motif of the suffering Saints, arguing that persecution would backfire and strengthen Mormonism, as the Saints would use it to reach out to new converts. He envisioned a "Mormon lecturer" appearing "before his British audience 'in deep black for his murdered wife and family,' or in the costume which he bore upon the occasion of his memorable escape from the American soldiery at——." The more the Mormons suffered, Kane suggested, the stronger Mormonism would become, as the
Saints would use their persecution to entrench a corporate identity that defined themselves as a people apart from and persecuted by the nation. Thus, the target of the federal campaign, the “real abomination which we ought to wish should perish—the Religion itself” would thrive.

On April 5, Kane and Cumming, accompanied by two servants, left “this execrated camp,” Kane wrote, “and the men that hate me and my peace.” He exulted to his diary, “Hope Adventure Mountain Air a good Horse & Liberty! . . . What fun! . . . so near happiness!” As he headed for Utah, he looked toward Philadelphia, promising Elizabeth they would be the “happiest couple of lovers in the world” when he returned. “I have never in my youngest days led a purer life than the past three months which I have dedicated to you,” he told her. Perceiving that his role in the conflict was ending, he assured Pat, “It is all over. . . . I have done my work good or bad.” Kane interpreted the “half a hundred providences which seem to have on occasion specially interposed in my behalf” as the “strongest argument on which I base my more than hope that I shall yet win a peace . . . what other less important purpose has such a stock of miracles been spent for?” The journey had also strengthened his health and he credited “Out door exercise—with excitement enough to blunt the sense of affection, and Mountain Air.”

The small party made slow progress the first day, which ended with their “wagon stuck fast” in a snowdrift and Kane suffering from having “been baptised in our attempt to cross the Creek.” Temporarily separated from the servants, Kane and Cumming spent the night outdoors and without food. The following morning, they encountered a group of Mormons that included William Kimball, Porter Rockwell, and Howard Egan, who respectfully treated Cumming as Utah’s governor. After difficult travel in a snowstorm, they found an “excellent dinner” awaiting them that night, as Young had dispatched one of Salt Lake’s finest chefs to greet them. The next night, the escort took Cumming and Kane past the Mormon fortifications in Echo Canyon. To give Cumming an exaggerated sense of Mormon military strength, “the works were brilliantly lighted by Bon-fires & Much parade.” The Mormon guides deliberately traveled slowly, to give the relatively few defenders time to light additional fires and gather for a series of impromptu speeches from Cumming (who never suspected that his audience did not vary). The illumination of Echo Canyon deeply impressed both Kane and Cumming, who said it “outstripped any thing he ever expected to see.”

Elaborate receptions awaited them in Salt Lake City, and Cumming soon reported to Johnston that he had been universally well-treated and recognized as governor. Accompanied by Cumming, Kane again took up residence at Staines’s
mansion. Mormon leaders, who clearly wanted to implement Kane’s advice to forge an alliance with Cumming against the army and hostile federal officials, nevertheless viewed the newcomer with deep skepticism. When Cumming witnessed the continuing Move South, he pleaded “don’t move you shall not be hurt I will not be Governor if you dont want me.” Apostle Woodruff thought that the “poor Devil should have thought of this principle before he started from home and not come with an armed force to force himself as governor upon a people who did not want him.”

Kane and Cumming immediately investigated some of the charges that had precipitated the Utah Expedition, including the Saints’ purported destruction of the territorial law library and the papers of the district court. Finding both intact, Cumming felt confirmed in his conciliatory approach. Unbeknownst to Cumming, Kane privately met with Young soon after his arrival and “told him that he had caught the fish, now you can cook it as you have a mind to.” Playing both sides, Kane saw himself as directing events that would culminate in peace. On April 14, he took Young and George A. Smith to meet with Cumming. Smith thought that Kane “appeared quite healthy” and described Cumming as a “moderate drinker and a hearty eater,” with “more chops than brains.” Similarly unimpressed, Young left the meeting convinced that Cumming “desired the destruction of the Saints.” At least officially, Cumming had a more positive initial view of Young; he reported to Johnston of Young’s “willingness to afford me every facility which I may require for the efficient performance of my administrative duties.”

For the next several weeks, Kane mediated between Cumming and Young and gathered evidence to rebut allegations made by the former federal officials. Cumming widely proclaimed his willingness to make concessions to the Saints. According to a Mormon who met with Cumming and Kane on April 19, the governor distanced himself from the army and pledged to “make favorable reports to [the] government for us and do all he could to prevent a collision between us and the U.S.” In a cipher letter to his family (probably intended as well for Buchanan), Kane praised Cumming as “right on public matters.” On April 24, Cumming met again with Young in what Kane termed a “final & decisive” conference. “For once I am and know myself to be happy,” Kane recorded. The unofficial truce signaled the Mormons’ willingness to submit to federal authority, allow the army to enter Utah, and end hostilities. In exchange, the Saints secured an ally who promised not to interfere with their religion and to protect them from the federal troops.

Kane continued to direct Cumming’s actions from behind the scenes after the truce, ghostwriting his official communications to government officials. In
a May 2 letter to Secretary of State Lewis Cass, which Kane penned and to which Cumming made only minor corrections, Cumming disputed some of the specific allegations that had prompted the Utah Expedition, announced the progress to peace, portrayed Young as a "calming" influence on the Saints, and combated the notion that rank-and-file Mormons were unhappy under Young's tyranny. Likewise, in a letter to Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives James L. Orr, a prominent South Carolina Democrat, which Kane delivered and may have drafted, Cumming reiterated several of Kane's themes, including the suffering Saints on the Move South, the division of the Saints into Young's peace party and an opposing war faction, and the fear that a war would target innocent victims and ultimately strengthen Mormonism. Praising Young as "earnest, intelligent & of great experience," Cumming wrote that the "chief hope of control over this extraordinary people, is exerted through this man. I believe that I have obtained his confidence and will therefore exercise some ascendency over his actions." Finally, Cumming demanded the removal of Judge Beckles for impaneling a grand jury to investigate polygamy in Utah immediately after Cumming's departure from Camp Scott, which could have doomed the fragile peace and endangered his own life.  

