

## PIONEER SOCIETY

A historical journalist of the 1840's, had there been one around at the right moment observing the flight of the Mormons across the Mississippi River in the dead of Winter, might reasonably have reported that it was all over for that religious society, that the torch had been deftly put to that variant and deluded civilization. Some things, however, are not moderately meaningful or effective. Some tasks, some challenges call for fanaticism. Clem's grandparents and the other Mormons who were driven out of Illinois and trekked the wilderness plains westward to find a place no one else wanted have been called fanatics. And, if determination, resoluteness of purpose, and devotion to principle characterize the radicals, then, many of these were of that ilk. There were, of course, among them a proportionate number of slackers and backsliders, but, by and large, they were a hardy, committed, dedicated people, many of them of New England Puritan stock. Others had more recently come from the old countries, especially the British Isles and Scandinavia. They were strong in the faith, determined to find or make a better world. Fanatics? Yes! Who but a breed of fervid zealots could have survived the winters, struggled through the other seasons to break the ground produce the crops, build the churches and the schools, and virtually by sweat of brow and in pain and sorrow fulfill Brigham's dream of making the desert "blossom as a rose?"

No one human society, however, has had one character only. The history of mankind is not as simple as that. Always there have been differences, differences of generation, differences of temperament, differences of class.

Nevertheless, the joint enterprise which called these people of varying cultures and backgrounds into the wilderness produced a new culture in which the "old rigid class structure" was gradually leavened. What drove them forth? They held in common the conviction that the primary values of life and eternity are theological, and that God was still in history as much for the nineteenth century Mormon as for the Old Testament Israelite. This provided the vitality necessary to preserve the institution in spite of the supposed perversions to which it was liable.

Obviously Mormon civilization, including its culture in general and its theology in particular, was not wholly original. Nor did it pretend to be original. In truth, if there was anything they insisted upon most, it was that their gospel principles were ageless and eternal.

For ten years prior to 1852 plural marriage, as sanctioned and taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith, had been quietly if not covertly practiced by some of the leaders. After that time, as openly taught and encouraged by Brigham Young, it came to be regarded by many as a religious duty. However, despite common convictions that united them in most things, just as there were generation differences and class differences so there were also different personal qualities that led both lettered and unlettered men into the wilderness under the banner of common cause. Some chose not to practice the principle themselves, while acquiescing in the doctrine and sustaining their brethren who did. A few, torn between the present and the past, still somewhat fettered to the monogamous tradition of the established Christian churches from which they had come, found it irreconcilable and openly defied it. This, perhaps more than any other, was the most divisive element within Mormonism itself over the years.

Here, also, was the character of Mormon "radicalism" which gave rise to the tumultuous anti-Mormon activity of the last half of the nineteenth century.

Even the Federal Government eventually aligned itself with what was considered the strongest in the conservative Christian tradition, meddling in things which might be regarded, in our less Victorian oriented society of today, as constitutionally questionable.

The people of the Box Elder Settlement were no less influenced by these factors than those of other Mormon colonies of the Great Basin. Lorenzo Snow, the local apostolic leader, had several wives and encouraged others, who were able and willing to live the covenant righteously, to follow his example. Until the coming of the railroad the sixty miles distance separating the settlement from Salt Lake City seemed immense. Local leadership in some instances had to be autonomous. The emphasis was upon hierarchy and order through following the example of Priesthood leadership. In general the population tended to group itself into four classes or types; the saints, the backsliders, the apostates, and the outsiders.