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Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley

Second Edition

VOLUME ONE

IN THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER MONOGRAPH SERIES

With an Autobiographical Introduction by
Hugh W. Nibley

Forewords by Gary P. Gillum and Truman G. Madsen



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CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| Hugh Nibley: Scholar of the Spirit, Missionary of the Mind | vii |
| Foreword to the First Edition | xix |
| An Intellectual Autobiography: Some High and Low Points..... | xxix |
| 1 To Open the Last Dispensation: Moses Chapter 1 | 1 |
| 2 The Expanding Gospel | 23 |
| 3 Treasures in the Heavens..... | 53 |
| 4 Subduing the Earth: Man's Dominion..... | 95 |
| 5 Genesis of the Written Word..... | 111 |
| 6 The Sacrifice of Isaac | 143 |
| 7 The Book of Mormon: A Minimal Statement | 163 |
| 8 Churches in the Wilderness | 169 |
| 9 The Haunted Wilderness..... | 203 |
| 10 Their Portrait of a Prophet | 233 |
| 11 Educating the Saints..... | 249 |
| 12 Zeal without Knowledge..... | 281 |
| 13 Beyond Politics..... | 301 |

HUGH NIBLEY: SCHOLAR OF THE SPIRIT, MISSIONARY OF THE MIND

Gary P. Gillum

The mythmakers and labelmakers in and out of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have always had a field day with Hugh Nibley, spreading exaggerated stories of his eccentric and polymathic attributes, his peculiar methods of scholarship, and his alleged irresponsible social behavior at the university. Unfortunately, these popular and all-too-common folktales fail to include all angles and flagrantly disregard the heritage, experience, environment, and intelligence that have made Hugh Nibley the man he is. How would your outlook be shaped if (1) your pioneer ancestry included Alexander Neibaur, the first Jewish convert to the Church and one who knew Joseph Smith personally; (2) your paternal grandfather, Charles W. Nibley, was Presiding Bishop of the Church; (3) your life experiences included seeing pristine forests greedily destroyed, fighting in a horrible World War, and reading literature in which anti-Mormon authors and uninformed hackmen tore your Church apart with a zeal barren of knowledge; (4) you lived in the midst of Latter-day Saints who witnessed to the truth of the fulness of the gospel but often failed to live it, preferring instead to follow the ways of the world; and (5) you were born with an intellect and spirit keen and discerning enough to spot self-serving and truthless scholarship from afar, even though such scholarship wore the outward garments of Ivy League respectability, higher degrees, and “union” membership? It seems only fair, then, to talk about Hugh Nibley in his own milieu, even as he himself talked about Lehi’s contemporaries. But to do so effectively, his attributes must be broken down into seven broad categories, arbitrarily but cautiously selected to place him in true perspective: missionary of the mind, apologist, amateur, social critic, iconoclast, eschatologist, and spontaneous Saint.

MISSIONARY OF THE MIND

Few admirers of Hugh Nibley know of his “library career” at BYU. Hence, I use the more inclusive term “missionary of the mind,” coined by one of the most scholarly librarians in American history, Dr. Jesse Shera of Case Western Reserve School of Library Science. From the outset of Nibley’s long career at BYU, he unflaggingly pestered President Ernest Wilkinson and his colleagues for a realization of his prophetic dream that “the B.Y.U. should be the Information Center of the Church. The way to gain the respect of the world is not to concur meekly in its opinions . . . but to master its tools and sustain a powerful offensive.”¹

To give reality to his dreams, he did his homework. In the early 1950s Nibley spent sabbatical leave time at Harvard and Berkeley, interviewing “those who can impart the most information and wisdom on the subject of libraries and curriculum.”² He corresponded not only with eminent scholars in his field, but with booksellers like Lucien Goldschmidt and William H. Allen Rare Books in Philadelphia, and he began to amass a collection at BYU of texts that would enable BYU religious scholars to “rewrite the whole of Church History.”³ Consequently, through the aid of President Wilkinson, Nibley was able to obtain for the BYU library the four hundred or so volumes of the *Patrologiae Latinae* (Latin Church fathers) and the *Patrologiae Graecae* (Greek Church fathers), which not only formed the beginnings of the Hugh Nibley Ancient Studies Room but began a healthy and consistent collection development pattern in Ancient Studies and in the general religion collection that has not slackened to this day, thanks to farseeing librarians like A. Dean Larsen and others. Such aggressive collecting, as well as the voluminous and popular writings of Hugh Nibley that reflect his use of the Ancient Studies Room, also made possible the Religious Studies Center, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), and the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (ISPART). The last of these institutions represents worldwide and far-reaching projects that Nibley could not have imagined in 1952.

In ancient religious matters BYU has thus become the information center for not only the Church but for the religious world in general. The Dead Sea Scrolls, Islamic Texts, Vatican Library microfilming, and Herculaneum project are only a few examples of the stone Hugh Nibley began rolling forth in the 1950s.

APOLOGIST

Unlike the proverbial scholar who is ever distrustful of the sources and hence neurotically avoids any possibility of writing anything that might be construed as erroneous, Nibley jumps in “where angels fear to tread.” Fully aware that *any* source may be flawed, he is therefore not too proud to use any and all sources. He knows, like C. S. Lewis, that he is living in the middle of a play whose beginning or end he can only know through revelation, so he simply does the best he can in the short time allotted to him to occasionally take the risks of “amateur” scholarship. He does not care that a few of his conclusions may be proved wrong, yet he is fully conscious of his apologetic and eschatological role in helping Mormons and non-Mormons, scholars and farmers, attain a salvific “big picture” viewpoint not only of history but of life all around them.

If as the Lorax⁴ of Mormondom he speaks for the trees, or juxtaposes the seeming opposites of temple versus university, priesthood versus academic degree, ordinances versus ceremony, or revelation versus scholarly methodologies, he maintains a certain stewardship of a scholar, spoken about by President Boyd K. Packer, whose ideal qualifications for historical scholarship find writing by the Spirit above facts, understanding, and scholarship.⁵

How might we characterize Nibley’s style? First, his apologetic methods are tempered by a humble perspicacity that is defiled only occasionally by an impatience born of too frequent celestial clock-watching. In other words, as Nibley would put it, “We take either ourselves or the gospel seriously. Never both.” To those who know him it is obvious that he follows Abraham Lincoln’s dictum, “We must disenthral ourselves, and then we shall save our country.”⁶ Or more pointedly and spiritually, in the words of C. S. Lewis, “The real test of being in the presence of God is that you either forget about yourself altogether or see yourself as a small, dirty object.”⁷

Second, Nibley is the antithesis of rhetoric, although his style is far from barren. He seems to echo Albert Einstein, “If you are out to describe the truth, leave elegance to the tailor.” Third, in describing truth, Nibley often humbly assumes that his audience and his readers know as much as he does, whether he is teaching a Gospel Doctrine class or writing about the Book of Breathings. Unlike books for general consumption that are written on the lowest-level style, Nibley’s works force his readers to

ascend to the difficulty of his writing, even though his writing is never deliberately difficult. Consequently, his thoughts are written for the ordinary Joe as well as the scholar. It is also true that Nibley exhibits a certain detachment from his writings, for compared to the witness of the Spirit, his writings are all “junk and stuff.” He will not be held responsible for anything he wrote yesterday. His mind is continually open to the new and the more truthful.