While Kane wrote Cumming's official letters, he also restricted the flow of information to him, further displaying his strategic manipulation of events. According to Daniel H. Wells, a member of the Mormon First Presidency, Kane thought "all things were progressing as well as he could expect." However, Kane felt "quite anxious" that Cumming's letters to Washington should be sent before mail arrived in early May, which could possibly influence Cumming. Should mail be received prematurely, Kane suggested the Mormons "have it detained at Provo" for a few days. He also persuaded Cumming to have his communications taken to Johnston by Mormon messengers, which would "tend to add fuel to the fire" between Johnston and Cumming. Kane perceived that his efforts had solidified Cumming's alliance with the Saints. Later that month, he commented to a Mormon that Cumming "appears to be our warm friend and has pledged himself in writing to sustain the Saints and will call them out to oppose Johnson [sic] and says . . . bro Brigham and he can whip all the troops."  

Kane and Cumming also visited Provo, hoping to persuade the Saints to reverse the Move South. Kane portrayed Young to his family and Buchanan as tempering the more extreme Mormons (even though, in reality, Young had forcefully exorted his sometimes recalcitrant followers to continue the Move South). Both Kane and Cumming repeatedly urged the end of the Move South, but given the deep animosity toward the military, the Saints abandoned the policy only after the army passed through Salt Lake City on June 26. Privately,
Kane perceived that Young was reluctant to shift his course again: “The effect of his changing his position for the third time would have been to discredit entirely his extraordinary pretensions as one receiving revelations from the Most High.”

On May 5, Young “tenderly” broke the news of John Kane’s death to Thomas, prompting his decision to return to Philadelphia. Three days later, Young invited Kane to investigate Mormonism’s spiritual claims. Since 1846, they had engaged in a “friendly and free interchange of views.” Sensing Kane’s “guarded reserve” on “matters of religious belief,” however, Young had carefully avoided the subject. Correctly deducing that Kane was “more or less inclined to skepticism” on religious matters, Young argued that Mormonism “is so naturally philosophical, and so consistent with and enforce of every valuable and true principle” that it would “interest a person [of] your reflective turn of mind.” Kane rejected Young’s overtures; for him, Mormonism would always remain in the realm of reform, not personal belief.

Kane left Salt Lake City with Cumming and an escort of Mormons on May 13. Wells recorded that Kane “seemed considerably affected in taking leave of the City, constantly looking back as we rode along the bench, and admiring it, but said he should never see it again.” The group first traveled to Camp Scott, where Kane and Cumming learned of Buchanan’s appointment of official peace commissioners. On April 6, Buchanan, hopeful that Kane had successfully encouraged Mormon leaders to back down, had issued a presidential proclamation. If the Saints submitted to federal authority, Buchanan promised a blanket pardon and noninterference with their religion. This news, along with the arrival of Kane and his Mormon entourage, incensed the soldiers at Camp Scott. A Mormon who passed nearby later that month wrote: “I understand that hell is at Fort Bridger. . . . The soldiers were as mad as devils when Colonel Kane and his escort passed through their midst; and they have made two attempts to kill the colonel, but have failed.” Leaving Cumming in this inhospitable environment, Kane and the Mormons traveled across the plains.

A few weeks later, Buchanan’s peace commissioners—Lazarus W. Powell, a senator-elect and former governor of Kentucky, and Ben McCulloch, who had won fame as a soldier in the Texas Revolution, in skirmishes against Indians, and in the Mexican-American War—arrived at Camp Scott, where they counseled with Johnston and Cumming. The commissioners reported to Secretary of War Floyd that the Saints had duped their new governor about their pacific intentions. They then traveled to Utah, where they presented Buchanan’s conditions to Mormon leaders. Eager both to make peace and to save face, Young agreed to allow the army into Utah but insisted that it not be stationed in Salt Lake.
The Utah War, Act II

City. On June 26, Johnston marched his army through the abandoned streets of Salt Lake City and, about forty miles southwest of the city, they built Camp Floyd. Shortly afterward, Young declared an end to the Move South. The Utah War ended in an uneasy truce, and both Buchanan and Young claimed victory.

To Kane, Young wrote, "The Administration yielded, and we feel also to yield a little, and bear much so long as we are satisfied that no real evil is intended."42

The Latter-day Saints had little doubt of Kane's divinely appointed role in ending the Utah War. Eleanor McComb Pratt, widow of the slain Apostle Parley P. Pratt, wrote that Kane was "inspired by God to stand in the defence of oppressed innocence, and inasmuch as you continue to act obedient to this inspiration I know the God of Israel will bless you and millions will rise up and call you blessed." William W. Phelps and Eliza R. Snow, Zion's poets laureate, both composed tributes to Kane. In his, Phelps honored "The tongue that forever speaks truth." Snow's piece, though not the most elegant poetry, illustrates well the Saints' view of Kane:

You plead the rights of man—you fain would see
All men enjoy the sweets of liberty.
Goodness is greatness—knowledge pow'r; and thou
Perchance art greatest of your nation, now.
And while that nation sink, beneath its blight;
You, like a constellation, cheer the night.

