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Title: Letters and documents copied from originals in the office of the Church Historian,
Reorganized Church

[Typescripts of the papers of William E. McLellan.]

“W. E. McLellan, M.D.” to “Joseph Smith [III], esq.”

Linden, Genesee Co., Michigan

Jan. 10, 1861

[***]

In your speech at Amboy you said “I believe my father was a good man.” And in the same speech you go strongly to Condemn the principle and practice of Polygamy. I do not wish to say hard things to You of your Father, but Joseph, if You will only go to your own dear mother, she can tell You that he believed in Polygamy and practiced it long before his violent death! That he delivered a revelation sanctioning, regulating, and establishing it—and that he finally burned the awful document before her eyes. Elder ^Marks^ can tell you that (before its conflagration) it was read in the High Council of Nauvoo, over which he presided. Your Mother told me these items when I was in Nauvoo. I am not dealing in fictions, nor in ill founded slanders—and would now feel glad if these things had never been enacted. But Sir, I have felt it a solemn duty to lay these items before You. And Sir, Your Mother (if she feels disposed) can give You a rather *black catalogue* reaching back as far as the date of your birth. Then, Sir, if you are honest before the Heavens yourself, never, never, no never proclaim again publicly or privately that “I believe my father was a good man”, whilst the means to know his real character lies so near You—even in the bosom & memory of your Mother! Now Sir, if your Father was a “good man”, and You are his legal successor, then You are legally and morally bound to Carry out his measures! Hence I saw in the phrase “good man,” a great deal of meaning. And when I read your speech (taking you to be honest) I felt a pang wring my old aching heart. Joseph, you are but a youth. Do be admonished by one who has grown old. Take not your own dear Father for a pattern in your religious career. Altho he might have had some good traits, yet in all that constitutes pure God-like goodness he was woefully lacking! If you have determined to be Great in the eyes of God, then do carve out your own course, but not pattern after his.

William E. McLellan, M.D. to President Joseph Smith [III]

Independence, Jackson Co. Mo. July 1872

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Now Joseph I will relate to you some history, and refer you to your own dear Mother for the truth. You will probably remember that I visited your Mother and family in 1847, and held a lengthy conversation with her, retired in the Mansion House in Nauvoo. I did not ask her to tell, but I told her some stories I had heard. And she told me

whether I was properly informed. ¹ Dr. F. G. Williams practiced with me in Clay Co. Mo. during the latter part of 1838. And he told me that at your birth your father committed an act with a Miss Hill—a hired girl. Emma saw him, and spoke to him. He desisted, but Mrs. Smith refused to be satisfied. He called in Dr. Williams, O. Cowdery, ² and S. ³ Rigdon to reconcile Emma. But she told them just as the circumstances took place. He found he was caught. He confessed humbly, and begged forgiveness. Emma and all forgave him. She told me this story was true!! Again I told her I heard that one night she missed Joseph and Fanny Alger. she went to the barn and saw him and Fanny in the barn together alone. She looked through a crack and saw the transaction!!! She told me this story too was verily true.) Now I would not have told you this had it not been for one thing. You said in your speech at Amboy April 6th 1860, "I believe my father was a good man, and a good man never could have promulgated such doctrines." You referred to *Polygamy*. Now let me tell you my dear Sir. I asked your Mother particularly on this point. She said, one night after she and Joseph had retired for the night, he told her that the doctrine and practice of Polygamy was going to ruin the church. He wished her to get up and burn the revelation. She refused to touch it even with tongues. He rose from his bed and pulled open the fire with his fingers, and put the revelation in and burned it up. But copies of it were extant, so it was preserved. You say, "I have never believed it and never can believe it." Can you dispute your dear Mother? She related this to me, and will if you ask her [to] tell you the same thing. It made a powerful impression on my mind at the time, and I've often reflected on it since. Now Sir suppose you could be convinced that your father not only believed Polygamy but actually practiced it his individual self, then what would you say—and then do about it? Was he an adulterer so long ago, and still a "good man."