AMATEUR

It is well known that Nibley sides with the amateurs, often totally eschewing the “professionals,” whether in business, law, or his own disciplines. His “big picture” perspective clashes with the ultraspecialization so important to modern education. To Nibley, specialists are those who forget eternity in the pursuit of the moment, who ignore the universe while in love with the particle. Moreover, Nibley seems to feel, again like C. S. Lewis, that great scholars are now as little nourished by the past as the most ignorant, uninformed person who holds that “history is bunk.” In addition, these scholars are the modern equivalent of the Greek Sophists, complete with the aura of sophistication, thereby making Nibley the symbol of unsophistication or even naïvete. However, if readers feel that he is unsophisticated by virtue of his much footnoting, they must remember not only that Nibley’s 15,000-plus footnotes are actually sparse to a fault, but that unlike most scholars, he quotes with comparative ease from German, French, Latin, Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, Egyptian, and a dozen or so other ancient and modern languages.

Although Nibley has been excoriated by those who disagree with his methods, with his tendency to read between the lines, with his use of overlooked or rejected sources, with his risky comparisons between two cultures (the realm of the professional anthropologist), or with his penchant for being brilliant and multifaceted, there are others who ask if his critics can do better. Perhaps Nibley is an academic prophet after all, a true renaissance man in a day when “looking beyond the mark” by specialists is fashionable, and one who sees the end coming for the ultraspecialists or splitters in favor of the synthesizers and creators—the Newtons, Scaligers, and Bentleys after whom Nibley has unself-consciously tried to model himself.

SOCIAL CRITIC

*Glitter is coined to meet the moment's rage;
The genuine lives on from age to age.*⁸

If there is any discipline in which Nibley is a true professional, it is social criticism. As *literatorum rex* (king of critics) and satirist, he knows no fetters or fences in time or space. Like the Roman epigrammatist Martial, Nibley sees himself surrounded by “fops, fortune-hunters and dinner-touters, dabblers and busybodies, orators and lawyers, schoolmasters, street hawkers, barbers, cobblers, jockeys, architects, auctioneers, debtors, bores, quidnuncs, doctors, plagiarists, hypocritical philosophers, poisoners, jugglers and acrobats,”⁹ with a fortunate leavening of a few serious, truly educated, happy, honest, and genuine scripture readers, seekers after truth, and followers of pure religion. To the latter, society is still playing childhood games such as “Hey, Mommy” or “Hey, Jim, look what I can do!” or ignoring our own unique abilities in order to be like other people.

Much to the chagrin of most of us, he continues to liken the scriptures to ourselves, often hitting hard, but never in a self-righteous, “I’m-better-than-you” attitude. The hard hits are often softened with a sense of humor, as in his famous spoof on archaeology, “Bird Island,” the satirical introduction to Scaliger,¹⁰ or his ribald humor in numerous other sources.

Even when criticizing or satirizing education, scholarship, and intellectualism, Nibley takes the gospel more seriously than himself. When throwing stones at science, scientists interpret him as waxing hyperbolic, but he is really being dead serious. Even in his own field of ancient studies, he would be critical of the childish wranglings of linguist Pettinato and archaeologist Mattiae, whose scholarship and discipline had the most sway in interpreting the Ebla Tablets at Tell Mardikh. He is unafraid of his own colleagues, speaking his mind clearly about the right of students to experience effective teaching from committed teachers. If he is a friend of students, he is an enemy of humanists, politicians (as opposed to true statesmen), military men, and even the Saints who “no longer speak of making the land blossom as the rose but of making a quick buck in rapid-turnover real estate.”¹¹

Like other enlightened scholars, he dislikes labels, mostly because he himself is conservative in one thing, liberal in another. But he is clearly conservative in his stand on rhetoric. He seconds Plato’s definition of rhetoric as making “small things great and

great things small.”¹² He constantly attempts to avoid this, except in a spoof, and insists, like Lucian, that “rhetoric had been left to the legal persons whose object is not truth but victory.”¹³ Further, Nibley agreed with the late BYU historian Russell B. Swensen, who used to counsel history students (only half in jest) that the eleventh commandment for historians is “Thou shalt not commit sociology.”¹⁴ Occasionally, however, he steps into the sociological quicksands to fill a void ignored by those whose business society is. In “How Firm a Foundation”¹⁵ he unabashedly places his name on the line and thinks, like physicist-turned-pacifist Richard Garwin, that the MX, and other military hardware in general, has reached a lunatic stage that cries out for public scrutiny. The refreshing thing about Nibley is that he is not afraid to be that public or to be scrutinized himself. Instead, he continues to avoid the glitter and searches deeply and widely for the genuine—a search that will never cease.

ICONOCLAST

Although everyone considers Nibley a nonconformist and a philosopher in the Platonic sense, few label him an iconoclast. But this is merely an oversight, for Nibley is truly an iconoclast in the tradition of Henry Louis Mencken, Erasmus, and others. Nibley pleads for the revision of social science, religion, and philosophy to stress connectedness, coherence, and wholeness, arguing against the fragmenting, reductive, and compartmentalizing forces of the prevailing orthodoxies.

Somehow knowing that the Lord Himself would approve, Nibley’s iconoclasm even surfaced heavenward in a famous prayer he offered in commencement in 1960, which thoughts included: “We have met here today clothed in the black robes of a false priesthood” to receive degrees that are absolutely worthless.¹⁶ Nibley implied in this prayer that the ancient traditions, the money wasted on robes, and the symbol of the apostasy and mammon were an intrusion into eschatological perspective. Moreover, he hinted that degrees are merely union cards, that grades and tests are not true signs of learning, and that all three had a way of belittling the self-educated and self-motivated autodidacts, the Joseph Smiths, Benjamin Franklins, Leonardo da Vincis, and Brigham Youngs the world has seen. In both phrases he pointed a finger at the university, with eloquent between-the-lines silence, indicating that the university has a much higher level to attain.

Education was not his only whipping post, however. Science, religion, and history have had their bellies dissected by the mental surgeon Hugh Nibley as well. Long before Helmut Koester wrote that “the terms ‘apocryphal’ and ‘canonical’ reflect a traditional usage which implies deep-seated prejudices and has had far-reaching consequences,”¹⁷ Nibley pointed out the benefits of apocryphal writings to his BYU students, and strongly reminded them, in words similar to those by Elaine Pagels in her best-selling *The Gnostic Gospels*, that “It is the winners who write history—their way. No wonder, then, that the viewpoint of the successful majority has dominated all traditional accounts of the origin of Christianity.”¹⁸ But even after all of this, Nibley’s truest and longest-standing iconoclastic fervor has pointed to eschatology, or the eschatological viewpoint.

ESCHATOLOGIST

When we speak of eschatology, we are usually thinking of “last things”: the Second Coming, the Millennium, or life after death. But when Nibley uses the term, he does so in connection with a certain perspective or viewpoint, exemplified most clearly by his parable called “The Eschatological Man.”¹⁹ If readers can understand and empathize with this parable, then they have made a giant leap toward knowing the mind of Hugh Nibley, a mind that is really not as inscrutable or enigmatic once you understand his perspective. A prophet like Spencer W. Kimball shares his perspective by remarking, “If you’ve seen what I’ve seen.” A scholar like Nibley can only come close: “If you knew what I knew,” or, “If you’d only read what I’ve read.” But all of this is begging the question: exactly what is an eschatological viewpoint? And how does this viewpoint set Nibley apart from the majority of scholars?