Some Saints believed that Kane's conversion must be imminent. Josephine Richards, a recent handcart pioneer, told him, "the Spirit testifies to me that you will be one with us... and you will be great in the Kingdom of our God."43

The Mormon leadership also extolled Kane. Apostle George A. Smith credited him for saving the army, "this mass of sinful mortals from festering along the mountain sides," and allowing its entrance into Utah, "with all the paraphernalia of modern Christianity, civilization and order, the stream of corruption, its accumulated icebergs of degradation and filth." While Smith perhaps considered this a dubious honor, he also noted that the Saints were "indebted to Kane for their existence at the present time." In short, God "made you an instrument to prevent the shedding of blood." Young reinforced Kane's sense of heroic iconoclasm, praising him for waging "the battle of life, for the right, against all opposing powers, rising above the afflictions and reverses which beset your pathway, and stand[ing] forth to the world, the champion of truth, liberty and honour as you have ever been." In 1864, the Saints named a county in southern Utah after Kane as a gesture of their esteem. While Mormon thankfulness could cynically be viewed as the flattery necessary to stroke the ego of a valued
ally, their private statements also reflect their estimation of his actions. To Woodruff, Young confided that Kane's intervention was the "reason why we have let the army alone."44

By contrast, the national press engaged in a lengthy debate over Kane's motivations for traveling to Utah and his influence in the peace settlement. Throughout his absence, Elizabeth fretted over the speculative, incomplete, and often inaccurate reports that trickled east about his activities. The Kane family jealously guarded Thomas's reputation. Pat was "very furious" about Buchanan's appointment of peace commissioners, believing it would "take all the wind out of Tom's sails." Though initially hopeful this "may influence his return," Elizabeth soon agreed, seeing it as "singular behaviour on Mr Buchanan's part" that "seems to place Tom in a very unpleasant position." She hoped that Thomas "will have succeeded in making peace before the Commissioners get out there," but envisioned a "frightful possibility": "Suppose poor Young & H C Kimball give themselves up on the faith of Tom's word, and then Buchanan refuses to sustain him?" To combat Buchanan's actions and unfavorable press reports, the Kanes followed Thomas's pattern of anonymously placing favorable articles and "Letters from California" in newspapers. One article, purportedly written in Los Angeles in late April, conjectured that Kane had undertaken "an errand of mercy, hoping he might bring about a reconciliation, and avert bloodshed."45

When news of Cumming's triumphant entrance into Salt Lake City arrived east, Kane became an instant celebrity. On May 17, the St. Louis Republican trumpeted, "End of the Mormon Rebellion!" The paper credited Kane with causing the "change in Brigham Young's programme— from that of open rebellion, to a direct invitation to Gov. Cumming to visit Salt Lake City, and take charge of the Government." The paper asked for an inquiring public, "Who is Col. Kane?" Even in his own moment of glory, the long shadow of his deceased father and brother still partially obscured Thomas; the Republican called him, then thirty-six years old, a "young man," the son of Judge Kane and the brother of Doctor Kane. Denying that Kane was a Mormon, the paper reported that he had been sent to Utah by Buchanan and had used his influence to secure peace. The following day in Philadelphia, Elizabeth happily recorded, "Today, the newspapers and the town are ringing with his praises," and some even dubbed Kane "the Napoleon of Peace." Greeley's New York Tribune lauded him: "He has avoided the effusion of blood; he has saved the expenditure of millions; he has substituted peace for a war in which glory was impossible. A private citizen, he has done what all the power of the Government could not accomplish. Honor to the patriot and the peacemaker!"46

Other press reports asserted that Kane's secret Mormonism, not humanitarian
motivations, had prompted his actions. To dispel such rumors, Pat met with Buchanan in mid-May, who "with his own hand wrote a notice to the [Washington] Union, saying that Tom was no Mormon, but a worthy brother of Elisha's." Buchanan still distanced himself from Kane—so that Kane could receive all the credit, he disingenuously explained—though he also told Pat that the peace commissioners "were no more Commissioners than Tom himself." A correspondent of the New York Times doubted the Union's denial, reporting that Kane had previously "proselytized for Mormonism." Even if Kane was not Mormon, the Times correctly reasoned, he "may be acting as much in behalf of Brigham Young as of the Government." 47

Most accounts dismissed reports of Kane's covert Mormonism, but many nevertheless sniffed a conspiracy between Kane and Buchanan to manipulate the country into a dishonorable peace. The New York Times' correspondent at Camp Scott speculated that Buchanan had colluded with Kane, a "sympathizer with the Mormon faith, and therefore necessarily a disciple and servant of its High Priest." In this telling, Buchanan sent Kane as an "emissary to Brother Brigham" to trade an amnesty for the Mormons' "sham obedience" and "let the federal Administration get its fingers out of the fire." Like the Times' correspondent, many Americans viewed the prospect of a nonpunitive peace with displeasure. One Georgian railed to Buchanan, "I think Brigham's blood would save the blood of probably thousands—and millions of money!" Instead, Young, a "mean, disgusting scamp," had escaped punishment even though he had "set at defiance the whole government, burned supplies, murdered men, involve[d] the country in untold expenses, and the Army in unappreciable hardships." The New York Herald meanwhile criticized Kane for simple irrelevance, as "army movements," not his actions, had impelled the Mormons to seek peace. 48

For his part, Kane sought to deflect attention away from himself and toward Cumming. During his return trip, he spoke often with reporters, leaving a trail of newspaper articles quickly dispersed around the country that credited Cumming for pacifying the troublesome Mormons. At Fort Laramie, for instance, Kane told a reporter that he had never witnessed "an infuriated mob in a city more desperate or wild in their denunciation of the United States," but Cumming's "cool, determined manner kept them at bay till reason got the better of their judgment, and they quieted down like a swarm of bees." 49

Amid the continuing press speculation, Kane arrived in Philadelphia on June 19. Ecstatic, Elizabeth thought he "looked far better in health than when he left." He stayed only two days before leaving to consult with Buchanan at Washington. During his brief visit, though, he shared unwelcome news with Elizabeth. The "first moment we were alone," Elizabeth recorded, her husband told...
her, "like my dear honest darling, that the hope that had dawned on him of being a Christian was gone." Elizabeth believed it was "only a cloud veiling the sun" and professed assurance he would return to Christianity. Nevertheless, she wrote, "how hard it will be to shut up in my own breast again all the sympathies that went out to my brother-Christian. He was so much nearer me!" The exact reasons for Kane's disaffection are as obscure as those for his conversion the previous fall. Had the "Holy War," as he referred to the nation's actions during the Utah War, fought by American Christians against his Mormon friends crushed his fledgling faith? Had his associations with the Saints soured him on Christian orthodoxy? Elizabeth may have thought so. A few weeks later, she noted the "seemingly miraculous power that Tom says these Mormons have. He has seen instances, scores of them, of invalids restored to health and working capacity by the word of the Mormon priest." Jealous of their claims on Thomas's time and suspicious of their influence on his spiritual health, Elizabeth clearly resented the Mormons at times.

