

BRIGHAM YOUNG  
ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Hugh W. Nibley

HUGH W. NIBLEY is one of the most gifted scholars in the Church today. His linguistic abilities, his concern with detail, and his brilliant mind combine to make all efforts productive and meaningful. He is a prolific writer and a gifted lecturer.

He graduated summa cum laude from the University of California at Los Angeles, and completed a University Fellow Ph.D. degree at the University of California at Berkeley.

After serving in military intelligence in World War II, he taught at Claremont Colleges in California before joining Brigham Young University, where he spends most of his time in research and writing.

Dr. Nibley was honored as recipient of the David O. McKay Humanities Award. He served as a missionary for the Church in Switzerland and Germany, and concluded his mission in Greece.

He and his wife, the former Phyllis Draper, are the parents of eight children.

*The Celestial Environment*

Brigham Young is one of the few men in history who could claim the privilege of personally occupying, settling, and placing the stamp of his own personality on a large part of the earth's surface. He founded a hundred communities over hundreds of thousands of square miles of the continent, and after over a century they are still in existence, some of them, in those places where the bulldozer and chain saw have not yet completed their devastation, still bearing visibly the marks of his genius. For Brigham was keenly aware of his unique opportunity to lay the foundations of a new civilization and of the awful responsibility that weighed upon anyone who presumed to alter the face of nature and create an environment in which generations yet unborn would be obliged to live.

It does not often fall to the lot of mortal men to set foot, let alone to settle, in a land as fair and undefiled as in the morning of Creation, but that part of the world into which Brigham Young finally led the Mormons was such a land. It was their privilege to lay the foundations of Zion in a region of the globe that man had not visibly altered or defiled, amid scenes of rare and startling beauty in a fresh and unspoiled world. "You are here commencing anew," he told the people. "The soil, the air, the water are all pure and healthy. Do not suffer them to become polluted with wickedness. Strive to preserve the elements from being contaminated by the filthy wicked conduct and sayings of those who pervert the intelligence God has bestowed upon the hu-

man family.” (8:79:60.)<sup>1</sup> For Brigham, moral and physical cleanliness and pollution are no more to be separated than mind and body: “Keep your valley pure, keep our towns as pure as you possibly can, keep your hearts pure, and labor what you can consistently, but not so as to injure yourselves. Be faithful in your religion. Be full of love and kindness towards each other.” (8:80:60.) There is nothing mysterious or abstruse in this identifying of the defilement of man with the defilement of nature. A Latter-day Saint astronomer has recently written, “Pollution and environmental deterioration are primarily moral and spiritual problems, rather than problems of technology.”<sup>2</sup>

At a time when “free as air” signified that a thing was of negligible worth, Brigham Young was insisting that the greatest physical asset the Saints possessed and one they should treasure most highly was pure air. “What constitutes health, wealth, joy and peace? In the first place, good pure air is the greatest sustainer of animal life.” (MS 22:748:60.)<sup>3</sup> “The Lord blesses the land, the air and the water where the Saints are permitted to live.” (10:222:63.) “We have the sweet mountain air, and a healthy country. . . . What kind of air did you breathe, who lived in eleven, twelve, and fourteen story houses in your native country?” (1:78:53.) “Speaking of the elements and the creation of God, in their nature they are pure as the heavens.” (8:341:61.) But since the earth is a place of testing, “every faculty bestowed upon man is subject to contamination—subject to be diverted from the purpose the Creator designed it to fill” (6:94:57); and it is so with all things in this world. Accordingly, “the strength, power, beauty, and glory that once adorned the form and constitution of man have vanished away before the blighting influences of inordinate appetite and love of this world.” (12:118:67.) The pressure is always on: “Our ene-

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, references given hereafter are from the *Journal of Discourses*. The first number indicates the volume, the second the page, and the third the year of excerpt.

<sup>2</sup>A. B. Morrison in *New Era* 1:69 (1971).

<sup>3</sup>MS indicates the *Millennial Star*, with volume, page, and year following.

mies . . . would like to see society in Utah polluted, and their civilization introduced; but it would be a wo[e]ful day for the Israel of God, if such efforts were to be successful.” (MS 27:205f:65.)

Why should the enemy seek to pollute? There was an early Christian teaching, reported by Eusebius, that the evil spirits, being forever deprived of physical bodies, constantly go about in the world jealously seeking to defile and corrupt such bodies, glorying in foulness and putrefaction as they “move about in thick, polluted air,” and make charnel houses and garbage dumps their favorite haunts,<sup>4</sup> until the earth cries out: “Wo, wo is me, the mother of men. . . . When shall I rest, and be cleansed from the filthiness which is gone forth out of me?” (Moses 7:48.) Once in reply to that cry a vast outpouring of waters purged the earth, quite literally, of its filthiness.