If LDS social psychologists express dismay because too many Latter-day Saints love Harlequin novels, *Playboy* magazines, and soap operas, it is because such lackluster and worthless leisure indicate a failure to see the “big picture” perspective, or an all-embracing worldview. A cosmic or multidimensional perspective is like that of an extraterrestrial who sees everything in a different light and realizes how tentative each facet of life really is. Those who have visited the “other side,” say Raymond Moody²⁰ and others who have had life-after-death experiences, stress the

importance of certain things in life: learning to love and serve other people and acquiring knowledge and wisdom.

Contrary to popular opinion, Nibley does not merely exhibit service. I have witnessed this man showing heart-felt compassion that I have seen few others exhibit, a case in point being the care shown to a mutual friend of ours, an elderly Jewish woman transplanted from New York to Orem, Utah. Nibley knows his scriptures too well to ignore love or his family. His impatience comes from his not wanting to spend time with those who come to him with "trivial questions" or unimportant tasks. This, I feel, is a service of real love to all of us who come in contact with him, for in our learning which questions to ask him, we often achieve an eschatological perspective. Nibley sees so much in each of us that he is saddened to be an accomplice in lower-level living.

It is no secret that Nibley is fond of the New Testament apocrypha, particularly of the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas. Should Nibley ever need to post a saying on his bedroom wall, it might be the following from the first chapter, third verse: "When you come to know yourselves, Then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living Father."²¹ Nibley rightfully feels that life is tedious for most people because they refuse to seek the mysteries of godliness. To him, like Viktor Frankl, "Human existence is essentially self-transcendence rather than self-actualization."²² Humans spend too much time in the shallow mud puddles instead of learning to swim in the deep oceans or in the swift currents, for it is in such challenges that they can immediately extend, perfect, and intensify their senses. The real world, to Nibley, is beautiful beyond comprehension, yet even in the best circumstances it is a filthy slum compared to what is beyond and ahead. And that is why Nibley is so critical of society and its lack of perspective, even down to dress, about which so many jokes have been made concerning Nibley himself. Like Aristotle, Nibley cares more for reality than for appearance; acquisition of wealth other than by barter is unnatural; he condemns as morally wrong the unlimited pursuit of wealth beyond what is needed for the purposes of life.

SPONTANEOUS SAINT

It would be an injustice to Nibley himself if the most important hallmark of his character were to be ignored. Nibley's son-in-law Boyd Petersen includes many stories of his father-in-law's life

as a faithful Latter-day Saint in his biography.²³ Two additional stories exemplify his spontaneous service and were related to me by those who experienced the incidents firsthand. Dan Butler, whose father was Nibley's bishop in the Provo Manavu Ward at one time, told how his family went swimming one evening at the Richards Building on BYU campus. After the fun was over, they looked all over the building for little Dan, only to find him safely in the corner of the men's locker room with Hugh Nibley, who was giving Dan an astronomy lesson.

The second incident juxtaposes the committed life of a Latter-day Saint with a solemn and important mission to bring the Joseph Smith Papyri from Salt Lake City to the Special Collections Library at Brigham Young University. Sterling J. Albrecht, Gifts Librarian in the late 1960s—and later director of the Harold B. Lee Library until 2002—relates the story:

Hugh and I were invited to SLC to pick up the Papyri. We met with Elder Tanner [counselor to President David O. McKay] in his office. He told us that the First Presidency was sending the Papyri to BYU so that Hugh could study and interpret it. He also said that the Papyri was very valuable and if anything happened . . . [while we were driving] that Hugh and I should just keep going. As we were driving to Provo, we saw two ladies at the side of the road with the hood of their car up. I thought that we should stop but also remembered Elder Tanner's admonition that we had very valuable cargo, so I was going to drive on by. Hugh said, "Stop the car, they need help!" We stopped, locked the car and walked over to see if we could help the women. They said that the car would start but they couldn't get the hood down so that they could drive it. Hugh got up on the top of the car, hung his feet down over the windshield, and then pushed on the hood with both of his feet. He forced the hood down and the ladies were able to drive it.²⁴

CONCLUSION

Professor David Riesman of Harvard, while at Brigham Young University in 1963, stated that Nibley was the "Thomas Aquinas" of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and that his own erudition paled before Nibley's.²⁵ Whether he is an

Aquinas or not, I concur with Robert F. Smith in stating that “a general perusal of his articles and books . . . establishes him in my mind as one of those men of whom we see only four or five per century.”²⁶ We hope that this little volume establishes that fact in even greater force.

Throughout his writings, Nibley implies that we all need to be doing the works of Abraham. Such works should give all of us a spiritual stance in which light is victorious over darkness, good over evil, the meaningful over the insignificant, and in which living is not acted out through a glass darkly simply because we have failed to clean the glass, but because in our searching we have not yet attained the clearest vision. Nibley is great because he has given us a “Saints’ Guidebook” for reaching that light.

NOTES

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3. Nibley to Wilkinson, June 12, 1953.
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11. Nibley, as quoted in "Mormon Media Image," *The Sunstone Review* 1, no. 1 (July/August 1981): 34.
12. Plato, *Phaedrus* 267A, quoted by Nibley in "Victoriosa Loquacitas: The Rise of Rhetoric and the Decline of Everything Else," in *The Ancient State*, CWHN, 10:250.
13. H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, trans., introduction to *The Works of Lucian of Samosata* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905), xi.
14. Russell B. Swensen, quoted in Arnold H. Green, "History and Fable, Heroism and Fanaticism: Nachman Ben Yehuda's *The Masada Myth*," *BYU Studies* 36, no. 3 (1996–97): 422, n.15.
15. Nibley, "How Firm a Foundation! What Makes It So," in *Approaching Zion*, CWHN, 9:149–77.
16. Nibley comments on this prayer in his BYU commencement speech on August 19, 1983, see "Leaders to Managers: The Fatal Shift," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, CWHN, 13:491. Unfortunately, no written transcription of the original prayer has been found, although a devotional prayer transcription is extant that makes no reference to a false priesthood.

17. Helmut Koester, "Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (January–April 1980): 105.
18. Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 170.
19. Gary P. Gillum, comp., *Of All Things! Classic Quotations from Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 60–64.
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21. "Gospel of Thomas," in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. James M. Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 118.
22. Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963), 175.
23. Boyd K. Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford, 2002).
24. Sterling J. Albrecht, e-mail message to Gary P. Gillum, May 14, 2003. Although no written records were found to establish the date of this incident, it likely occurred during 1967 or 1968, shortly after the Church acquired the Papyri.
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FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

Truman G. Madsen

To those who know him best, and least, Hugh W. Nibley is a prodigy, an enigma, and a symbol.

The origins he pursues as a historian are sometimes obscure. His own origins are clear. More dominant than recessive is his inheritance from one of the early Jewish converts to the Church, Alexander Neibaur: that brilliant gift for language and linguistics, that perfect ease with the subtleties and technicalities of word usage. The outcome is a man whose thinking vocabulary is five times that of Shakespeare, and in foreign language ten times that of most men. Superb tools! How he has used them is the story of his life.

He was tracting in the Swiss-German Mission at age seventeen. Then, as since, he was blithely unconcerned with what most people define as needs: food, clothing, shelter, recreation. At his mission end, it was discovered that checks from home, several hundred dollars, had accumulated in the office unclaimed. He was still wearing the same shirts, huddling in the same ramshackle apartment, and consuming more books than food as the instruments of his ministry.