Thomas also distressed Elizabeth by reiterating his unwillingness to accept government reimbursement for his traveling expenses. Meticulously recording their financial standing in her journal, Elizabeth noted credits of $18,150 (mostly tied up in insurance policies and McKean County land) versus debts of $9,184, including $2,600 Kane had taken to Utah and an additional $1,200 Elizabeth used during his absence. Pat concurred with Thomas's decision, reasoning, "Tom's achievement is worth more than $2600 to the family." Elizabeth countered that Thomas had "no prospect of employment (lucrative employment, his family will give him work enough)," two children, and "a useless woman like me to be a drag on him." She wrote, "Still, he wills it, and notwithstanding his theory of partnership, equal rights, and so forth, practically the only result of my disapproval is to depress his spirits, and make him firmer in the belief which I know he entertains that my honour is not as delicate as his, and that my mercenary associations make me covetous." While she respected his "noble delicacy and disinterestedness," she feared that if he died or could not find work, "we must be a burden on Mother's estate," a prospect that "galls me." Elizabeth vacillated between lamenting her own dependence—"To be a burden on him in everything degrades me in my own eyes"—and expressing relief "that I am no longer my own mistress but can refer everything to 'the Colonel.'"  

While Elizabeth agonized, Kane consulted with Buchanan and his cabinet during five days in Washington in late June. In his first private meeting with the president, Kane assured him that the Utah peace "is all true . . . and better than he had yet heard"; in response, Buchanan "thanked God with some solemnity." The Move South had evoked Buchanan's concern, and he inquired, "But these
poor creatures—is there much suffering among them?” Kane dispelled his apprehensions about the Saints’ immediate necessities to his satisfaction. Buchanan and his cabinet disagreed with Kane about the “course to be pursued respecting Utah,” and Kane “quarrelled” with Secretary of War John Floyd. Kane considered their disputes “honest and open differences of opinion,” which did not cause him to think “less highly of the President & Cabinet . . . seeing that the truth had been kept from them by designing persons, and they no doubt heard it from him [Kane] for the first time.” At length, however, Kane persuaded Buchanan to accept his narrative of the war, and he “received Buchanan’s promise as a gentleman, that the Mormons should no longer be molested.” Even though he largely accepted Kane’s views of the war’s outcome, Buchanan kept Kane at arm’s length publicly. After Kane’s visit to Washington, Buchanan’s allies at the Washington Union asserted that Kane went to Utah not at the president’s behest, but “on an individual, self-imposed mission, as a private citizen, philanthropist, well-wisher of the Mormons, or what you will.”

The cabinet discussions in part focused on the prospect of replacing some of the current Utah officials. John Bernhisel reported to Young that the Saints’ “enemies” desired Cumming’s removal, but Kane’s strong support had ensured his retention. Furthermore, Bernhisel related that changes in other appointments (a likely reference to Judge Eckels) “are also confidently anticipated.” A week later, though, Bernhisel stated that Eckels would not be removed, but “he holds his office by an uncertain tenure, and he will be instructed fully in regard to his future course.” Though the efforts against Eckels ultimately fizzled, Kane succeeded in lobbying for the appointment of a district attorney sympathetic to the Mormons to counteract Eckels. In July, Attorney General Black selected Pennsylvanian Alexander Wilson, whom Kane believed “quite above the grade of man who generally consents to accept a Dist. Attyship for the Territories.” Wilson proved to be a favorable appointment for the Mormons, as he supported Cumming’s conciliatory policies (though alcoholism and indebtedness limited his effectiveness). Kane and Mormon leaders also expressed satisfaction with Cumming’s continued friendliness. Young explained, “He likes exceedingly to have things his own way, but so long as his way lies generally in the right channel we can overlook some erratic flights of assumed authority.” Following Kane’s meetings with Buchanan’s cabinet, both Bernhisel and Kane sensed that the political winds had temporarily shifted in the Saints’ favor. Bernhisel noted, “Unless the imprudence and want of self-control of our people furnish them with a fresh set of excuses, they will never be able [to] send another army to Utah, or pay for sustaining an army another winter there.”

Free from the immediate crisis, Kane descended into illness and depression.
After his return from Washington, Elizabeth worried, "He is sick already and is also suffering much from one eye, which was injured in crossing the snows." A few days later, Kane awoke with a "violent fever" and he soon became "thoroughly worn out & dispirited"; the Kanes traveled to a resort in the Hudson Valley to help him recover. Depression, related to the deaths of Elisha and John Kane, reinforced his poor health. In late August, he was "slowly emerging from the depths of [his] grief." (His depression, however, continued into 1859, when he described himself as "despondent and listless; and, if he has ceased weeping for his noble father and dear brother—is all too conscious that the light of his day has left the world.") In mid-July, the Kanes received another disappointment as Judge John Cadwalader appointed another man to Kane's former clerkship. Elizabeth told her husband "we must go West," as they could not "earn enough to enable us to spend our winters here, our summers in a healthier climate. Better therefore to remain permanently in the healthy mountains." She thus encouraged Thomas to seek an appointment as land agent of the McKeans and Elk Land Company, a course he successfully pursued.14

