

Image of Zion: Mormonism as an American Influence in Scandinavia

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Europe and America, partners in what historians have come to call an Atlantic civilization, have always carried on a brisk exchange, not of goods and peoples only, but of ideas and influences. In this intellectual free trade Europe's exports have ranged from Marxism to existentialism, while America has repaid with *isms* of its own like pragmatism and functionalism. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, long before Hollywood warped Europe's image of the United States, we began to send abroad an influential *ism*, which was to gain thousands of zealous converts, but which sometimes proved so notorious that European governments on occasion thanked us to keep our peculiar invention at home. The country tried to disown it, but Mormonism, as native to America as Indian corn, was in fact a dynamic and very special version of the country's romantic prospects, its optimistic gospel of a promised land.¹ Mormon missionaries, in advance of the tourists, the GI's, and the Point Four experts of more recent times, were evangelists of American ways; and Mormon literature shaped the image of an American Zion to which the faithful aspired, while apostates and unbelievers countered with propaganda of their own.

Mormon elders went to England in 1837 to reap a remarkable harvest, founding a mission that gave Mormonism lifesaving stability and continuity during its critical period in the United States following the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith. After the heartbreak of Nauvoo and new beginnings in the West, the British Mission was Zion's stoutest stronghold in Babylon, the Mormons in England actually outnumbering for a time those in the

¹ For a full discussion of this ideology and the program it initiated, see my article, "Mormonism's 'Gathering': An American Doctrine with a Difference," *Church History* (Chicago), XXIII (September, 1954), 248-64.

United States.² By 1850 Mormon apostles, fresh from what was still an adobe and sagebrush Zion in the Rocky Mountains, were taking their millennial proclamation beyond the British Isles to Scandinavia, Germany, France, Switzerland, and Italy. Headquarters at Liverpool served as Mormonism's busy European clearing house for arriving missionaries and departing converts.

Widely known by their passports from Washington and their talk about America, the redoubtable elders were often accused of being white slavers, polygamists fleeing federal marshals, or speculators and railroad agents seeking emigrants for profit. But through such missionaries America became a household reality to thousands of Europeans. Hardly a family in Denmark, for example, had not read Mormon tracts by 1885, and most knew, or knew of, someone who had gone to Utah. The missionary might finger the word "Zion" in a huge scrawl across the smoky ceiling of some lowly cottage. For the wonderstruck villagers, the moment materialized and joined two myths — the Mormons and the American West. What had been rumor became an advent filling the dwelling, immediate and immense. The coming of the Mormons turned the fabulous into a fact and a disturbing personal force.

From 1850 to 1900, in Scandinavia alone they won nearly fifty thousand converts, over half of whom emigrated. By what persuasive image were these Scandinavians led to join an outcast community and settle a distant region at the very time others of their emigrant countrymen were homesteading the rich and more comfortable acres of Minnesota and Wisconsin?

By 1850, when the Mormons arrived in Copenhagen, folk imagination had already been quickened by a growing number of "America letters" and "America books," like Ole Rynning's influential *True Account of America (Sandfaerdig Beretning om Amerika, Christiania, 1838)*. In the 1840's a few emigrant guides, forerunners of scores of handbooks to come, described the American prospect in engrossing detail. But "New Scandinavia," to use Fredrika Bremer's optimistic term, meant the rich lands in the central regions of Minnesota and Illinois. "The West" in L. J. Friberg's *Haandbog for Emigranter til Amerikas Vest* (Christiania,

² Mormonism won 111,330 converts in Great Britain between 1850 and 1900. The total church membership in 1850 did not exceed 60,000, with only a decided minority of 11,380 in Utah and close to 35,000 in England, and with the rest scattered throughout the United States, but located principally in Iowa settlements.

1848), a work cited again and again in Danish newspapers, meant Wisconsin. On the maps and in the schoolbooks in Scandinavia the Far West was written off as "The Great American Desert."

If knowledge of America was fanciful, of the Mormons it was almost pure fable. Europe knew Joseph Smith during his lifetime as "the Western Mahomet," with sword in one hand and his Koran, the *Book of Mormon*, in the other. Yet more reliable information about the Mormons had begun to circulate as newspapers occasionally copied from the numerous notices in the British press. It was from a Copenhagen newspaper that Peter O. Hansen in 1843 first read about "a book found in America called the Book of Mormon," kindling a curiosity that sent him to the United States to learn more.³ After 1850 mission periodicals, modeled after *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* (published in Liverpool), appeared in Copenhagen, Stockholm, and other European capitals. Sometimes official Mormon literature found a place in Continental papers as news from America. In 1850 Apostle John Taylor, who opened a mission in France, sent Brigham Young's "Fifth General Epistle," a detailed account of the year's developments in Utah Territory, to the *Journal des Debats* in Paris, to find it copied by papers in Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, and Germany. "And thus," Taylor told a Salt Lake City audience in 1852, "it was spread before the nations of Europe. Our place and our people are becoming well known abroad." He reported the London *Times* as saying, "We have let this people alone for some time, and said nothing about them; we have been led to believe that they were a society of fanatics and fools, etc.; but let this be as it may, their position in the world, in a national capacity, demands at our hands, as public journalists, to report their progress, improvements, and position."⁴

Ignorance abroad about the American West in general and the Mormons in particular was frequently matched in the United States. But with the discovery of gold in California, both Europe and America took a hurried lesson in geography and Great Salt Lake City, unexpectedly finding itself athwart a national highway,

³ "Peter O. Hansens Autobiografi," *Morgenstjernen* (Salt Lake City), III (1884), 331.