The pattern of physical self-neglect continues, the price of fierce concentration. Even now, an emeritus professor and the father of eight children, most of them grown-up, his diet is not high on the hog nor his home high on the hill. "If you don't have a car, thank God and walk," he says. Like the late Dr. John A. Widtsoe, he has prayed (as did his grandmother before him) that he would have a bare sufficiency of the things of this world lest they distract him from his mission. Over the years he has had no secretary, no prestigious research grants, no staff (only temporary bouts), and a mere handful of graduate assistants. He still pecks away at his own battered typewriter, not trusting anyone too

close to his skyscrapers of three-by-five cards massed in shoe boxes. Rarely, if ever, has he taken an authentic vacation. During a recent spring semester, the doctor diagnosed total exhaustion and sent him to Florida. During that period, his wife Phyllis reports, for the first time since their marriage he once or twice came to bed at night without a book. A man of endearing eccentricities, he is not a misfit—he is instead a delight in any social setting. But in study he is, as he insists every genuine student must be, a loner cooped up in his rather bleak, rectangular office, which he chose because of its wide floor where he lays piles of categorized notes, leaving only a narrow path to and from his desk.

Some of the awe and even resentment of Nibley arises not from the fact that he penetrates into specialized esoterica but that he spills over into other fields with startling competence. Professor Arthur Henry King invited him casually to lecture on Oedipus and was stunned at his grasp and insisted that the lecture be published. Francis Wormuth, University of Utah political scientist, read Nibley's "Tenting, Toll and Taxing" and responded, "There are two geniuses in the western states—myself and Hugh Nibley." He is up-to-date on contemporary scientific developments but also equipped to explain in detail their analogues in the seventeenth (or any other) century. Of course, it is in part the calling of a historian to learn something old every day. But Nibley insists that a student is only a student when "interest reaches excitement." For him, excitement becomes all but obsession; he finds nothing in the world boring or dull except those who are themselves bored or dull. Attend his home nights and you will hear incredibly learned presentations. If you want to swap war stories, those of Athens, Persia, or Rome as those of Germany, he can provide vivid detail. Hike behind Timpanogos and you will hear him tick off the Latin names of all the flora and fauna and tell you how dikes are built. Break into an opera solo and he will hum the parts of the instruments, offer commentaries, and even take on something of a dramatic performance himself. Talk up the latest article on black holes, or parapsychology, or Godel's proof, or Nigel Calder on the brain, or astrophysics. He will disappoint you in that he has already read it and impress you to go back to reread what you missed.

Students often lament Nibley's packed and even cramped style both in lecture and writing. Robert K. Thomas says of him, "He is always the classical satirist." It is so; if he ever really gave that flair its head, he could be a ruthless cynic. In fact, however,

as the present set of essays demonstrates, he has many styles. Early on he was immersed in British poetry, and such is his gift for powerful imagery that, even in sober articles, he slips into hyperbole. He has memorized half of the Greek poets, and when at a Biblical Society meeting Jesuit George MacRae heard him discourse without notes and then spontaneously quote thirty lines in the original, he put his hands over his face and said, "It is obscene for a man to know that much."

One Nibley style is a horse laugh, as is his response to the *Myth Makers*, including that to Mrs. Brodie in *No, Ma'am, That's Not History*. There he savors her delicious prose style and regrets that she ignored nine-tenths of the relevant data. But his hints are stronger; what is really wrong with Brodie is not just her debunking tone but her uncritical presuppositions and her amateur psychologizing. That's where non-Mormon analysts have come down hard on her later efforts. A more systematic style appears in three books and over three decades—*Lehi in the Desert*, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, and *Since Cumorah*—in which Nibley has provided an Old World Middle East check on the Book of Mormon. Now John L. Sorenson has done the same for the Meso-American context of the book. These efforts undercut what Richard L. Bushman calls the "sponge theory" of the Book of Mormon—that Joseph Smith simply absorbed what was "in the air" in his boyhood, then squeezed it and out came the Book of Mormon. Nibley cannot help smiling at this irresponsible "explanation." His style changes when he turns to the questions of parallels in ancient cultures, finding in Israel's Dead Sea Scrolls revealing traces of the people of the desert, in the Nag Hammadi literature evidence that some forms of Gnosticism may very well have been a graduate course in early Christianity, and in Syria the new discovery that Abraham was, after all, likely a historical character.

Students often ask how Nibley is viewed elsewhere. He has made a dent if not a breakthrough with preeminent men. In addition he has generated much heat and, for a mild man, it is surprising how gracefully he can take it. ("We need more anti-Mormon books. They keep us on our toes.") In some quarters he is impressive enough to be carefully ignored. Some of those who wish to champion him are themselves academic outcasts. Such men as anthropologist Cyrus Gordon of Brandeis, for example, take seriously a pre-Columbian origin of Meso-American peoples at their own peril, but cannot say enough good about Nibley's work. On

the other hand, America's highly honored Catholic exegete, Raymond E. Brown of Union Theological Seminary in New York City, has read Nibley's work and now says in learned company that the Book of Mormon is "authentic pseudepigrapha." Chicago's Egyptologist Klaus Baer refused to comment for or against Nibley's latest book on the Egyptians but shares Nibley's thesis that no able Egyptologist can confidently assert that Joseph Smith's reading of the Abraham facsimiles is fraudulent. ("Revelation is not a puppet affair for Mormons. If God wanted to bestow the mummies and scrolls upon Joseph Smith to prepare him for revelatory understanding of Abraham, why not? If his readings don't agree with the scholar's, a proper Mormon answer might be 'Do we have a right to tell God his business?'"") Hebraist and colleague Sidney B. Sperry wished Nibley had focused his talent on the Church Fathers, expanding into volumes what he only skirmishes with in articles—a documentary tracing of the decline and fall of the Christian Church. Classicist Jacob Geerlings remarked shortly before his death: "Hugh Nibley is simply encyclopedic. Though I do not agree with his views I hesitate to challenge him; he knows too much."

A persevering jibe at Nibley is that, for all his learning, he is a hop, skip, and jump scholar, who is too hard on reason, other disciplines, and the consensus of mainstream academia. Such writers take Nibley's jokes seriously and his serious work as a game. Sterling W. McMurrin, a historian of ideas, sees him as a kind of latter-day Tertullian putting faith ahead of critical intelligence and, like Karl Barth, as utterly opposed to the natural intelligence. To such generalizations Nibley, it must be admitted, is an unsatisfactory answerer. He will not sit still long enough to be classified. But he is no Barth. For all his plasticity and pot-shotting, he has the highest respect for scholarly endeavor, even that which is infected with vanity. But he has the heartiest and sometimes wittiest contempt for academic pretension. He is hard on abstract theology, harder on philosophy, and hardest of all on his own institution. More than once he has walked into a seminar or workshop and announced: "None of us has any business being here. We don't know enough." In this same spirit he says to students who suppose verbalizing is proof of insight, "If we really cared about this subject we would be in the library studying the documents."