Even during his sickness, Kane worked to persuade the Buchanan administration and the press to accept his narrative of the Utah War. Bernhisee traveled to Philadelphia and New York to assist Kane "in arranging matters with the press." Kane's hypersensitivity to perceived slights to his honor (probably exacerbated by his illness) soon soured his relationship with Buchanan's cabinet. Kane asked Attorney General Black to review a letter he had written to Young, giving the Mormons promises about future government intentions. Black's refusal to commit before consulting with Buchanan offended Kane's honor, though Black tried to assure him that his "voluntary and patriotic service, are highly valued" and informed him that Buchanan wished to make statements to Young only through official channels. Nevertheless, Kane demanded the letter's return and threatened to cease all communication with Black, though he soon reversed course. While he privately considered Buchanan's "certainly the most corrupt administration he has ever had to deal with," Kane resolved to continue "an avowed supporter."33

Though he lacked inside news from the administration, Kane sent Young advice in mid-July. Believing the tide had shifted, he urged Young to support Cumming, prepare another bid for Utah statehood, and ask for a "general investigation" by the government to disprove the charges that led to the Utah War. Kane marveled at the rapid shift in public opinion on the nation's "Holy War" against the Saints. The previous year, the "unanimity with which our people were prepared to carry on the Mormon War was frightful...like the frantic crowd rushing for a narrow passage, driving the foremost before it, and decla-
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debate concerned "who shall have the credit . . . of the pacification of Utah"—
Johnston, Cumming and Kane, or Buchanan's peace commissioners. While a
successful statehood campaign would require an even greater change in public
opinion, Kane promised, "Time will do the work," and he pledged to "give you
months of my time between this and Christmas to lay the guns, and order on the
assault." To ensure the effectiveness of his efforts, he counseled the Saints to
be quiet and orderly and well disposed," so that the new federal officials would
contradict the "slanders" against the Saints and media attention would focus on
the "camp lies," the fraud of the "contractors and speculators," and the cost of the
war.36

Though Kane perceived that the pendulum of public opinion had begun to
swing toward more sympathetic portrayals of the Saints, Mormon leaders con-
tinued to feel under attack. In a letter to Kane, George A. Smith characterized
the "reports of Newspaper Correspondents from this place" as "a tissue of false-
hoods." That fall, a non-Mormon from St. Louis, Kirk Anderson, began an anti-
Mormon newspaper, the Valley Tan, in Utah. Though Young considered it a
"vulgar little scurrilous sheet," he feared its influence on the national mood.
The newly installed federal judicial machinery in Utah, headed by Eckels, also
targeted church leaders with "vexatious schemes and cases against [Young] and
others, in order to annoy and stir up strife and contention." In addition, the Saints
constantly protested the "corrupting influence" of the army and their "camp fol-
lowers." Young charged, "We live under the menaces of a living Military despo-
tism." He pleaded with Kane to focus his lobbying and public relations efforts on
obtaining the troops' removal.37

To assist Kane, Young assigned newspaper editor and soon-to-be apostle
George Q. Cannon to "act entirely" under Kane's direction in the East. A thirty-
one-year-old English immigrant, Cannon possessed a gentlemanly demeanor
and a quick intelligence; his apologetic and writing skills had been honed
through four years as a missionary in Hawaii and stints as editor of two Mor-
mon newspapers. Young hoped Cannon and Kane would develop "a mutual
friendship" that would "aid in ridding our fair Territory of her foreign dictators."
Cannon, who probably influenced Mormonism more than anyone else except
Young in the second half of the nineteenth century, quickly impressed Kane
and (again, with the exception of Young) became his closest Mormon associate.
Two years later, Kane extolled Cannon to Young as "singularly well fitted for the
conduct of public business": "With G. Q. Cannon at Washington, your affairs
will never suffer there."38

Kane concocted a plan for Cannon to cultivate relationships with newspaper
editors. Cannon should not yet assume the ecclesiastical post of the “presidency of the Eastern mission.” Rather, he should pose as “a man of business, a Mormon” of course, with some means at command” to devote to changing public opinion. Kane instructed Cannon to meet with leading newspaper editors in New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C., who possessed the “rare gift of knowing the public mind—knowing what will meet with popular favor and when and how to manufacture public opinion on any question.” Cannon should offer the editors “well written articles as correspondence and editorial” revealing “several unwritten chapters of the history of our troubles.” Following Cannon’s efforts, Kane also visited the editors to “learn their true position and feelings and shape things accordingly.” Implementing their plan, Cannon and Kane placed anonymous articles and persuaded several of the editors to support a proposed congressional bill to make Utah territorial positions elected rather than appointed, which would have given Mormons control of local government. In return, the editors received articles, flattery, and possibly bribes.59

As he had in 1846, Kane recognized the relationship between public opinion and congressional legislation. Acting upon Kane’s recommendation, the Mormons prepared another application for statehood by dusting off an 1856 memorial that, upon the advice of Senator Stephen A. Douglas, had never been presented to a then-hostile Congress. In October, Young instructed Bernhisel to push the bid in the upcoming session when Kane “deemed proper.” In December, though, Bernhisel reported that the prospects appeared “very gloomy,” and Kane advised that statehood would be achieved only after a “decided change in public sentiment in our behalf,” which would “require some time to accomplish.” A few months later, Kane had completely reversed his earlier suggestion; he now believed that a statehood application would only display the Saints’ “weakness,” as “falsehoods of the most atrocious character against us as a people” continued to circulate. The Mormon troubles weighed heavily on Kane during the winter of 1858–59 and even jeopardized his health, as he “over taxed himself on several occasions” while trying to “counteract and mar the plots” of the Saints’ opponents.60