⁴ John Taylor, Sermon, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool), I (1852), 19. A generation later, Missionary A. L. Skanchy succeeded in having a Bergen, Norway, newspaper run Governor Caleb West's report on Utah to correct a fanciful history of Brigham Young which the paper had published. Skanchy to N. C. Flygare, March 16, 1887, *Skandinaviens Stjerne* (Copenhagen), XXXVI (April 1, 1887), 203.

became the renowned "Half-Way House in the Wilderness." Travel accounts multiplied at home and abroad. An abridged translation of Edwin Bryant's *What I Saw in California* appeared in Stockholm as early as 1850.⁵ Western travelers, now with sympathy, now without, perpetuated Europe's image of the Mormon country as a theocratic state with outlandish customs and beliefs. Mormon propagandists themselves faced the difficulty of making a forbidding region and a peculiar people sound attractive, of getting a population to the land to undertake the labors that Utah's governors would one day praise in their annual messages. For this the Mormons had enthusiasm and a special vision.

In 1850, at the moment the mission to Scandinavia was launched, Utah admittedly had little to attract either homesteader or speculator. Isolated, rainless, without a railroad or the lure of land grants, without a government survey to insure title, with a precarious amount of arable land, and with its discovery as the "treasurehouse of the nation" still in the future, the Territory seemed an affront to the rest of the country, which officially rejected the land and repudiated its inhabitants. A Virginia senator, for example, during the congressional debate on the Compromise of 1850 declared that he was glad to see Utah hemmed in between two mountain walls in a desert basin, and was perfectly willing to abandon such worthless land to the Mormons.⁶

But to Brigham Young, Utah's natural adversities seemed an advantage. They exactly suited his design — salvation for his people lay in a region where a good living would require hard labor and where the land would be coveted by no one else. Zion as a refuge, a place where the pure in heart dwell, a land "where honest labor and industry meet with a suitable reward, where the higher walks of life are open to the humblest and poorest,"⁷ was the basic theme of Mormon propaganda. The prospects were brightly pictured, but only on these terms. The land was grudging and the labor sweaty, but it was labor, as the London *Times* had the insight

⁵ Two other notable travel books to reach Scandinavian readers were William Chandless, *A Visit to Salt Lake City* (London, 1857), which appeared in Copenhagen in 1858 as *Ved Saltsøen, Et Besøg hos Mormonerne i Utah*, and William Hepworth Dixon, *New America* (Philadelphia, 1867), which by 1868 found its way into French, German, and Swedish editions, known in Swedish as *Vår tids Amerika* (Stockholm, 1868).

⁶ Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah* (4 vols., Salt Lake City, 1892-1904), I, 450.

⁷ Brigham Young and others, "Thirteenth General Epistle," *Millennial Star* (Liverpool), XVIII (1856), 49.

to observe, "lightened so that it is never sordid and never penurious, and some kind of image is reproduced of patriarchal sufficiency and contentment."⁸ For anyone to be content in Zion, conversion — at least conditioning — had to precede immigration. Mormon missionaries were "heralds of salvation" first, and only incidentally immigration agents.

In Scandinavia, Zion was proclaimed in a vigorous literature ranging from the sober and moralizing to the extravagant and apocalyptic that sometimes failed to distinguish between Zion as metaphor and Zion the city by the Great Salt Lake. The hymns reflected the ambiguity, some of them identifying Deseret with Zion of the Psalms. Converts who failed to make the distinction sought an illusion, as the Liverpool *Millennial Star* warned: "They read and sing about Zion as she was seen in visions of the Prophets . . . and do not appear to have any conception that this is not all to be enjoyed now. . . . Let every Saint remember that Zion is composed of such as he."⁹ At other times the description of a western Zion in America was unmistakable. "O Du Zion i Vest"¹⁰ was the Danish version of "O Ye Mountains High," where the sky was blue, the streams clear, and the air breathed liberty. The color was often local and life was bucolic:

We plow, we sow and irrigate,
 To raise the golden grain;
 And diligently labor
 To independence gain;
 Some haul the wood from canyons wild,
 Some tend the flocks and herds,
 And all our moments are beguiled
 By industry's rewards.
 My valley Home, my Mountain Home,
 The dear and peaceful Valley.¹¹

The imagery was appealing: Joseph Smith was a "fattig Bondreng, total ulaerd," a poor peasant boy, wholly unlearned, like so many Scandinavians themselves. The songs promised a day of justice — the defeat of the clerics, the redemption of the poor.

⁸ London *Times*, August 12, 1879, quoted in *Millennial Star*, XLI (1879), 513.

⁹ *Millennial Star*, XXIII (1861), 232-34.

¹⁰ *Salmer til Brug for Jesu Kristi Kirke af Sidste-Dages Hellige* (12th ed., Copenhagen, 1885), 80-82. The Danish Mormon hymnal went through many editions totaling 40,000 copies by 1900.

¹¹ "There Is a Place in Utah," *Sacred Hymns and Spiritual Songs for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (20th ed., Salt Lake City, 1891), 382.

Zion was frequently "Zion's ship," an appropriate image for expectant voyagers. The farewell hymns, like "I Vestens Bjaergeland," all spoke the same sentiments: we're not sorry to go; we'll not forget you; we hope to see you in Zion soon; our home is in the West — that is our Fatherland.¹² The converts themselves wrote many hymns, setting their new emotions to old tunes. A surprising number of private journals yield verses from unlikely pens, the mood of Zion touching clerks, tailors, schoolmasters, and shoemakers.