As a teacher, he is, at least at the outset, terrifying. He does not lecture; he explodes. He brings source materials in the original

to class, translates them on the spot, and lapses into spasms of free association as he sees linguistic connections. He teaches whatever he is working on that day, allowing students to look over his shoulder. His long paragraphs go by at approximately the speed of light. Students who learn the most learn to interrupt and to probe; it is like trying to count machine-gun shots while able at best to take notes on the tracers. Because the fine-tuning of his mind is to written materials, it is as if he is listening to them more than to his students; he is utterly oblivious to electronic trappings like microphone, or TV camera. Most of the time he talks as if everyone present has just read everything he has. This is less a Germanic or Olympian detachment than a temperamental unwillingness to put anyone down. He exhibits patience with questions which show no one was listening a minute ago. When he does not want to answer, he trails away into a closely related area and his listeners are not brave enough to request backtracking. Once a student asked him the question, "What is a symbol?" The answer slowly expanded to cosmic proportions, and Nibley stopped for breath an hour and twenty minutes later. It is not surprising that few professors have generated more stories about absentmindedness. He offers no defense but demonstrates that no mind is really absent; it is only present on other—and in his case more important—things. If you watch his lips move, during moments of partial seclusion or even in the middle of a slow-moving conversation, you can catch him reviewing any one of the dozen languages he wants to keep fresh. He is usually talking before and after the bell rings for any given class period, and the lecture only begins and ends with your being in earshot. He does have "an infinite capacity for taking pains." This means he has little truck with haste. He is slow to print, quick to revise and supplement (just ask his editors, who groan as they see "final" galleys torn to shreds), and perennial in his retreat from what cannot hold water. Much of his most significant work still lies on his shelves unpublished because it requires, by his standards, more work. More and more.

How, in book form, could we represent his writing? How could we select thirteen out of three hundred essays?¹ We began with the premise that Nibley is a phenomenon. (He receives hundreds of letters a month from around the world inquiring on more topics than can be found in the *Britannica*.) We envisioned the rising wave of college-age students and the wider-reaching waves of adult education. We selected essays that are not exactly popular but which, on the other hand, are not (except for the notes)

unduly technical. Our criteria were loose: range of subject matter, diversity of style, controversiality. In some cases we consulted (and more than once overruled) Nibley's own appraisal as to relative significance. No strict logical connection holds the essays together. But they do fall into a sequential order: they begin with materials that relate to the premortal realm of existence and then move down through the dispensations. We also included important samplings of Nibley's hard-won as well as whimsical, sometimes startling, and always disquieting comments on education, society, and politics.

Ill-wishing critics have suspected over the years that Nibley is wrenching his sources, hiding behind his footnotes, and reading into antique languages what no responsible scholar would ever read out. Unfortunately, few have the tools to do the checking. For purposes of this volume we have assigned ten linguists to go through every note for typographical accuracy. Some slips and discrepancies have been discovered and corrected (and others, no doubt, missed). But our greater effort has been to check fidelity in translation and relevance to the points Nibley presses in his text. Some stretchings beyond a minimal "given reading" have been noted. But in most cases Nibley clearly states where his readings are not in harmony with other scholars; and, on the other hand, where they would be defended by an increasing minority. It is the latter situation, for example, which explains his ritualistic account of the Book of the Dead materials. But he well knows that his notes will stand or fall with the scrutiny of oncoming generations. "You don't need to check them," he has said more than once. "I must stand behind them." So, indeed, he must.

If there is general agreement among most high school students that "history is bunk" and boring bunk at that, a little maturity and some exposure to Nibley may reverse the verdict. He observes that no culture in the world is more superficial than that of America, where change, adaptation, and fad are as fleeting as popcorn. He thinks both Protestant and Catholic culture (less so among Jewish) are likewise massively undernourished in terms of the classical insights and perspectives of the ancients. He is not talking simply of wisdom nor even of moral lessons. He is talking in the larger pattern of what is today called "apocalyptic." Far from living too much in the past, he sees the past as the clearest "clue" to the future; but only if one defines past and future in a way that reaches, at both ends, to God. Latter-day Saints themselves, history-minded as few others, are slow to recognize that

“the restoration of all things” included restorations of key books for every major dispensation; a book of Adam, a book of Enoch, a book of Noah, a book of Abraham, a book of Melchizedek, a book of Elijah, a book of the intertestamental period, three books on the dispensation of Christ, and vast apocalyptic visions of the consummation of world history.

Nibley has given flesh, in all this, to a “patternist” or “diffusionist” theory of history. The premise is at work in almost everything he has written since his Berkeley days. On the negative side he refuses to accept the conventional dogma of Social Darwinism—that society has emerged from simpler, cruder, more primitive forms. He never tired of pointing this out on a recent tour of Athens and visits to its museums, to Sounian, Corinth, and then again in Egypt at the Tombs of Theban Royalty, and in Luxor and Karnak, and again at the ruins of Qumran at the Dead Sea: full-blown cultural and spiritual splendor can be found in some of these early stages of civilization. Neither the evolutionary nor the revolutionary conception of religion will do. On the positive side he sees strands of eternal meaning in pockets as rare and neglected as the Hopi Indian Year Rites. Critics say he has broken some of his own rules on “parallels” and that the similarities that seem to appear in, say, the Book of Mormon matrix and the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Coptic materials are only superficial. He himself admits that some of these materials may turn out to be “poor stuff.” But in them are echoes, echoes of something at the core of the authentic influence of Christ. And these echoes, as scholars increasingly acknowledge, require reevaluation of all that has heretofore been called Christianity. Nibley’s thesis is that those reevaluations, as often as not, point in the direction of Mormon doctrine.

If one studies Nibley’s writing output not chronologically but thematically, one can see a pattern, both in the foreground and in the background. It is the temple. His mastery of Arabic, Greek, Hebrew (and a little Aramaic), Latin, German, French, and Spanish, and more recently of Coptic and Egyptian, have given him access to world liturgy. In historic and comparative terms he has done for the western world what Mircea Eliade has done phenomenologically for the ceremonial life. He is incurably literalistic, never capitulating to the notion that religious expression is quasi-real without a tie in *terra firma*, yet, simultaneously, perhaps more than any one of his colleagues, alert to the rich nuances of symbolic significance, especially as these are manifest in ordinances. He has offered specialized courses in world liturgy for three decades

and enlisted the aid of some bright and newly competent graduate students. He wrote "What Is a Temple?" for the dedication of the London Temple, and says now, with a wave of the hand, "a lot has been learned since then." The Mormon fourfold canon (the standard works) and books of remembrance of our own century help one understand what the temple is all about. It is Christ. Nibley has done his homework on both counts. But what he has published to the world is really something else—and may be one of his lasting contributions: authentic records, to which there was no access in the nineteenth century, show that jewels and nuggets as well as twists and distortions and inversions of temple ceremonies have reached into almost every society. He has shown that Joseph Smith's full-bodied presentation of ordinances, with the temple at their climactic apex, could not have been simply a nineteenth-century aberration nor warmed-over Masonry. By and large, and point for point, what takes place in Mormon temples is closer to presently describable ancient practice than to any modern ritual. Of course, the hard question remains, Where did the ancients get them? Nibley has more than enough evidence gathered that it is not implausible to postulate a common source. But the question, Nibley's leading question, and which puts the burden of proof of the nay-sayers is, Where did Joseph Smith get them?²

Nibley's literary legacy will survive him. So will his zest for life, even in its most grim and agonizing hours (we watched him dance with joy at King Tut's Tomb as he saw firsthand and in color what he had previously seen only in photographic reproductions). And for those who find the idea of eternal ordinances and covenants and ceremonies foreign to authentic religious life, his personal embodiment of his writings will always beckon to deeper second thoughts. Some months after he had completed his volume on the Egyptian ritual he emerged elated from the Provo Temple one afternoon, saying, "I have learned more today in one session of the temple than ever I knew before." When pressed, he offered that kindly smile which, loosely translated, means, "These are things I would rather not talk about." (He can mumble in more languages and say more in his asides than any man alive.) He did, however, provide in his own terms a clue "that the idea of beauty in divine creation came fresh." He saw, again but as if for the first time, what he had seen in the rain forests of Oregon—"the kind of world God intended this to be." At this level there is nothing of the pedant about him, but all the uncomplicated wonderment of a child. William James somewhere observes that one

may define a Bach quartet as “the moving of horsehair over catgut,” or he may be transformed by the music. Something of the temple’s transformation, its power, impact, and revelatory lift, can be seen exuding from Nibley’s pores.