Cumming’s possible removal as governor loomed as the greatest threat to Kane’s vision of the proper resolution to the Utah War. While Kane and Young had their own doubts about Cumming—his alcoholism made him “his own worst enemy”—they recognized his key role in protecting the Saints and feared any possible replacement. During August 1858, Kane told Young of his plans to bolster Cumming’s public reputation in a “narrative which I shall present next winter.” To satisfy Cumming’s considerable vanity, solidify his alliance with the Saints, and strengthen his credibility with Buchanan, Kane would present Cum-
ling (not the commissioners) as the key peacemaker. To do so would require him to omit Young's own "chief role," but Kane promised Young to "leave on file among my papers a Statement that will do you justice." Buchanan's search for a possible replacement for Cumming during the winter of 1858–59 prompted Kane to deliver his lecture defending the governor before the New York Historical Society in March 1859. As before his lecture on the Mormons in 1850, Kane's health presented problems. In late February, Elizabeth "annoyed" Kane by pressing him to give up the lecture. "He is anxious to 'put it through' a phrase which curses his life," she fretted. "He is perpetually putting weights on his safety valve in order to press on under higher working power than he ought to do." While Kane worried that it would not be a "credible literary production" he hoped it would "help to keep Cumming Governor of Utah."

As Kane mounted the lectern, he faced a large and "very intelligent" crowd. To bolster his own credibility, he publicly distanced himself from the Saints; he hoped the lecture would "put an end to the connection of his name with the affairs of Utah, which had become a source of absolute annoyance to him." He disappointed at least some in the audience by not delivering a "racy recital of adventures and experiences among the polygamous community and its leading spirits." Rather, Kane presented a "eulogy of Gov. Cumming" and his courageous decision to travel to Salt Lake City unaccompanied by the army and without assurances of his reception. Complaining that "no man has been more vilified and had less justice accorded to him," he lauded Cumming's "gallant conduct in securing peace. Though "feeble in body" and in pain, Kane "got through with it very well," in Cannon's estimation.

Kane's lecture accomplished its aim of helping Cumming remain Utah's governor. According to Cannon, Buchanan anxiously inquired about the lecture, and he "felt much relieved" that Kane had not contradicted the president's own public statements (though he had shifted the emphasis on Utah's pacification from the peace commissioners to Cumming). Kane pronounced himself "very well satisfied with the result." Cannon agreed, calling the lecture "most opportune—it was a blow, and a telling one, too, in the right spot," which gave Kane "reason to think Governor Cumming safe for the present, and this is a great relief to him." Impressed with Kane's dedication, Cannon wrote that there "probably was not one Elder in the Church out of a thousand who would have taken such risks or deemed it necessary to have gone to such pains . . . to accomplish such an end." Unlike in 1850, Kane did not publish this lecture, a reflection of his exhaustion, financial difficulties, and desire to keep out of the public spotlight. To influence public policy, Kane also cultivated a personal relationship with Buchanan. According to Cannon, Buchanan now saw himself as the Mor-
mons’ “best friend,” a feeling Kane encouraged, believing Buchanan “would feel a sense of pride in being thought our [the Mormons’] protector.” For the most part, Kane saw Buchanan’s actions toward the Saints after the Utah Expedition as “better almost than he could have expected.”

While he extolled Cumming, Kane repeatedly refused publicity about his own role during the conflict. In July 1858, a group of prominent Philadelphians petitioned Kane to compose a “full, clear and minute narrative” of his “very important service to our Country and humanity.” He declined, citing a wish for obscurity and a desire to not unsettle the fragile peace (though admitting he would like to “expose a few eminent humbugs and salt some of the leeches who drop off so slowly from their hold upon the Treasury”). Eli Price, a Quaker reformer and family friend, urged Kane to reconsider, calling his actions “the most brilliant episode in American history. I say this because the individual of his own high impulses, in so short a time, with great risks, has achieved so great a good, by averting a tremendous evil.” Notwithstanding such encouragement, Kane consistently declined to comment on or write about his experiences. When a newspaper closely tied to the Buchanan administration announced that Kane would present his “case to the people,” he fumed to Buchanan that this “caps the climax of gratuitous misrepresentation.” Insisting again that such a course would be “highly prejudicial to the public interest,” he renewed his “determination with regard to the newspapers and newspaper people.” Kane only wanted to “run away and hide myself among the mountains of Elk County.”

Elizabeth offered several explanations for Kane’s distaste of self-promotion. First, he believed that receiving the “glory of men” would sully the offering he had made to God.” Though he had again renounced Christian orthodoxy, he yet “felt very humbly and yet very proudly that God had accepted him as an instrument.” In addition, Kane believed that continued peace depended on his silence: “Every word he utters, good, bad or indifferent would be caught up in Utah and used to influence the public mind there.” His silence ensured that the Mormons would “wait and keep on the lookout for something from him for a good while”; in the meantime, they would “be settling down, quieting their own apprehensions, and making the best of things.” A truthful narrative would require Kane to expose “what miscalculation the Mormons have met with of late, and what excuse they had for rebelling,” as well as the potential “mischief” the Saints could yet cause. Such sentiments would “encourage the War party in Utah and proportionately depress the friends of Peace.” Finally, Elizabeth believed that Kane’s patriotism compelled him not to reveal “so much that was discreditable to our own United States officials.” Kane was certainly not compelled by humility. Indeed, he credited himself and Young with saving the nation from
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war. He privately wrote, "next to myself—this is modest—our country owes more
to Brigham Young than to any other human being in our generation." 65

