

Swarming Jerusalem in the Bosom of Solitude:

Salt Lake City

I sit in apartment 703 of a University Heights building and look directly west out of the living room window. The air is clear and the view is unsurpassed. The whole Salt Lake valley is spread out before me like a map. The downtown lies before me and then at a distance of twenty or thirty miles , the Oquirrh mountain range pierces the horizon with its corrugated edge. Its mantle of snow extends nearly to the valley floor. Beyond the Oquirrhs lies another range:the Stansburys. The Great Salt Lake itself lies fifteen miles off and from my distance and height appears as a thin silver fillet.

At my extreme right, I catch a glimpse, through

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... peripheral vision, of my "own" mountain range, the range against which the University and this apartment house snuggle: the Wasatch, which extends a hundred miles south from the Idaho line and culminates in Mount Timpanogos at a height of 11,750 feet. With perhaps five hundred square miles of valley displayed before me, I can see four distinct regimes of weather. Two widely separated dark columns of wind and snow extend to the earth. It will not be long before one of them comes up the heights and lashes the building.

To the northeast, the Utah State Capitol sits on its own hill, like a St. Paul's of the Desert. Directly west, down South Temple Street, one can make out the bee-hived roof of the Hotel Utah, and behind it to the right the six triangular towers of the Mormon Temple. One of the towers, more prominent than the others, bears aloft the gilded angel Moroni blowing his trumpet. This is the Holy Place of Mormonism in the Holy City of Salt Lake where all Jews and most of the Gentiles are Gentiles. Though there are other Mormon Temples in other cities, the one in Salt Lake is the primum inter pares.

The Temple in Salt Lake of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (LDS) is forbidden to the uninitiated and one wonders what goes on in its

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inner chambers. I ask my Mormon friends and learn that most have never been in it themselves: they have not achieved the proper degree of elevation . Others shy at the question and then answer: well, weddings take place there provided the bride and groom are properly garbed in a ritual undergarment. A wedding knot tied in the Temple is thought to have more virtue and staying power than one tied elsewhere. Such a marriage is "sealed in Time and Eternity" and the children of such a marriage are bound to their parents for eternity in the Future Life. If a marriage is only "sealed for Time", then in the Future Life the children are released and make their own way in the Elysian Fields.

One hears other things. There are strange rituals devoted to the baptism of remote ancestors long dead so that they might be united with the True Faith they knew nothing of in their earthly days and so that they might be raised to a more felicitous state of being (or of non-being). Who are your ancestors? Salt Lake City is the place to find out. Probably the largest collection of genealogical information/in the world is just down the street from me and is there precisely to help you answer that question. In the case of atomic destruction, there is a backup collection deep in a cave in Little

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Cottonwood Canyon.

The rituals of ancient times were often performed in secrecy or in partial secrecy. The Mormon Temple in Salt Lake is inaccessible but not secret. The first floor contains a number of classrooms and a number of "sealing rooms". There is a "Primeval Room", a "Garden of Eden Room", and a "Contemporary World Room". In these rooms there are murals, and Temple-goers may contemplate these three ages of mankind. There is also a "Council Room" where the President and his four Councillors meet with the Twelve Apostles and hold council on nicely upholstered chairs.

One hears that the LDS President receives guidance and revelation, for example, on the position of the Blacks within the church; whether this occurs within the Council Room is not stated. One wonders whether there are other inner chambers in the Temple and whether the President, like the High Priest in Old Jerusalem, pronounces the Ineffable Name. At any rate, what the Presidents have said and planned and done over the past century has been blessed with remarkably good fortune. The Mormon church has prayed and worked and missionized and prospered. Three new Temples in remote corners of the world are announced this week.

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Today, Mormonism is probably the fastest-growing religious community in the Western world.

"What is Mormonism?", writes N. B., my wife's aged aunt who lives in Blackheath, London. "A Mormon church is going up in Blackheath where formerly highwaymen and cutpurses flourished, and I am sufficient of a disbeliever to wonder whether the current trend represents progress."

Whatever Mormonism "is", it obviously provides much and aims for more, and, in the words of one of its own disenchanted, wants to wrap its children in a stifling mantle of happiness.

The streets of Salt Lake are wide, wide enough for "a yoke of oxen to turn comfortably"; the blocks are long, seven to the mile. The downtown business core is clean and viable. It does not have that decayed, burnt-out look that characterizes the central part of so many American cities. Is it necessary to have sealings and an eschatology that asserts that Christ came to America in order also to have cleanliness?

While Salt Lake is Mormon, it is less exclusively so than the surrounding countryside. In the city, there are non-Mormon Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and a small Islamic community. There are Indians, mostly Utes,

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there are Mexicans and Hispano Americans, there are a fair number of Orientals, and there is even a group of Tongese, natives of the Polynesian island of Tonga, who were brought to Salt Lake as manual laborers. They work principally as gardeners. Then, of course, there are the tourists. In the summer they flock here as a point of departure for the magnificent National Parks: Yellowstone, the Tetons, Bryce, Zion, the Grand Canyon. In the winter and spring they come for the skiing--one hundred and fifty inches of snow at Alta as I write these lines.

The valley is being settled in rapidly and thickly; vast suburban areas now flourish where not so many years back one brought the children for their riding lessons. Real estate is astronomically high. City planners worry about water and think they can bore aqueducts through the mountains of the High Uintas. The indigenous lower-income residents of such chic resorts as Park City have had to sell out and get out. Old-timers worry that their ancient way of life will be obliterated by this great wave of prosperity. "O, Egypt, Egypt; of thy religion nothing will remain but an empty tale, which thine own children in time to come will not believe."