In his study of the nature of genius, Ernest Jones says “an essential prerequisite” is “a particular skepticism.” The genius must be original. He “must have refused to acquiesce in certain previously accepted conclusions. This argues a kind of an imperviousness to the opinions of others, notably of authorities.”³ One must know the authorities well in order to know where to disagree. In history, Nibley knows them cold. But he also has the requisite imperviousness, even to some of his own opinions. “Things are never settled,” he keeps saying, and “my conclusions are momentary.” Constantly he sees problems and perplexities that others do not and is incessant in pursuing them. Who else, for example, would have thought of tracing the role of the notched arrow in the formation of the State? On the other hand, in religious realms where others see huge problems he sees no problems at all. The one refusal to acquiesce accounts for his colossal erudition; the other for his breathtaking assurances of faith.

To students of all kinds, that combination, that balance, is sometimes confusing but always exciting. (“There may be things about the Church that I find perfectly appalling. But I know the gospel is true.”) To his critics it is maddening. And to his disciples? Well, Hugh Nibley could have had disciples lined up four abreast from here to the library. He has, instead, sent them on to the only One who deserves disciples.

NOTES

1. The selections were made by a committee: poet Arthur Henry King, philosopher C. Terry Warner, classicist Douglas Phillips, political scientist Louis W. Midgley, and S. Kent Brown of Ancient Studies. Several of Professor Nibley's former students were also consulted.

2. "I am prepared to admit," a well-known scholar confessed to Wilfred Griggs after scanning Nibley's footnotes on "What Is a Temple?" "that Joseph Smith knew things about the ancient world that no one in the nineteenth century could know." That pretty well sums it up.

3. Ernest Jones, "Nature of Genius," *Scientific Monthly* 84, no. 2 (February 1957): 80.

AN INTELLECTUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY: SOME HIGH AND LOW POINTS

Hugh W. Nibley

Those who ask, "What is the meaning of life?" and get no reassuring answers have been known to conclude that the whole thing is a cruel joke. If we are supposed to find the answers, they say, why are they hidden? Precisely because we are supposed to find them, which means we must look for them; the treasure is buried to keep us digging, the pearl of great price lies glittering in the depths where we must seek it out. Treasure hunts can be both instructive and fun, provided the clues are not too discouraging, and kind Providence has strewn the most exciting and obvious clues all over the place. It is only when we choose to ignore them, like the pigheaded constable in the English murder mystery, blind to all but his own opinion, that we court frustration and cynicism.

As an infant I entertained an abiding conviction that there were things of transcendent import awaiting my attention. So I kept wandering away from where I was supposed to be. Adults find that attitude upsetting; the scientist or scholar who looks twice before formulating a conclusion has only scorn for the layman who looks only once, but he will give a bad time to any student of his who presumes to look farther than he has, and can never forgive the younger person who actually discovers something. Yet from every side the hints continue to pour in, as they have since the beginning of time; every decibel or photon brings to our human perceptrs more information than anyone has yet deciphered. My own reactions to these generous stimuli have been inadequate and hesitant, but the hints themselves may be worth mentioning. Here are some of the more potent ones, registered decade by decade.

The 1910s. In Portland in 1910 the great rain forests began a few miles from our home on every side, proclaiming in their primal magnificence the kind of world God intended this to be. But

the world that men were hewing out of the forest was something else. My grandparents, especially Grandma Sloan, still believed that we were in the last days, and could tell us why. Everybody else, including my parents, was cool to that idea—progress and prosperity were the watchword. And what did the signals say? As we stood on the little station platform at Gearhart Beach at the end of our last summer there, the family could hear a lumber company a mile away in the towering woods noisily beginning what was to be the total destruction of the greatest rain forest in the world. My father obligingly explained that the lumber company was only acting in the national interest, since spruce wood makes the best propellers, and a strong air force is necessary to a strong and free America. But it was another message that reached and offended childish ears from that misty battleground of man against nature. A little later I understood better what was going on.

The 1920s. I began my second decade in southern California as a compulsive reader, memorizing Shakespeare plays and aspiring to add something to the Bard's modest contribution. But English literature I soon found to be derivative, and so took to Old English to find what was behind it; what was behind it was Latin, and what was behind that was Greek. In those days we thought that you had reached the beginning of everything with the Greeks. Ministers and missionaries retiring to southern California in the twenties flooded the dusty bookstores on Main, Spring, and Los Angeles streets with an astonishing wealth of antique and exotic texts (at two bits a volume), thus abetting and implementing my undisciplined researches. But if you really want to get back of reality, science is the thing; and, as Karl Popper assures us, all science is cosmology. I became a passionate amateur astronomer. Only to discover that everybody wanted to be a scientist, while all the written records of the race, as legitimate an object of purely scientific interest as any fossil or spectrum, were consigned to all but total neglect in the hands of esthetes and pedants. I began to suspect that the records had something very important to convey to us, hints and clues that lay waiting in densely compacted deposits of the human past—others were busy in the lab, but who really cares what is in the stacks?

In the twenties, business was booming, as you may have heard, and I got a good look at some big men who played golf at Brentwood, Wilshire, and the L.A. Country Club; dull, profane men they were, who cheated on every stroke, just about. When my admiring father asked one of them at dinner what he considered to be his greatest achievement in life, the man unhesitatingly

replied that it was his celebrated filibuster to keep James Joyce's *Ulysses* (a book of which, as literature, I was very fond) out of the land. One summer, at fifteen, I worked in the Nibley-Stoddard sawmill in the Feather River Canyon and came to know all manner of men. Later my grandfather (Charles W. Nibley), impressed by my premature pedantry, told me how much money was made in the lumber business, a painful theme that cannot be pursued at this time. The thing for schoolboys to do in those halcyon days was to work in mills or ranches in the summer, or to become seasonal tramps. Full of the Concord School, I spent six weeks alone in the Umpqua forest between Crater Lake and the Three Sisters, quite a wild place then, and learned that nature is kind but just and severe—if you get in trouble you have yourself to thank for it. It was another story down in the valley, where I learned that there were kindhearted tramps who knew far more than any teacher I had had—I mean about literature and science—but tramped because they preferred passing through this world as observers of God's works. For such a luxury they paid a heavy price: in any small town in the nation anyone not visibly engaged either in making or spending money was quickly apprehended and locked up as a dangerous person—a vagrant. Everywhere, I learned very well, the magic words were, "Have you any money?" Satan's golden question. Freedom to come and go was only for people who had the stuff—in fact you could have anything in this world for it.