Concerned for her husband's reputation, Elizabeth dissented from his decision to avoid publicity. Even while claiming she eschewed ambition—"certainly I would not care to have Tom a Major, General, Ambassador, Prince or President"—she wanted Buchanan to recognize him during his annual message in December 1858. She suspected Buchanan would not do it, however, given the precedent of a June presidential message that included "no word of Tom, though in a special message on Utah affairs a word of praise would have been, to say the least, graceful." Buchanan's only gesture to reward Kane—offering to appoint him to a foreign mission—had thoroughly annoyed Elizabeth. Since Kane's well-known antislavery views would likely prevent confirmation, she charged Buchanan with insincerity and ingratitude. In his December message, Buchanan surprised Elizabeth by mentioning Kane, "who, from motives of pure benevolence, and without any official character or pecuniary compensation, visited Utah during the last inclement winter for the purpose of contributing to the pacification of the Territory." However, Buchanan highlighted the role of the army and the official peace commissioners rather than Kane's contribution. While she expressed some small pleasure at Buchanan's statement—"they say the Kanes are the only family in the country two of whose members have been mentioned in presidential messages"—Elizabeth charged the president with giving "a perverted statement of facts." She fumed, "He actually praises the drunken and brutal wretches who he knows gave Tom next to as much trouble as the Mormons." 66

Elizabeth contrasted Buchanan's stingy praise with the Mormons' actions. Besides an outpouring of tributes, the Saints repeatedly (if surreptitiously) tried to reimburse Kane for his expenses. When Daniel Wells parted from Kane after accompanying him on the first stretch of his journey home, he "dropped something heavy in my lap and rode off not stopping for all my shouts." Kane found a "chronometer watch worth at least $500," which he gave to Elizabeth Cumming to return. In addition, Kane spent twelve hundred dollars in bank drafts while in Utah, which had never been cashed. Suspicious, he pressed Bernhisel for an explanation. Reluctantly, Bernhisel gave Kane a letter Young had written for such an occasion, in which Young pleaded with Kane to accept the "just though exceedingly poor remuneration for many very great favors." Kane, however, insisted on repaying the money. 67

Though he shied away from publicity for himself, Kane continued to burnish the Mormon public image, in part through lobbying the Buchanan administration to contain the most explosive issue connected to the Utah War: the Moun-
tain Meadows Massacre. During his journey to Utah, Kane had experienced the consequences of the massacre in the rage of the San Bernardino Vigilance Committee and in the disquietude of the southern Utah settlements. Although his route northward bypassed Mountain Meadows, Kane met with Kantosh, a Paiute Ute Indian chief who had converted to Mormonism, who confirmed what other Mormons had undoubtedly told Kane. According to Kanosh, the Pancho emigrant party, traveling from Arkansas to California, had stirred up continual troubles in their journey through Utah. Kanosh charged that the emigrants had "killed a beef for them [the Indians] but must have poisoned it," as "four men and a number of women & children" died. "Then they got so mad; they passed the word round & gathered all together and used them up," he concluded. Kanosh even provided Kane with the names of several of the Native Americans purportedly responsible. Thus, Kane heard a narrative that freed Mormons of any complicity in the crime.68

Just as he had easily believed Mormons' denials of polygamy until 1852, Kane accepted their explanation, buttressed by Kanosh's testimony, of the Mountain Meadows Massacre. The grisly details doubtless seemed too atrocious to attribute to some of those whose cause he had long championed. His trust in the Mormons and his emotional dependence on his relationship with them conditioned him to look past the hard truths of the involvement of some Mormons, which most of the nation suspected. Nevertheless, Kane was not alone in initially accepting that the massacre was a Native American atrocity; even Mormon leaders, including Young, at first believed the reports of the massacre perpetrators that shifted the blame to local Indians.69

By 1859, however, Young recognized the guilt of some Mormons in southern Utah (though still not fully understanding the numbers involved) and offered federal judicial authorities assistance to bring them to trial "to be condemned or acquitted as an impartial, unprejudiced judge and jury should decide." Territorial justices John Cradlebaugh and Eckels, deeply suspicious of Young, rejected these offers. That spring, Cradlebaugh convened court in Provo to investigate the massacre and, claiming Mormon intimidation and obstruction, temporarily jailed community officials and ordered federal troops to protect the proceedings. These tactics infuriated both local Mormons (who feared the combination of judicial and military persecution) and more moderate territorial officials, including Governor Cumming, Alexander Wilson, and Jacob Parney (who favored conciliation over confrontation and believed that only the governor could call forth the army). On Young's urging, Kane successfully pressured Buchanan and Attorney General Black in June to restrict the power to request assistance to the governor from federal troops. Black rebuked Cradlebaugh and clarified that...
only Cumming possessed such power. After meeting with the president, Kane
reported to Young that Buchanan "went out of his way to speak in terms of severe
condemnation of the course of the Cradlebaugh ayacuchos" and praised the
Saints' "attachment to law & order." 70

While agreeing with Young and Kane on the immediate issue of the legality
of Cradlebaugh's actions, both Buchanan and Black pressed Kane for more
information on Mountain Meadows. In November 1859, Black asked Kane to
read Cradlebaugh's report, which asserted a connection between the Saints and
the massacre. Again putting on the persona of the impartial outsider, Kane re-
marked to Black of his wish "to put an end to this mixing up my name with
Mormon concern." Nevertheless, Kane repeated the initial Mormon portrayal
of the massacre as solely the responsibility of Native Americans, citing his con-
versation with Kanosh and his own observations of the "wicked and degraded"
Indians of southern Utah. Speaking to Black as a fellow Democratic insider, not
as a Mormon advocate, Kane urged him to support the removal of troops from
Utah. "The Mormons certainly cannot complain" of the soldiers' presence, as
they were "fattening on the camp slops so famously," but both the Democratic
Party and the soldiers would benefit from the army's removal. 71

Kane explained to Young that Black was "anxious for a full account" of the
massacre. Perceiving that "he wishes it for good purposes," he advised Young's
compliance, in the form of a confidential letter to himself that he would then
show to Black. Following Kane's instructions, Young sent a letter that complained
of the attempts, by both the press and government officials like Cradlebaugh, to
link the Saints to the massacre. Young denied personal involvement: "The hor-
rifying event transpired without my knowledge, except from after report, and
the recurring thought of it ever causes a shudder in my feelings." He awaited an
official investigation, as the "facts of the massacre of men, women, and children"
are shocking and crucifying to my feelings, that I have not suffered myself to
hear anymore about them than the circumstances of conversation compelled.
Besides avowing that he had not ordered the massacre, Young changed the sub-
ject to Cradlebaugh's infringements on Mormon civil rights. In his view, federal
judicial officials, their "bayonet courts," and the confusing jurisdictions of the
judicial system in Utah—not Mormon obstruction—explained the lack of ade-
quate investigation and prosecution. 72