Before these expressive and influential hymns, however, had come the tracts, a veritable chorus of "voices": "A Voice of Truth," "A Voice of Warning," "A Voice from the Land of Zion." Erastus Snow's *En Sandheds Røst til de Oprigtige af Hjertet*, "A Voice of Truth to the Honest in Heart," was the first official tract and remained the most popular. From a first edition of 2,000 copies in September, 1850, it reached 140,000 by 1882 and was still being read during Mormonism's centennial in Scandinavia.¹³ It made only casual mention of Zion and the central doctrine of gathering. A clear, succinct account of the new gospel's first principles, its arguments were Biblical, its tone tempered but urgent, appealing to minds trusting in Scripture but dissatisfied with the formalistic creed of the state religion and its indifferent clergy.

A Danish translation of the *Book of Mormon*, itself an intriguing story of ancient migrations to the promised land, appeared in 1851. "They are now being thrown into circulation by the brethren, and by a bookdealer of Copenhagen," wrote Snow to Brigham Young of the first edition of 3,000.¹⁴ By 1882 Scandinavia had absorbed 8,000 Danish and 3,000 Swedish copies.

Lærdommens og Pagtens Bog, a translation of Joseph Smith's revelations and epistles found in the *Doctrine and Covenants* — another distinctively American scripture — was published in 1852. It set forth the order of the church, introduced members to the responsibilities of a lay leadership whose forms and procedures had been born on the American frontier, and incidentally acquainted them with a good deal of United States geography. Successive Danish editions by 1882 totaled 6,800 copies.

¹² *Salmer til Brug*, 286 and *passim*.

¹³ Publication figures to 1882 for this and other titles to be cited are drawn from the printer's account books and tabulated in Andrew Jenson, "Bogtrykker F. E. Bording," *Morgenstjernen*, III (1884), 104.

¹⁴ Erastus Snow, *One Year in Scandinavia* (Liverpool, 1851), 12.

Publication was a striking aspect of Mormon activity in Scandinavia. By 1873 eighteen titles were in print, advertised for sale at mission headquarters in Copenhagen or at any of the Latter-day Saint meetings. By 1881 the Mormons had spent 100,000 Danish crowns or \$25,000 with a Copenhagen printer for a total of 1,840,750 pieces of literature (tracts, periodicals, and books) in Danish and 275,600 in Swedish.¹⁵ Preponderantly theological, this literature was a far cry from the lure of "unworked lodes in the Wahsatch Mountains," "free 'gaarder' in the West," and assurances of "food and an endless elysium of beer" which were supposed, according to some reports at least, to be Mormonism's characteristic appeal.¹⁶

Many tracts and books first appeared serially in the mission periodical, *Skandinaviens Stjerne*, founded in Copenhagen in October, 1851, and hailed by the *Millennial Star*, its sister publication in England, as "another star in the moral firmament of celestial lights." A bi-weekly, by 1861 it reached its highest circulation of 2,700, leveling off to an annual average of about 1,500. Like the *Millennial Star*, *Stjerne* was devoted to American interests, providing an indoctrination far broader than its Mormon bias and exerting an influence wider than its modest circulation. "Several periodicals," wrote Willard Snow, "have copied some important pieces from it; and, I am happy to say, to their credit."¹⁷ Issues passed from hand to hand, and it attained considerable notoriety as the local press engaged it in debate on the virtues and vices of America.

Provincial as the minutes of local conferences and cosmopolitan as the farthest traveler's account, *Stjerne* was scripture, historical record, newspaper, emigrant guide, and above all a serialized "America Book." As carrier of Zion's sermons and epistles, letters from emigrants, excerpts from American newspapers, and reprints from the *Millennial Star* and Salt Lake City's *Deseret News*, it was a storehouse of information about a new world. Here Zion was

¹⁵ Jenson, "Bogtrykker F. E. Bording," *Morgenstjernen*, III (1884), 104. By 1890 they spent another 26,000 Danish crowns on printing. "The Scandinavian Mission," *Millennial Star*, LIII (1891), 62.

¹⁶ See, for example, "The Mormon Embargo," London *Examiner*, August 16, 1879, quoted in *Millennial Star*, XXXV (1879), 545-47.

¹⁷ Willard Snow to Samuel W. Richards, July 16, 1852, *Deseret News*, December 11, 1852. In 1877, *Nordstjärnan*, a Swedish journal similar to *Stjerne*, was established at Gothenburg and later removed to Stockholm.

pictured in engrossing detail: Indian raids, grasshopper plagues, the hardness of a winter or the dryness of a summer, the size of the harvests, the founding of new settlements, the coming of the telegraph and the completion of the railroad, the appointment of federal officials, the transactions of the territorial legislature, congressional debates about Utah, Fourth of July celebrations — in short, the praying, the working, and the dancing in Zion. Scandinavian readers learned more of what was happening in Utah Territory than in their own community and, fascinated, followed the fortunes of the Mormons in their conquest of the desert and their continuous conflict with the world, a drama in which apostate and gentile were the stock villains.

In its physical descriptions and minute reports of developments in the territory, *Stjerne* served Utah as the railroad and land commission circulars served other states. The annual epistles of Brigham Young and his successors, which regularly appeared in *Stjerne*, were typical of the literature, concrete and colorful, that provided a firsthand view of pioneering, a close-up of a working model of American state building. Zion was perhaps more theocratic than democratic, but it familiarized Scandinavians with words like “Congress” and “settlement” and acquainted them with leading personalities in the national arena.

