EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS DISCUSSING JOHN W. WOOLLEY

Letter from George E. Woolley to Orson A. Woolley, Magrath Canada, November 2, 1916:

The last time I saw our brother John was at Bro. [John W.] Taylor's funeral and I do not know whether he has been reinstated or not, but if he has it is being kept quiet. That is one of the things I do not understand. When a person is excommunicated public notice is given of the same but in the receiving of the person again in the church it would appear to be the policy to keep the matter hushed up.

Letter from George E. Woolley to Orson A. Woolley, Magrath Canada, September 1, 1917:

I presume you read in last saturdays News the announcement of the First Presidency and President Grant relative to the rumor that John W. Taylor had been received back into the church. It comes as a shock to me and one regrets its apparent necessity because of the families and especially the children.

I had been told by a member of our brother Samuel's family that Bro. Taylor had been received back with all his former blessings and it had come so straight I had allowed my reason to accept it against the impression I had to the contrary. Statements relative to our brother John have been made to me that I cannot gainsay and yet to believe them as they have been given me is beyond my power to accept. There are so many falsehoods or to modify that a little, so many apparent false statements, being made and that have been made in the past that I shudder and am apprehensive for the future. I do not know how soon the split will come but split there will be in this church. Our Father's patience will be exhausted, it seems to me, and there will come a shaking up of things.

Letter from George E. Woolley to Orson A. Woolley, Magrath Canada, October 13, 1927

I am writing to acquaint you with the fact that our sister Fannie is again being troubled with an idea that her existence is being threatened and that this time there is a conspiracy against the family. My heart is indeed sad this morning with the trials that seem to be coming our way, Aunt Beth is still in the sanitarium at Portland and not progressing as I could wish.

Letter from George E. Woolley to Orson A. Woolley, Magrath Canada, July 27th, 1918

I suppose you have read of the death of Vinnie, Gordon's wife. She was buried thursday from the 27th Ward Chapel. I presume I got myself into bad repute with the sympathizers of our Bro. John. At the conclusion of the services the Bro. in charge announced that John Woolley would dedicate the grave. It struck me as being out of place and wrong. John had not heard the statement as he is hard of hearing and when on the outside of the chapel and the funeral procession was forming, Loren told John of the announcement. Loren apparently being in harmony with same. Sell was at the funeral and I tried to find him and ask if he thought it was proper thing for John to do. I could not locate him, however, and I felt some delicacy myself of broaching the matter to John, feeling that he might think me prejudiced. I started out to walk up to the cemetery which is just a very short distance from the 27th. Ward Chapel and over took Taylor Woolley. I remarked that I hoped John would not dedicate the grave. He wanted to know why. I told him John had been in to see me within ten days and asked me if he dedicated the grave and the authorities heard of it would hinder any action they might feel disposed to take. That John could not dedicate the grave by virtue of any priesthood he held and without the priesthood it would be no dedication. At first Taylor thought I was wrong, but soon concluded that I was right and
said he would go and speak to John. He started but his courage oozed out and he said he would not. The auto carrying John, Fannie, Rachel and Maria coming along just then I jumped on the step of the auto and asked John if he intended to dedicate the grave. He said he did not want to but they had asked him and he didn't know what he would do. I told him in my judgment, it would be a mistake and gave him my reason. Fanny, Maria and Rachel thought it was awful of me to say such a thing. That there could be no objection. Seeing Loren, I dropped off and took the matter up with him. He said he believed I was right but left it with his father. Well, John dedicated (?) the grave. Did not do it by virtue of any priesthood. Prayed also for those of our family that were weak in the faith (I took it that was for me) and thanked the Lord that there were many of our family there that has never denied the faith. And then some. Spoke to Bell just before the prayer was offered and he wanted to know how I knew that John was not authorized to dedicate the grave. I told him I did not believe the tales that I had heard and that he had heard. He wanted to know why and I told him God does not do things that way. He seemed to modify his view some after that and thought I had done the right thing in speaking to John. Well, it is up to them. I feel that I did my duty, even though I was the youngest of Father's sons. Probably it was presumptuous of me the youngest to thus speak to the oldest but I did it anyway. Did I do wrong?

I think John must have heard some of the statements made by you relative to his case. I am not positive but have an impression along that line. He came in to see me some ten days, or such a matter, ago and said it had come to him that it had been stated that he was not feeling badly about being out of the church and that such statements hurt him. He said that if any one asked him how he felt he always answered that he felt fine etc. But that was as to his physical condition. He felt very keenly he said the being on the out side of the Church. That he had suffered very much in his feelings and he wanted people who thought he did not to know better.

Asked me to use my influence to get him back with any one with whom I might have influence. He mentioned Bro. George Albert Smith in particular.