Young's explanations and Kane's assurances convinced Black. Further at-
ttempts by Cradlebaugh and Eckels to bring indictments against the perpetrators
proved futile, in part because of their insistence on holding court in central
Utah, rather than in the vicinity of the massacre in southern Utah. The oncom-
ing Civil War distracted the nation from the furor over Mountain Meadows.
Church investigations continued over the next decade, and Young ordered ecclesiastical disciplinary punishment against some of the key participants. Not until the 1870s would additional government inquiries occur, eventually resulting in the execution of John D. Lee, the Mormon scapegoat for the massacre. Kane’s final service to the Saints in the years immediately after the Utah War foreshadowed his primary efforts for them in the 1870s: battling federal antipolygamy legislation. Southerners, concerned with creating a precedent for federal intervention with slavery, had killed three attempts to outlaw Utah polygamy in the 1850s. In 1860, however, antipolygamy legislation passed the House of Representatives. To prevent passage in the Senate, Kane wrote a lengthy letter to Virginia Democratic senator James Mason (a copy of which he also sent to Buchanan) that detailed arguments against the legislation, probably to give Mason firepower to help defeat the bill. Opposition to laws banning polygamy made strange bedfellows out of the antislavery Kane and Mason, the author of the Fugitive Slave Law. In his letter, Kane again emphasized that persecution would only help Mormonism as it would “play into the hands of the ultra-polygamist and war party in Utah” and potentially lead to an armed conflict with the federal government. The Saints, Kane predicted, would wage a costly guerilla war until the army would “be driven to an excess of violence” against Mormon noncombatants, which would evoke the country’s sympathy for the Saints. The nation would then be forced to “make peace with the Mormons just after we had advertised their new creed to all the nations of Christendom, given them a martyrology, and driven every hysteric preacher of their unhappy band stark mad with prophecy, miracle-working and babble in the unknown tongue.” Kane also lobbied Buchanan, who came out in opposition to the antipolygamy legislation. During Kane’s interview with the president, according to Cannon, Buchanan “launched out immediately and scarcely left him [Kane] anything to say . . . He did not want us disturbed, nor any cause of trouble given us, and would use his influence with his friends to have unfriendly and unjust legislation arrested.” For the moment, opponents of the legislation prevailed, and the bill was never brought up for debate in the Senate. With the assistance of Cannon and Utah’s new territorial delegate William Hooper, Kane had once again ward off a threat to the Saints, and he sensed that the congressional actions had been the “last expiring effort” of the Saints’ enemies. Kane’s premature optimism was spectacularly misplaced. Two years later, with southerners absent, the first federal antipolygamy bill, the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act, easily passed. The nation thus entered a new phase in its attempt to answer the Mormon Question; for the next thirty years, a succession of laws applied federal pressure against Mormon polygamy until the Saints abandoned the practice.
As during no other time in his life, Kane shaped events of national importance during the Utah War era. His intervention relied on his previous career in Democratic, anti-evangelical reform. Kane’s view of the Utah War as a “Holy War,” propelled in large part by the culture of evangelical reform, shaped his sense of mission, as he sought to protect the religious liberty of the Saints from reformers’ meddling and federal intrusions. His status as a Democratic Party insider gave him sufficient credibility to win Buchanan’s cautious assent to his proposal; Kane also used his Democratic connections to shape perceptions of the war and policies toward the Mormons after the conflict. In addition, Kane’s involvement in the Utah War allowed him to play the role of the romantic hero on a national stage, as he risked his own safety to stand between a downtrodden people and an army bent (in his eyes) on persecution. By setting himself against the opinion of the nation and undertaking an arduous journey in the dead of winter, he had helped avert a potential catastrophe.

In the Utah War and its aftermath, Kane achieved his central aims. During the war, he successfully created narratives that helped persuade the Mormons to accept Cumming as governor and that transformed Young from chief agitator to the necessary check on the Mormon war faction, someone with whom the Buchanan administration could work. Certainly, Kane made missteps as well; his rapid alienation of the army, for instance, could have ultimately harmed his mission of peace, though in actuality it strengthened his relationship with Cumming. In the immediate postwar period, Kane ensured that his vision of the Utah War’s resolution prevailed, particularly in his efforts to keep Cumming as governor, influence public opinion, and block anti-polygamy legislation. Here, too, there were failures and frustrations. Troops remained in Utah, non-Mormons flowed into the territory, an opposition newspaper sprang up, the territory was no closer to statehood, most officials—with the exceptions of the hard-drinking Governor Cumming and U.S. Attorney Wilson—remained hostile to the Saints, and continuing coverage of the Mountain Meadows Massacre mitigated Kane’s public relations efforts.

While Kane may have overestimated his own importance at times, had he not intervened, the Utah War might well have escalated (and even won a place in the textbooks). In brokering the peace and then keeping the compromise in place until the Civil War, Kane ensured that the resolution of the Mormon Question would be transferred from the battlefield to the realm of politics and law. Though heated disputes continued for decades, never again would the Saints and the nation come to the brink of a shooting war.

Following Kane’s opposition to the anti-polygamy legislation in 1860, a year went by before more letters passed between Young and Kane. Indeed, except
for sporadic contacts, Kane had little to do with Mormon affairs for most of the next decade. In September 1861, Young dictated a letter, pointing out the irony that “the seat of war has been transferred from Utah to the immediate vicinity of the Capital of our government.” By then, Kane had already transitioned from peacemaker to soldier in a war the Mormons saw as divine retribution on the nation.76