The annual epistles were vital bulletins, absorbing reports to Zion’s prospective inhabitants. It was easy to understand why Deseret meant “honeybee” and why the founders had chosen the beehive as the official symbol. The reports breathed confidence. Calamities outside Zion were the Lord’s judgments, the signs of the times; inside Zion they were purgative trials of faith. Zion always came off well by comparison: events in Europe or in the American states — wars, strikes, fires, municipal corruption, and financial panic — showed the gentiles ripening for destruction. “We’ll prosper both here and in all lands until the honey bee has sucked all the good and strength from the nations till they are ready for damnation.”¹⁸ The epistles, and *Stjerne’s* accompanying editorials, met the challenge of Zion’s adversities from year to year — Johnston’s army, the accusations of unworthy federal officials, the crusade against polygamy, hard times in 1873 and 1893. Zion never ate humble pie. When Johnston’s army came to Utah

¹⁸ *Stjerne*, II (January 1, 1853), 111.

in 1857, only to prove Buchanan's move a blunder, and when the states themselves became embroiled in civil war, the tone became triumphant, even overbearing.¹⁹

In the defense of Zion, *Stjerne* was the Lord's quiver, always full. But more absorbing even than the official communiqués, more intimate, having the authority of personal witness from known friends, were the letters from Utah that found their way into *Stjerne* after the departure of the first emigrants in 1852. Emigration itself, once begun and growing yearly, was good advertising for Zion. "I am happy," wrote Brigham Young to Franklin D. Richards, the church agent in Liverpool, "to learn of your forwarding so many Saints to America. . . . I believe it helps the cause, not only by coming to assist in the works of Zion, but has a beneficial influence in the world, and aids those who go to proclaim the Gospel, in obtaining hearers and believers."²⁰ Next to the return of the emigrants as missionaries — over 1,300 emigrants served as missionaries in Scandinavia by 1900 — emigrant letters proved Mormonism's most persuasive witness.

In the letters from Zion the facts were often more marvelous than fiction, big with reports of health and ownership in the new home, alive with memorable detail, as often heavy with moral observations. Through the letters ran glad refrains like "Children are no burden in Zion"; "We have the deeds to this ground"; "There is freedom here"; "The land cries out to be used." A letter from

¹⁹ Missionary Joseph W. Young reflected Zion's confidence when he wrote satirically from Copenhagen on February 4, 1858: "James Buchanan's sending troops to Utah seems to me the greatest piece of humbug that has been got up since Barnum's 'Baby Show.' However, if Uncle Sam has a few millions of dollars to spend, and a few thousand soldiers to freeze and starve to death in the mountains, all right, — the game has been his own seeking after. The old gentleman will learn, perhaps when it is too late to repent, that he is fighting against God. Yes, the Almighty built the batteries, bastions, towers, and parapets, and dug the trenches which form the bulwarks around his people, and I entertain the idea that Uncle will find He is a better engineer than the old man had taken him to be." Joseph W. Young, "The Mormons in Europe — Progress of Mormonism in Northern Europe," *New York Times*, March 10, 1858.

²⁰ Latter-day Saints Journal History, May 31, 1855 (MS., Church Historian's Library, Salt Lake City). "The Scandinavian Elders from the Valley," Carl Widerborg wrote in 1865, "are exciting considerable interest among their friends and acquaintances, and are pretty busy in traveling, holding meetings and conversing with those who are seeking information about the things and matters in famous Utah. Some strangers only wish to satisfy their curiosity, I admit, but still many of the honest will be led to investigate the truth of the gospel and obey it." Carl Widerborg to Brigham Young, Jr., September 27, 1865, *Scandinavian Mission History* (MS., Church Historian's Library).

America ran like rumor through a village, creating a legend even before the letter itself could pass from hand to hand.²¹

Marie Louise Lautrup, emigrant of 1856, wished that "one of our Danish poets" could see Zion's valleys and mountains; he would have stuff enough for a long description of what she could tell only poorly and briefly. She recalled that while she was living in Copenhagen "in Brother Petersen's house," the Mormons had come talking about the thousand-year kingdom and the promised land. She had thought Mormonism a delusion and had wished she might be rich enough to journey to Utah to see conditions for herself, and to return and warn Denmark. But Brother Petersen, she recalled, had said, "maybe you will go and not want to come back." And now, writing of Salt Lake City, with water from the canyons running down each side of its wide streets, and with its young trees just planted; of cattle browsing in the high grass on the mountain slope above the city; and of visits, in nearby settlements, with Old Country neighbors who were doing well on their own land with their own herds and good crops, she was glad to stay. "I enclose," she added, "two flower petals for you from Zion."²²

Another enthusiastic emigrant, writing in 1858, was convinced that "no other folk in the world has, in proportion to its size, so great a blessing of horses, cattle, mules, oxen, sheep." The caravan of wagons would have stretched, he said, "from Copenhagen to Korsør." He found Zion "glorious to work for by day, to dream of by night."²³ And P. C. S. Kragsskov, sounding like John Smith on the inestimable virtues of Virginia, found "the healthiest air, the clearest water" in Zion, "the best place for the Saints I have ever seen. . . . But the greatest joy for me is that I can see and hear prophets and apostles Sunday after Sunday who teach us Christ's pure gospel."²⁴

A correspondent from Zion in 1863 wished he could send pictures of the new Salt Lake Theater throughout the world that people might "see that the Latter-day Saints have ability, intelligence,

²¹ The Royal Library at Copenhagen preserves several Danish Mormon emigrant letters. *Stjerne* and *Nordstjärnan*, of course, published but a small fraction of all the letters that must have been written.

²² Marie Louise Lautrup to the Editor, July 24, 1857, *Stjerne*, VII (January 15, 1858), 123-27.

²³ C. A. Madsen to Carl Widerborg, July 25, 1858, *ibid.*, VIII (October 15, 1858), 26.