It was an awesome task that the Mormons were undertaking in laying the foundations of Zion; it meant preparing a fit habitation for the Saints, an environment and an economy stable enough to last a thousand years, a setting worthy to receive and entertain the visits of heavenly beings, a place that in time the Lord himself would be pleased to call his permanent home! Yet Brigham did not hesitate for a moment to launch into the work with perfect confidence and astounding clan—before the Saints had been in the valley a single day, ditches, fields, and streets had been laid out and the water was running into garden patches.

Observers of the work that followed often remarked with awe that Brother Brigham seemed to know exactly what he was doing all the time. He did know, for this master builder and craftsman had been given the most perfect of models to work with, nothing less than the heavenly order as revealed to the Prophet Joseph. “We are trying to be the image of those who live in heaven; we are trying to pattern after them, to look like them, to walk and talk like them, to deal

<sup>4</sup>Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 5:2 (in Migne, *Patrol. Graec.* 21:313).

like them, and build up the kingdom of heaven as they have done." (9:170:62.) Yes, but what is heaven really like? We know that too, according to Joseph F. Smith, a disciple of Brigham; for that we have only to look about us: "Heaven was the prototype of this beautiful creation when it came from the hand of the Creator and was pronounced 'good.'" (23:175:82.)

When Dr. Morrison, the astronomer, compares this earth to "an exquisitely equipped spaceship" on which every human want has been anticipated and provided for,<sup>5</sup> he might be paraphrasing the scriptures that tell us that this earth has been prepared with "all things . . . made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart; yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul." (D&C 59:18-19.) Or as Brigham Young puts it, "All the creations are His work, and they are for His glory and for the benefit of the children of men; and all things are put into the possession of man for his comfort, improvement and consolation, and for his health, wealth, beauty and excellency." (13:151:69.)

His words of a hundred years ago strongly suggest the image of the spaceship today: "The earth is very good in and of itself, and has abided a celestial law; consequently, we should not despise it, nor desire to leave it, but rather desire and strive to obey the same law that the earth abides." (2:302-3:55.) "Our business is not merely to prepare to go to another planet. This is our home." (8:297:60.) "We are for the kingdom of God, and are not going to the moon, nor to any other planet pertaining to this solar system. . . . This earth is the home he has prepared for us, and we are to prepare ourselves and our habitations for the celestial glory in store for the faithful." (8:293-94:60.)

But if the work has already been done, all the physical arrangement completed and the vessel a model of perfection at the time we set foot on the deck, what remains for us to

<sup>5</sup>Morrison, p. 65; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1970), p. 248.

do on it and with it? That is for us to find out first of all, according to Brigham, examining the structure with care, studying its nature and possibilities meticulously, considering well before we lay about us with gun, fire, and plow. "It is one of the most happifying subjects that can be named, for a person, or people, to have the privilege of gaining wisdom enough while in their mortal tabernacle . . . and understand the design of the Great Maker of this beautiful creation." (1:111:53.) "Field and mountains, trees and flowers, and all that fly, swim, or move upon the ground are lessons for study in the great school of our Heavenly Father, in what is before us in good books and in the greater laboratory of nature." (9:320:62.)

If the earth still retained its paradisiacal glory, we would be justified in asking, "What do we do now?" But that glory has departed, and the first step in the rebuilding of Zion is to help bring it back. "Who placed the dark stain of sin upon this fair creation? Man. Who but man shall remove the foul blot, and restore all things to their primeval purity and innocence? [That is a large order, an impossible assignment, and Brigham admits it.] But can he do this independent of heavenly aid? He cannot. To aid him in this work heavenly grace is here." (10:301:64.) Fortunately it is God's work, in which he allows us to participate. "The greatest acts of the mighty men," said Joseph Smith, have been disastrous. "Before them the earth was a paradise, and behind them a desolate wilderness. . . . The designs of God, on the other hand" are that "the earth shall yield its increase, resume its paradisaean glory, and become as the garden of the Lord."<sup>6</sup> It is a clear-cut and fundamental doctrine: "We believe . . . that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory." (Tenth Article of Faith.) That, however, according to the same Article of Faith, will be the last step of five in the rehabilitation of the earth, and according to Brigham Young, it was to be a long hard pull: "Not many generations will pass away before the days of man will again

return. But it will take generations to entirely eradicate the influences of deleterious substances. This must be done before we can attain our paradaical [sic] state." (8:64:60.)

But what about eternal progression? Is the best we can hope for a reversion to the primordial state of the earth? Man is not an intangible Ariel; he walks with solid tread and leaves his mark on everything he touches. God is quite aware of that—he planned it that way: "Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited; and he hath created his children that they should possess it." (1 Ne. 17:36.)