Within a year the tramping continued, this time among the amused or resentful villagers of the Black Forest and the Rhine Plain. President Tadge, one of the few great men I have known, allowed me to do it my way. By bicycle in summer and afoot in winter I went alone (my companions thought I was overdoing it) carrying the gospel to Catholic, Lutheran, and Calvinist (they were the toughest) villages. The people were still peasants in those days, living in the Middle Ages in their wildly picturesque storybook towns. Surprising enough, the work was not entirely unsuccessful—the gospel message readily leapt the immense cultural gap, passing through the ever-so-tenuous medium of faith that is common to all cultures and all religions. It was a different story when I knocked on the doors of professors and industrialists in the university and factory towns. German Wissenschaft had long since severed all ties with any gospel but its own proud, self-contained positivism; literally they were without a culture and without religion. The hints were clear enough: the infernal machine of our age was made in Germany.

At the end of my mission President Tadjé let me go to Greece to carry messages to some native members of the Church and to make contact with some who had recently migrated from Turkey in a great influx of refugees. Those marvelous Greeks, cheerful and courteous, exuding the spirit of good will, with nothing to eat and nowhere to live! I took long walks, sleeping in the hills, and had a shock from which I never recovered. While I was circulating among displaced persons (under surveillance, of course) my stuff was stolen from the flea-bag hotel where I was staying. That made me an outcast among the outcasts. I spoke English, but also German and French, and my clothes were certainly not American—how could suspicious officials know where I really came from or what I might be running away from? My passport turned up at the American Express, but that was not the problem. By what right did I lay claim to affluence and security while all the people around me had none? How could a few rubber stamps place me in an exalted station? True, the stamps were only symbols, like money, but symbols of what? Hadn't those others worked as hard as I? Worse still, what was I if my sacred identity depended on who somebody else said or believed I was? If a bored petty official had decided not to make some phone calls, I could have become a nonperson forever. Legal fictions had supplanted intrinsic worth and faith in God and man; it was the papers that everybody was grabbing for in those desperate times. And what were the papers really worth? I soon found out when I returned to the big house in Glendale on January 1, 1930, and was told how many thousand American millionaires had just become paupers overnight.

The 1930s. At UCLA I quickly learned the knack of getting grades, a craven surrender to custom, since grades had little to do with learning. Still, that was during the Depression, when people of little faith were clinging to institutions for survival, and so I went along, as timid and insecure as the rest of them. What sort of thinking went on there? The man I worked for as an assistant refused to read Spengler, "because he is not even a full professor!" Staggering, isn't it? I have never thought of an answer to that one. Nobody stood alone; the only way they all stayed on their feet was by leaning on each other for support, like a stand of toothpicks. Berkeley was more of the same, with one difference—they had a library. I decided to put it all together in the stacks beginning at the southwest corner of the ninth level and working down to the northeast corner of the first level, book by book, stopping

whenever something significant caught my eye. It took four years, and then one day a cardboard tube came in the mail. It contained another passport, this time even more magical than the one with the rubber stamps. I may have forgotten the very names of the courses and teachers that qualified me as a PhD, but this pretty document assured me that from here on it was all safely stored in steel filing cabinets in the registrar's office.

I had started out at Berkeley as Professor Popper's only pupil in Arabic (next year there were three of us in Hebrew), and spent an awful lot of time at it, which could have been better spent elsewhere. But what an Aladdin's cave of hints! All an Arabic writer will ever give you is hints, and you build up your world from them. The most illustrious visiting scholar of the time was Werner Jaeger, who favored me with long chats and frank revelations over the teacups (my refusal to drink the stuff made an indelible impression on him and his wife). Professor Jaeger knew very well, he told me, that the Greeks were part of a wider Oriental complex, but he had to bypass all that in his study of the Greek mind, because it tended to disturb the neatness and balance of his great work on Greek education. Typical was the committee's rejection of my first subject for a thesis: I wanted to write about the perennial phenomena of the mob in the ancient world; but the committee found the subject altogether too unreal, too irrelevant to the mood and spirit of the modern world, to appeal even to normal curiosity. How could you expect such men to be aware of the desperately lonely and unhappy young people all around them, seething with resentment and building up to some kind of an explosion (which occurred in the '60s), frustrated at every turn as they asked for the bread of life and got only processed academic factory food served at an automat?

At Claremont Colleges I taught everything under the sun, including American civilization on alternate days with Everett Dean Martin (who was still famous then) and junior humanities alternating with Ed Goodspeed, retired from the University of Chicago. I also taught the history of education and received the most sinister vibrations of all: it took no prophetic gift to see that no good could come of the highly successful efforts of Dewey, Kilpatrick, and the rest, to supplant all religion and culture by their own brand of the new, emancipated, manipulated society. At the request of President Russell M. Storey (the second great man I have known), I took notes when a few celebrities would gather at his house in connection with the work of a committee on war

objectives and peace aims. There we could talk with such notables as Lewis Mumford, T. V. Smith, Thomas Mann, and Edward S. Corvin. It was heady stuff, but very soon I was getting a much more instructive view of the scene from closer up.

The 1940s. In high school I had won the proficiency medal as the best soldier in the ROTC. Now I was a master sergeant doing paperwork in military intelligence at every level and keeping my eyes open. Mr. Tucker used to come down from Washington to Camp Ritchie with exciting news of what went on in high places; for example, there was the fabulous Miss Crawford in the British War Office who knew every secret of the German Army; and in time, behold, it was I who ended up as Miss Crawford's assistant, she being a fussy redheaded spinster who got all her information from newspapers and magazines and kept all the clippings stirred up in a shoebox. That is how it is done. The army is correctly defined (by Robert Heinlein) as "a permanent organization for the destruction of life and property." The business of the 101 A/B Division, to which I was attached through the winter of '43 and all of '44, was to search out and destroy; all the rest of the vast military enterprise was simply supportive of that one objective. "Good hunting!" was the general's stock admonition before take-off. My business was to know more about the German Army than anyone else and to brief division personnel at every level on that meaningful subject both before and during operations. What I saw on every side was the Mahan Principle in full force, that "great secret" of converting life into property—your life for my property, also your life for my promotion (known as the Catch 22 principle). Attached to army groups and various intelligence units during 1945, I took my jeep all over western Europe and beheld the whole thing as a vast business operation. I well remember the pain and distress expressed at headquarters as the war wound down and twilight descended on brilliant military careers, high living, and unlimited financial manipulations; and how great was the rejoicing when the new concept of "brush-fire wars" was announced to the staff—a simple plan to keep the whole thing going, safely contained and at a safe distance. O peace, where is thy sting? The Mahan Principle was still in full force and remains so to this day.

After the War I worked for the *Improvement Era* on the top floor of the stately Church Office Building on South Temple Street in Salt Lake City and came to know another kind of headquarters. I also got to know some of the General Authorities quite well.

There were scientists, scholars, and even poets among their number. One useful thing on the premises was a good collection of anti-Mormon literature. So when Mrs. Brodie's highly fictitious biography of Joseph Smith appeared I became involved in that direction: what I said about Mrs. B. and her methods is exactly what more competent reviewers have said about her more recent *Life of Jefferson*. The bona fides of the Prophet center around the Book of Mormon—another happy coincidence: on the eve (week) of the Normandie invasion I had in London blown all my savings on Arabic books from the collections of Howells and Ellis, both of whom had conveniently died at that point in time. Lacking other sources, I turned to my own books for an Old World approach to the Book of Mormon that kept me going for years.