²⁴ P. C. S. Kragsskov to J. C. A. Weibye, April 15, 1860, *ibid.*, IX (August 15, 1860), 345.

and taste to raise grand buildings, especially in view of the conditions we've had to live under.”²⁵ In 1867 letters described the great new Tabernacle and its mighty organ, destined to attract so many generations of tourists. And the next year they welcomed the approaching completion of the railroad — it would aid the gathering, and, furthermore, it would bring travelers, “the powerful and the rich,” to Utah to see Brigham Young and his people and be amazed at how far advanced the Saints were over other peoples.²⁶

Ironically, the railroad that the faithful were sure would testify to Zion's virtues only helped to transform Zion from a confident, if struggling, independence to a troubled and still struggling dependence. Zion, seen with the eye of faith, continued to be brightly pictured, but more somber tones began to appear. Zion had known drought, grasshopper plagues, and Indian raids; its existence had always been marginal; but by choice as well as by necessity it had been self-supporting. Land, and home industries based on what the land produced, had been the basis of Zion's agrarian prosperity. The railroad, however, made Utah Territory more intimately a part of the national economy, responsive like the rest of the country to the business cycle. Now “hard times” meant scarcity of money and jobs, particularly in Salt Lake City, Zion's chief glory. “It is very pleasant to settle in a place like Salt Lake City,” said the *Deseret News* in 1878, “with its varied attractions and the opportunities it affords of instructions from the general authorities of the Church. But most of those who settle here may make up their minds to live ‘from hand to mouth’ for some time to come.”²⁷

Admittedly there had been “a change in our affairs in this Territory.” It was a very different picture from Parley P. Pratt's description of the ideal valley he had found in 1849: “The joyous and heavenly influence bore witness that here live the industrious, the free, the intelligent and the good.”²⁸ Unfortunately the idyl was

²⁵ A. Christensen to Jesse N. Smith, September 18, 1863, *ibid.*, XIII (November 15, 1863), 60. Franklin D. Richards, attending the Royal Theater in Stockholm in 1867, found it “about the same size as the one in Salt Lake City,” and warned European culture to take notice. Letter, February 6, 1867, *Scandinavian Mission History*.

²⁶ Christian Edlefsen to Sidste-Dages Hellige, November 3, 1868, *Stjerne*, XVIII (January 15, 1869), 123.

²⁷ “What to Do with the Immigrants,” *Deseret News Weekly*, June 19, 1878; reprinted in *Stjerne*, XXVII (August 1, 1878), 347-48.

²⁸ *Millennial Star*, XI (1849), 342.

being perpetuated in a new edition of Pratt's tract in 1878, the very year the *Deseret News* was facing the dilemma: "Israel must be gathered. But a serious question arises after the people arrive here; that is, what shall be done with them?"

Peter O. Thomassen noted in 1875 that "A deal of unemployment has existed in Utah during the winter, which has brought many to complain and wish themselves 'home again'." He added, however, that "the need in Utah bears no comparison with the need in the States."²⁹ A decade later, another correspondent wrote of how liberally the poor in Utah were looked after at Christmas time from the provisions in the tithing storehouses, receiving quantities of coal, mutton, flour, and potatoes. "When I read of the conditions of our poor Saints in Scandinavia," he said, "I wish they could have shared all this."³⁰ But the very protestations betrayed Zion's retrenchment. It was shocking to learn that there were indeed poor in Zion. The messianic hope was still alive, but newcomers must not expect to find Zion now as it should one day be; it was going through a purification period, and converts must come ready to adjust.³¹

In the 1890's there were official warnings abroad about packing off to Zion without due forethought of the difficulties of earning a living. Missionaries were cautioned not to let the fact of Zion as home, with its personal endearments and associations, lead them to think only of its beauties and to forget to tell of its disadvantages. The *Millennial Star*, for example, advised that in answering inquiries the missionaries should "state the whole situation, especially the untoward circumstances which emigrants and strangers are likely to meet."³² By the turn of the century general discouragement was downright.

Not that Zion had ever been pictured as all clover. From the beginning, descriptions smelled often enough of western sagebrush and greasewood, and official epistles were unsparing in their sober delineation of struggle in a wilderness. But they had never, like these later bulletins, thrown doubt on Zion's ultimate economic opportunity. Although some hardships had occasionally been pointed

²⁹ Peter O. Thomassen to C. A. Larsen, February 26, 1875, *Stjerne*, XXIV (April 15, 1875), 217-20.

³⁰ *Nordstjärnan* (Stockholm), IX (February 1, 1885), 48.

³¹ See C. A. Carlquist to P. Sundwall, August 12, 1894, *Stjerne*, XLIII (September 1, 1894), 362.

³² *Millennial Star*, LIII (1891), 264-67

out, the cautions for the most part had been spiritual, an effort to prepare the new converts against disappointment in their fellows. So, for example, Jedediah M. Grant, two-fisted counselor to Brigham Young, had preached in the 1850's that converts and immigrants were wanted on the "wholesale principle," but he took missionaries to task who delivered "long and pious sermons" representing Zion as "one of the most delightful places in the world, as if the people in Salt Lake City were so pure and holy that the flame of sanctity would almost singe the hair off a common man's head." On the contrary, when the Saints arrived from abroad they would find the people almost too busy to speak to them. The first things newcomers might be expected to do, he said, was "to leap into the mire and help to fill up a mudhole, to make adobes with their sleeves rolled up, and be spattered with clay from head to foot." Some would be "set to ditching in Zion."³³

If the cautions in Mormon literature itself were not sober enough, there was always the advice in the general immigrant handbooks: "In Utah Territory . . . the population consists chiefly of a polygamous sect called Mormons, against whose advances the immigrant is earnestly warned."³⁴

While Mormon propaganda was one stream of knowledge which shaped the Scandinavian image of Zion, the movement as it grew provoked another, a turbid flood of mingled fact and fiction which took its rise from clerical attack, folk rumor, travelers' accounts, and the testimony of disillusioned immigrants. It ranged all the way from learned refutations by the archbishop of Zealand to ribald portraiture of "Brigham Young and His Sixteen Wives" in anonymous street ballads.