I told him my advice to him was to go personally to Bro. Grant and tell him just how he felt etc. That if he would go to Bro. Grant in the proper spirit personally that it would do more for his cause than having other people always bothering the authorities. He did not take kindly to my suggestion, however, stating that they were responsible for his condition (they, meaning I took it, The Twelve) and they would have to take it up and make matters right. I felt very little humility in his attitude, but he says he is humble and could only show it more by digging a hole and getting in it and pulling the ground in on him. To me it is a pitiable condition. He is aged and seemingly unable to see the thing in the right light. He cannot divest himself of the idea that he is right and that the apostles are wrong and that he should be vindicated. I would like very much to see him properly reinstated, but I really, I could make no plea for him because of his repentance or conviction on his part of wrong doing in that which he did. All that I could do would be to urge his life of devotion in the past and his age and the sorry spectacle of one such as he being likely to go down to his grave without reinstatement. And yet a reinstatement on that plea would be merely a make-believe. For he is not repentant. And the worst feature of the whole matter is that he has any number of sympathizers in the family. As I view it there must sooner or later be serious results in our Father's family. The Woolley's are naturally tenacious and it seems part of the family that are becoming more set in the feeling that John is right each day, I believe, and to me it is lamentable.
I have been promising myself for a long time to write you and answer your letter of August 24, 1918, but one thing and another has been allowed to come between my promise and my actual doing. For a time I could not find your letter and there were things in it that I wanted to refresh my memory on before writing. I had had a conversation with Sell that brought back to me some of the statements made by you in your letter relative to the action of Moses W. Taylor in connection with his actions in the case of his brother John W. Sell had been telling me of statements that had been made to him relative to our Bro. John and I wanted to re-read your letter to see just what you had stated. I did not tell Sell of the things of which you wrote. Some of the things told Sell by Loren caused me to remember the answer made by the authorities to Moses W. when asked if he might bless John W. and I wondered if some such advantage was not taken of a remark by Pres. Smith in John's case. However, I am not worried about the matter. I was glad to have your express your views relative to my action in warning John when he was asked to dedicate the grave of Vinnie. I hardly share your views, however, in holding that the one presiding at the meeting was responsible. If he knew the circumstances and John's status he was responsible to the extent of asking John to act. Knowing John's attitude I was fearful that in the dedicating of the grave he would attempt to do so by authority of the priesthood, and I knew that if he did so he would bring himself in direct opposition to the authorities and in defiance of their action. John's responsibility, as I view it, as you apparently do not so view it, in views of the action by the authorities, attached by accepting the invitation to act. I do not know whether the brother in charge of the services was conversant with the fact of John's excommunication or not. If he were, of course he should not have asked John to dedicate the grave. But in either event John knew of his excommunication; he knew he was making efforts to get back into the church; he knew that if he dedicated the grave attempting to exercise the priesthood he would come in direct opposition to the wish of the authorities and in defiance of their action and if he dedicated the grave as an outsider his dedication would be no dedication at all. That is no more of a dedication than if done by a minister who might say a prayer over the grave of any of our Father's children. This may seem extreme but I cannot see it in any other light. I have always looked upon the dedication of a grave as a function pertaining to one holding the priesthood and that it is not properly done except that power be invoked. If I am wrong in that conception then the dedication of Vinnie's grave was valid and proper. If I am right in my conception then the dedication was no dedication. Our brother Gordon did not hear the prayer and without is perfectly satisfied and I am not worrying at all. I simply am stating my view of the matter. If John were as humble and contrite as he should be, he would in my view, avoid doing any thing that would tend to prejudice his case with the authorities. I believe I stated in my last letter to you that he had been to me and asked me to use my influence in getting him back into the church but I cannot consistently do any thing for him as long as he takes the attitude he does. I told him when he came to me that he ought to go direct to Pres. Grant himself and put himself in their hands to do just as they might direct. This he refused to do and I know from his spirit that he is not in the least repentant. That being true, how can I got to Bro. Grant and George A. Smith or others that I may know and ask for his reinstatement? It hurts me to see him take the position that he does at his time of life. He has no assurance that he will live for any great length of time and he should be getting back into the church but he ought to come back rightly.

So far as estranging myself from John by simply advising him in what I thought was for his good, I of course, took that chance but that did not worry me. What I wanted was to have him conduct himself in a way to secure reinstatement and if in giving him my view I was misunderstood I knew time would vindicate my position. I say I knew maybe I should say I believed. John was at the Woolley Reunion and did not seem to hold any feelings against me. Possibly he tolerates me. Bell cautioned him before he arose to speak at the reunion and as result he said nothing particularly obnoxious. Well, I guess that is enough on that matter.
Letter from George E. Woolley to Orson A. Woolley, Dec. 1, 1919

John's case, so far as I know, is unchanged. Norma told me he had been down to see Fannie and that they had had quite a talk and they were both pretty well agreed in their views. Fannie has become quite pronounced in her view that the manifesto was a mistake and a conversation with John would only confirm her in that view.

Letter from George E. Woolley to Orson A. Woolley April 15, 1920

I fear that our brother John will not be reinstated in the church. I had a talk with Bro. Randall of Centerville at the afternoon session of conference on Sunday and he told me of John's attitude. He is unrepentant, i maintaining that he is right and that he has the authority to marry. Is meeting with Clark of Davis County who was cut off and whom he married. Bro. Grant told the bishops and others present that Clark was not to be permitted to speak at funerals that were held in the meeting houses. If people desired Clark to speak at their funerals, they might have him do so in their own homes but not in the houses that are dedicated for the worship of our Father.

Bro. Heber Bennion of our stake has written a book called Gospel Problems. John has read it and is testifying that it is inspired and is the truth. I have read the book and know that it breathes the spirit of apostasy and is written in the spirit of fault finding. John has placed himself in a position to be led astray by just such writings and I fear for him.