The 1950s. In 1950 the Dead Sea Scrolls began to come out, along with the equally interesting Coptic texts from Nag Hammadi in Egypt, fusing early Judaism and Christianity in a way that conventional churches and scholars found very disturbing but which fit the Book of Mormon like a glove. Then in 1951 Brigham Young University acquired both the Greek and Latin *Patrologiae* and the Egyptian collection of the venerable S. A. B. Mercer, he who had spearheaded the attack on the book of Abraham back in 1912. Here indeed was a treasure trove of hints, including some very enlightening ones about Mercer himself. At last we had something to work with in the *Patrologiae*. But to be taken seriously one must publish, and I soon found that publishing in the journals is as easy and mechanical as getting grades: I sent out articles to a wide variety of prestigious journals and they were all printed. So I lost interest. What those people were after is not what I was after. Above all, I could see no point to going on through the years marshalling an ever-lengthening array of titles to stand at attention some day at the foot of an obituary. That is what they were all working for, and they were welcome to it. But there were hints I could not ignore and answers I must seek for my own peace of mind. There was one thing every student of the past has overlooked: here at our doorsteps among Arizona Indians lies the world's best clue to the spiritual history of the race; nowhere else on earth will one find the old cycle of the Year Rites still observed in full force and unbroken continuity from the beginning. When Brother Vergil Bushman, a great missionary to the Hopis, started taking me to the villages with him I could hardly credit the devotion and courage with which a little band of less than five thousand people had kept alive a language and a

culture which preserved the practices and beliefs of our own ancestors from prehistoric times until nineteenth-century industrialism severed the umbilical cord. Here the clues are both exhilarating and depressing, hopeful and sinister as nowhere else.

The 1960s. The fifties ended in Berkeley as a visiting professor in humanities, with Classical Rhetoric as the main subject. As in the novels of C. P. Snow, the faculty there had but one objective in life—to achieve eminence—and all labored under the pathetic illusion that mere association with a prestigious institution was the nearest thing to human satisfaction that this life could offer. As to the single-minded dedication to the search for truth, forget it! Take away the audience, and the great professor quickly lapses into the easy hobbies and trivialities of retirement. With nobody looking on, the game loses all its interest. And there is nothing else, for “how can ye believe, which receive honour of one another?” (John 5:44). At Berkeley I put too much religion into my teaching; one young man came to me with a delicate problem—his parents, he said, had been careful to give him the most proper and respectable education available, and now he was going to have to break the painful news to them—that he had discovered that there is a God. How could he do it gently?

Along with teaching I sweated for a year at Egyptian and Coptic with a very able and eager young professor. The Coptic would be useful, but Egyptian? At my age? As soon as I got back to Provo I found out. People in Salt Lake were preaching around that Joseph Smith’s fatal mistake was to commit himself on matters Egyptian—safe enough in his own day, but now that Egyptian could be read it was a trap from which there was no escape. This pressure kept me at Egyptian, in which I was still far from competent, but gradually it began to appear that it was really the experts who, by their premature commitments, were getting themselves into a trap. A trip to Jordan in 1964 cooled me somewhat toward the Arabs and turned me more than ever to the Scrolls. Then in 1966 I studied more Egyptian in Chicago, thanks to the kind indulgence of Professors Baer and Wilson, but still wondered if it was worth all the fuss. When lo, in the following year came some of the original Joseph Smith papyri into the hands of the Church; our own people saw in them only a useful public relations gimmick, but for the opposition they offered the perfect means of demolishing Smith once and for all. Not yet confident in Egyptian, I frankly skirmished and sparred for time, making the most of those sources which support the book of Abraham from

another side, the recent and growing writings, ancient and modern, about the forgotten legends and traditions of Abraham: they match the Joseph Smith version very closely.

The 1970s. The reading of the Abraham apocrypha inevitably led to Enoch documents and the discovery that Joseph Smith had given us among other things a perfectly good book of Enoch which rang up an astonishing number of stunning parallels when I started to compare it with the growing catalogue of newly discovered Enoch manuscripts. But my obsession of the 1970s has been the temple.

The essential information for solving almost any problem or answering almost any question is all *brought* together in the scriptures; but it is not *put* together for us there. Learned divines for sixty generations have argued about that, and the vast bulk of their writings is eloquent witness to their perplexity. And this is where the temple comes in. Without the temple any civilization is an empty shell, a structure of custom and convenience only. The churchmen, posing with too much dexterity to accommodate their teachings to the scientific and moral tenets of the hour, present a woeful commentary on the claims of religion to be the sheet anchor of civilization and morality. Where is the unshakable rock, the *shetiyah*? It is the temple.

Five days a week between three and four o'clock in the morning, hundreds of elderly people along the Wasatch Front bestir themselves to go up and begin their long hours of work in the temple, where they are ready to greet the first comers at 5:30 a.m. At that time, long before daylight, the place is packed, you can't get in, so I virtuously wait until later, much later, in the day. Whatever they may be up to, here is a band of mortals who are actually engaged in doing something which has not their own comfort, convenience, or profit as its object. Here at last is a phenomenon that commands respect in our day and could safely be put forth among the few valid arguments we have to induce the Deity to spare the human race: thousands of men and women putting themselves out for no ulterior motive. There is a touch of true nobility here. What draws them to the temple? There is no music, pageantry, or socializing to beguile the time; none of us begins to grasp the full significance of what is going on, yet nobody seems bored. Why is that? I can only speak for myself, harking back to the subject of hints, those countless impulses with which our perceptors are being bombarded by day and night. For thousands of years the stars have gone on sending us their hints,

broadcasting unlimited information if we only knew it; now at last we are reacting to a narrow band on the informational spectrum, putting clues together in a way the ancients never did. But also we are beginning to suspect that there were times when the ancients reacted to another band of the spectrum which is completely lost on us. The temple, as the very name proclaims, is a place where one takes one's bearings on the universe. What goes on there is confidential, and must remain so until both the Mormons and the outside world are in a better position to understand it. Meanwhile, I write this almost fifty years to the day since the bewildering experience of my own endowment; I have just returned from the temple again where this day I made a most surprising and gratifying discovery. If I went to the temple five times and nothing happened, I would stop going. But I've gone hundreds of times, and the high hopes of new knowledge with which I go up the hill every week are never disappointed.

Since a highly competent young man has become the director of Ancient Studies, the BYU campus has been visited by a dozen or so top authorities in biblical and related studies. Though they are far ahead of me, they are nonetheless schoolmen like myself, and it is only fair to let the ingenuous reader know that we are for the most part simply conscientious grinds, who got good grades and stayed on at school, moving into departmental slots conveniently vacated by the death of older (and usually better) scholars; then travelling all over to exchange commonplaces and read papers with our peers abroad in the world. As to research, we paw over large deposits of neglected material until we find something that nobody has noticed for a long time; then we write about it, and that is a contribution. The discovery of new documents has turned scholarship to translating again, which is too bad, because translating is the last resort of the resourceless mind—anybody can do it, and nobody can be expected to do it perfectly. Today as ever, to be a diligent tabulator keeping well within party guidelines is what passes as scholarly integrity. What can I say when we cautious, mincing souls, who consider ourselves illustrious if we can come up with an idea or two in thirty years, presume to take the measure of Joseph Smith?

At the present moment the hints and clues are pouring in from all sides with the accelerating tempo of a Geiger counter gone mad, and the interpretation thereof is as certain as it is disturbing: good news for those who wait with the Saints, disturbing news for all the rest. Grandma was right.