Most of the surviving anti-Mormon pamphlets³⁵ originated in newspapers and periodicals, which devoted an incalculable amount of space to the Mormons, their notoriety securing them an attention quite out of proportion to their numbers. The 1850's were the most prolific, as was true of pro-Mormon publications themselves. The bishops and the theological faculty at the universities wrote impressive treatises, arming their parish priests with scriptural and

³³ Sermon, September 24, 1854, *Journal of Discourses*, III (1854), 65-66.

³⁴ American Social Science Association, *Handbook for Immigrants to the United States* (New York, 1871), 106.

³⁵ Originals of some twenty-five titles may be found in the New York Public Library.

historical defenses against Mormon heresies. These scholarly writings could hardly be expected to reach the commoner. The priests themselves knew how to approach him more directly and wrote histories, explications, exposés, and even handbooks like "Everyman's Aid in the Fight against Mormonism" (*Haandsraekning for Menigmand i Kampen mod Mormonisme*, Copenhagen, 1857) and "A Little Antidote to Mormonism's False Teachings" (*En liden Modgift mod Mormonernes falske Laerdomme*, Randers, 1857), works which often abandoned doctrine for diatribe and attempted to frighten parishioners with accounts of Mormon infamies.

The arguments were tediously alike, the accusations over and over that Mormonism was unchristian, an *imperium in imperio*, its followers ignorant, its leaders scheming, the whole movement a foul hypocrisy, with polygamy its crowning abomination. It was polygamy, of course, that gave Mormonism such wide notoriety, making it fair game at church and carnival. "The Mormon Girl's Lament" (*Mormonpigens Klage*, Copenhagen, 1873), "together with a true and accurate account of a rich farmer's daughter from Fyen who a short time ago was lured by the Mormons to Utah after giving great sums of money to their priests," bewailed her fate as one of seven wives, forced to work in the fields while the husband drank and slept, and recounted her escape and the indescribable trials on her return home, where she soon died, poverty-stricken but repentant. Ballad mongers hawked "the latest new verse about the Copenhagen apprentice masons" who sold their wives to the Mormons for two thousand kroner and riotously drowned their sorrows in the taverns; or they portrayed a harassed Brigham Young who had real difficulties when he took his family to the theater or tried to evade wives' relatives asking for loans. In the songs, gay and crude and often illustrated with satirical drawings, it was easy to see where Mormonism touched the popular imagination.³⁶

Not simply polygamy itself but the delayed acknowledgment that such practice existed gave the Mormons abroad decided discomfiture. They had at first called their detractors liars and scoundrels when they were accused of practicing such an outrage. But polygamy was publicly announced at a general conference in Salt

³⁶ Several of these street ballads are preserved in the Dansk Folkemindesamling, the Danish Folklore Collection, at the Royal Library in Copenhagen.

Lake City on August 29, 1852, and a *Deseret News* "Extra" confirmed the doctrine. Once the admission had been made *Stjerne* boldly published the revelation, though not until October 15, 1853 (the *Millennial Star* had published it in January), accompanying it with classic defenses of polygamy by Milton and Luther and most of Orson Pratt's *The Seer*, a publication founded to explain polygamy to Americans. With the announcement in October, *Stjerne* took care to publish an exhortation to the priesthood to beware of lust and every other unholy desire and to preach nothing but repentance and obedience to the laws of men. Mission leader Willard Snow with unblushing Yankee baldness told the brethren to "keep their heads out from under the petticoats, as they would be shorn of their influence and powers in the Priesthood, like Sampson was shorn of his strength by the treachery of Delilah."³⁷

Mormon polygamy abroad was doctrine only, never practice, though *Stjerne* in issue after issue defended the doctrine on scriptural and social grounds, described its practice in Zion, and closely followed the efforts of the United States to outlaw it. Several publications in Scandinavia were exclusively devoted to its exposition. Orson Pratt's *Celestial Marriage* was translated as *Det Celestiale Aegteskab* in 1855, but distribution of the book was stopped when the author's vagaries—his contention, for example, that Christ was a polygamist—were not considered scriptural. The damage was done, however, and later tracts had to refute the book. Parley Pratt's *Marriage and Morals in Utah*, another defense of polygamy, appeared in translation the next year, calling for the death penalty for fornication and adultery, bidding the "monogamic law with all its attendant train of whoredoms, intrigues, seductions, wretched and lonely single life, hatred, envy, jealousy, infanticide, illegitimacy, disease and death . . . sink with Great Babylon," and inviting the Saints to "fill these mountains, the States, North and South America; the earth; and an endless succession of worlds with a holy, virtuous, and highly intellectual seed."

³⁷ Willard Snow, Journal, February 6, 1853 (MS., Church Historian's Library). Snow was in Liverpool when news of the announcement in Salt Lake City reached him, and he brought back a copy to Copenhagen. Members of the church in Scandinavia were made acquainted with the revelation privately before publication. Tailor Ola Nilsson Liljenquist said that he and two other brethren were called into President Snow's office, the first to hear it. "The Spirit of God rested upon me in great measure while listening to its being read, and I knew it was from God." Liljenquist, "Autobiography," *Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine* (Salt Lake City), I (July, 1881), 567.

The tract was still circulating in the 1880's, as was Chancellor Orson Spencer's *The Patriarchal Order or Plural Marriage* (*Den patriarkalske Orden eller Fleerkoneri*, Copenhagen, 1854), with its conclusion: "What reward have the men who have faith enough to forsake their contrary and unbelieving wives to fulfill God's commands? A hundred fold of wives in this world, and eternal life in the world to come." However academic in monogamous Scandinavia, such doctrine was dynamite in the hands of Mormonism's opponents, who saw in it the dissolution of their families and put but one interpretation on Mormon proselyting: it was a brazen bid for concubines for Zion.

Foes pictured Zion at worst as an Augean stable, its inhabitants wretched in this life and without hope in the life to come; at best, as crude and worldly without the spirituality of Lutheranism, its people leading industrious if subjugated lives, and the immigrant settlers longing for the homeland but, having no way to return, resigned to their lot. Pastor Andreas Mortensen, who had been to Utah in the 1880's, made sport of the idea that it was a land flowing with milk and honey where every man sat under his own vine and fig tree; imagine a peasant or laborer in Scandinavia trying to support six wives and all their children on his small holdings. It was "hundeliv" in Utah, he said, a "dog's life."³⁸ Credulous seamen at Jørsby, Jutland, solemnly believed in 1873 that fellow mariners sailing up the west coast of America had seen women in Utah pulling plows.³⁹ A common saying among the peasantry was that no one ever got away from there alive.

The disappointed and embittered immigrant was not peculiar to Utah, but Mormon apostates seemed to be particularly virulent. Some returned to the Old Country (how they managed to escape the Destroying Angels they never made clear), and became anti-Mormon crusaders, delivering sensational lectures and writing booklets that could be sold for a few pennies among the poor whom the missionaries were supposed to be deluding.⁴⁰ Derogatory let-

³⁸ Andreas Mortensen, *Fra mit Besog blandt Mormonerne* (Christiania, 1887), 181.

³⁹ Andrew Jenson, "Missionary Reminiscences," *The Historical Record* (Salt Lake City), IX (1890), 31.

⁴⁰ Missionary reports in *Stjerne* frequently mentioned encounters with two apostates, Pastor Mortensen and Julie Ingerøe, whose latest charges were forthwith met in the editorials. C. Christensen, for example, related that "Frue Ingerøe" had declared in public that Utah had no government and was the scene of murders and abominations — which accusations gave *Stjerne* a chance to explain Utah's territorial

ters from the settlements frequently reached the columns of local newspapers in Scandinavia, or were used by the clergy in their counterpropaganda as tracts, thus revealing the long and intense struggle for the soul of the proselyte, who was no doubt sorely tried by the conflicting portrayals of Zion.

The bad reports began even before the immigrants reached Utah. Christian Binder wrote from St. Louis in 1854 that the Widow Jørgensen from Slesvig lost all her money to the Mormon agent, that seventy to eighty Danes were dead of cholera and smallpox, and that a number did not go far beyond St. Louis, refusing to go on with "such an ungodly pack."⁴¹ Christian Michelsen in 1866 was shocked by the rawness of the Mormon teamsters from the Valley who came to assist the immigrants on the Wyoming frontier: dressed in wide-brimmed hats, short jackets, and leather breeches, with a revolver or bowie knife in the bootleg, a long bull whip around their necks, a quid of tobacco in their mouths, and emitting a stream of curses, these were "Zion's chosen men"!⁴² The complaints were as grievous as they were numerous.

In addition to apostate letters were book-length memoirs like the Swedish Johan Ahmanson's *Vor Tids Muhammed* (Omaha, 1876), the Norwegian Julie Ingerøe's *Et Aar i Utah* (Copenhagen, 1868), and the Danish Christian Michelsen's *Livet ved Saltsøen* (Odense, 1872), books one third devoted to an emotional recounting of personal experiences, one third to a recapitulation of hearsay concerning the practice of blood atonement and the activities of the Danites, and one third to whitewashing the authors' own careers among the Mormons, explaining how intelligent and respectable people like themselves were for a time carried away by the delusion.

Ahmanson, former Baptist, brilliant but headstrong, who had filled a distinguished Mormon mission in Norway before emigration, suffered the misfortune of the luckless handcart company of 1856, which he later described as if it were the whole emigrant experience. Moreover, he did not find the leading brethren in Zion government and to note that there were "a good many American citizens in Scandinavia from Utah who can testify of true conditions." "Om Apostater og deres Virken," *Stjerne*, XVII (December 1, 1867), 73. A speech by Pastor Mortensen in Randers, reported in *Fyen* (Denmark) *Stiftstidning*, met a strong reply in *Nordstjärnan*, IX (February 15, 1885), 53-54.

⁴¹ Christian Binder, *Maerkvaerdigt Brev om Mormonernes Skjaendigheder* (Copenhagen, 1854).

⁴² Christian Michelsen, *Fra Danmark til Saltsøen* (Copenhagen, 1885).

spiritual enough, which may have meant that he did not find his advancement in church councils rapid enough to suit him. In any event, he fled to Omaha, where he wrote his embittered book. Frue Ingerøe, with sensibilities too delicate for the rigors of pioneer life, found her journey to Utah and her stay there an unrelieved nightmare and after a year hastened back to Norway to lecture on the benighted Mormons. Christian Michelsen, back in Denmark after a miserable absence of four years during which he had been unable to feel the glories of a wilderness Zion, contrasted the loveliness of the Old World with the hardness of the New. On the return, the sight of Ireland first refreshed him: the ruins of the monasteries, the little towns nestling in the hills "all bore the stamp of antiquity"; England's trim wheat fields witnessed that "here . . . no land is wasted," and crossing the Channel, he soon heard "that dear Danish speech from every mouth"; hurrying to his native Odense, he cleansed himself of his Mormon associations in "a long talk" with his old pastor.

Obviously the lover of antiquity would find few charms in Zion, whose hopes were on the future. When the nostalgic and the disappointed refrained from retailing hearsay and gave an honest report of their grievances, it was clear they were often simply not prepared for the hardships and the crudities of frontier life, faults common to pioneer America but in Zion, of course, laid at the door of the church. It was the rare reporter who stood on neutral ground.

Whether the Mormon country was held out to Scandinavian readers as a land of iniquity or as a land of Eden, the great bulk of the writing about it was religiously inspired. It was not until about 1895 that any purely secular literature advertised the region in Scandinavia. In that year A. Jessen, a civil engineer and former Swedish-Norwegian and Danish vice-consul in Utah, wrote "An Invitation to Danish Farmers and Dairymen from the Lucerne Land and Water Company in Utah"⁴⁸ designed for the emigrant who had no particular destination and could perhaps be persuaded that the mountain states offered the most favorable conditions for the industrious. After pointing out the disadvantages of other regions (the South, for example, was unhealthy for Scandinavians, the prairie states too dependent on wheat and too much exposed to

⁴⁸ *Et Tilbud til danske Landbrugere og Mejerister fra Lucerne Land and Water Company i Utah* (Copenhagen, 1895). A copy — the only one known to the author — is available in the Royal Library, Copenhagen.

drought, blizzards, and whirlwinds), he described Utah's fine grasslands and small, sheltered valleys that irrigation could make productive. The company, he explained, had built ten "Danish miles" of canals intended to irrigate 16,000 acres in Lucerne Valley on the west bank of the Green River, where the earth was "twelve feet deep without stones," lumber abundant for building, coal available, and a market for produce at hand in the nearby mining districts. Danish farmers willing to establish a commercial dairy were offered land for a nominal rental. The circular expressed full confidence that "the business ability and industry for which the Danes have a reputation" would guarantee large earnings.

It sounded like a fulfillment of Zion's most material hopes, but between Erastus Snow's "A Voice of Truth" and the Lucerne Company's "Invitation to Danish Farmers" lay a difference greater than the half-century that separated them. It was a difference in spirit and in conception — a conception by the one of Utah as Zion, and by the other of Utah simply as real estate. Infusing all of Mormonism's propaganda was the notion that what was being done in Deseret was but the beginning of a world-wide reformation. Zion was model for America as America was model for the world, and the calling of the missionary and his literature was to advertise this fact by word as the inhabitants of Zion advertised it by their works.

The extent to which Mormonism felt itself to be an American influence abroad was perhaps best revealed in the Fourth of July oration delivered by Parley Pratt in Salt Lake City in 1853.

The more I contemplate our country [Pratt said], the providences which have attended it, the principles upon which it is governed . . . and the practical working of it; . . . the more I look at the spirit of our institutions; and the more I contemplate the circumstances of mankind in general, the more I realize . . . the greatness of the destiny of those principles. . . . There is a day coming when all mankind upon this earth will be free. When they will no longer be shackled, either by ignorance, by religious or political bondage, by tyranny, by oppression, by priestcraft, kingcraft . . . but when all will positively have the knowledge of the truth, and freely enjoy it with their neighbors.⁴⁴

Observing that "It is hardly possible for one dwelling at home

⁴⁴ See *Journal of Discourses*, I (1854), 137-43, for this and the succeeding quotations from Pratt's oration.

to realize the influence that American and English institutions, which are the best, exert over the nations, and among them," Pratt went on to enumerate the ways in which Europe looked to America "for instruction and example": the railroads, the telegraph, free and universal schools, liberty of the press and of conscience. "These things have a bearing upon their minds; they are ready to converse upon them, and when they have heard the description, they say, 'It is good, far better than our own institutions'." In the spread of these influences, leading the world to seek deliverance from oppression, "not in the style of revolution, but by voluntary emerging into freedom," Zion and the gathering played a central role. Providence opened the way whereby "the first and best spirits from all countries" might liberate themselves. Though they could not "master their tyrants at home," they could leave "the old constitutions to crumble in their own rottenness" and "one by one, family by family" they could come to America "where they have a right to the elements to sustain them." And in time their influence would "overturn those institutions which they could not conquer in their own country."

In his peroration Pratt described the prophetic role of Mormonism in this grand design:

Hence we contemplate that small beginning made by the American pioneers, by Columbus as the first pioneer, and by our fathers the pioneers of religion and liberty; we contemplate how that influence has spread and increased in the earth, influencing the feelings of individuals as well as national institutions. . . . We will acknowledge the hand of God in the movements of men, and in the development of minds, the result of which will be the fulfillment of what the Prophet has spoken — the renovation of our race, and the establishment of a universal Kingdom of God, in which His will will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

Nearly forty years later a gentile governor of Utah Territory recognized this characteristic outlook, its aspiration essentially unchanged despite radically altered circumstances. The Mormons, he said, "are . . . informed they are the chosen people of God, and that they must consecrate themselves to his service; and that in the fullness of time all nations and peoples will accept their doctrines and look to them as the great light shining upon the darkness of all nations of the earth."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Arthur L. Thomas, *Report of the Governor of Utah to the Secretary of the Interior, September 9, 1890* (Washington, 1890).

This vision, this exaltation, whether stated in religious or secular terms, from first to last marked Mormon proselyting abroad and made its particular image of America as Zion a powerful attraction to thousands of Europeans, the Scandinavians foremost among them, who came to the latter-day sanctuary in the West to try the promise for themselves.