No one appreciated this better than the supremely solid and practical Brigham Young. Along with a deep-seated reverence for God's establishment, he had a New England Yankee's passion for "improvement." "What is this work?" he asks. "The improvement of the condition of the human family. This work must continue until the people who live on this earth are prepared to receive our coming Lord." (19:46:77.) Day by day the prophet never tired in giving full and explicit instructions on just what the people should do to improve:

There is a great work for the Saints to do. Progress, and improve upon, and make beautiful everything around you. Cultivate the earth and cultivate your minds. Build cities, adorn your habitations, make gardens, orchards, and vineyards, and render the earth so pleasant that when you look upon your labours you may do so with pleasure, and that angels may delight to come and visit your beautiful locations." (8:83:60.)

For Brigham, improvement meant "to build in strength and stability, to beautify, to adorn, to embellish, to delight, and to cast fragrance over the House of the Lord; with sweet instruments of music and melody." (MS 10:86:48.)

Specifically, the one way man can leave his mark on the face of nature without damage is to plant, and President Young ceaselessly counseled his people to do as Adam was commanded to do in Eden—when he dressed and tended the garden: Our work is "to beautify the face of the earth, until it shall become like the Garden of Eden." (1:345:53.) "The

very object of our existence here is to handle the temporal elements of this world and subdue the earth, multiplying those organisms of plants and animals God has designed shall dwell upon it." (9:168:62.)

Where men cannot foresee the distant effects of their actions on the environment because of the vastly complicated interrelationships of the balance of nature, what rule of action shall they follow? Brigham was never in doubt: the one sure guide for him was the feeling for beauty; he knew with Plato that the good, the true, and the beautiful are the same; that what looks and feels and sounds and tastes good is to that degree sound, useful, and trustworthy: "You watch your own feelings when you hear delightful sounds . . . or when you see anything beautiful. Are those feelings productive of misery? No, they produce happiness, peace, and joy." (12:314:68.) We can trust such feelings, for "every flower, shrub, and tree to beautify, and to gratify the taste and smell, and every sensation that gives man joy and felicity are for the Saints who receive them from the Most High." (9:244:62.) "Who gave the lower animals a love for those sweet sounds, which with magic power fill the air with harmony, and cheer and comfort the hearts of men, and so wonderfully affect the brute creation? It was the Lord, our Heavenly Father, who gave the capacity to enjoy these sounds, and which *we* ought to do in His name, and to His glory." (1:48:52.)

To the objection that some people have atrocious taste, Brigham has the answer. If taste, like mind and muscle, is a thing we are born with, it is no less a thing that we are under sacred obligation to cultivate and train properly. We enjoy because we have sensibility. Promote this sensibility, seek to get more and more knowledge, more wisdom, and more understanding. . . . This will give us greater sensibility, and we shall know how to enjoy, and how to endure. I say, if you want to enjoy exquisitely, become a Latter-day Saint and then live the doctrine of Jesus Christ." (18:246-47:74.)

Taste can be cultivated and so must be: "Let us . . . show to the world that we have talent and taste, and prove to the heavens that our minds are set on beauty and true excellence, so that we can become worthy to enjoy the society of angels." (11:305:67.)

It is through "greater sensibility" that we both enjoy and endure, for the appreciation of beauty is nothing less than the key to survival. Nature has so provided that we actually enjoy most doing and sensing the very things most conducive to our survival; we delight in performing the most vital functions of life, and so simply by enjoying ourselves, we build up more formidable defenses against the powers of destruction than any accumulation of scientific data or learned admonition could provide. We eat long before we are in danger of dying of hunger and drink long before reaching a critical stage of dehydration, simply because we enjoy eating and drinking. If we ate, drank, breathed, and slept only when persuaded by irrefutable scientific demonstration that if we did not do those things we would die, we would not be long for this world. So it is in all things, and creatures as weak and vulnerable as man must cultivate a salutary sense of what is lovely and desirable and what is wrong and threatening, a feeling that hits them long before they can tell just why a thing is to be welcomed or dreaded.

"When the Spirit of revelation from God inspires a man, his mind is opened to behold the beauty, order, and glory of the creation of this earth." How does such a one react when "a man says, 'I am going to make iron, and I will have the credit of making the first iron in the Territory' "? He can only feel that "the beauty and glory of this kind of proceeding is the blackest of darkness, and its comeliness as deformity." (9:256-57:62.) Why so? Without being able to tell exactly why, we take immediate offense at such statements, made by men in high positions, as "I do not believe in conservation for conservation's sake," or "I do not believe in clean water for the sake of clean water." But we soon learn

that our shocked first reaction is a healthy one; when the forest is reduced to the now proverbial one redwood, it is too late. What prevents such a catastrophe is not the logic of survival but the feelings of wrongness. "Are you not dissatisfied," asks Brigham Young, "and is there not bitterness in your feelings, the moment you find a kanyon put in the possession of an individual, and power given unto him to control the timber, wood, rock, grass, and, in short, all its facilities? Does there not something start up in your breast, that causes you to feel very uncomfortable?" (1:210:52.) Brigham does not apologize for his feelings; the Puritan ethic, which he knew and despised so well, would salve its conscience by putting virtue on the side of the cash box and making a great show of abstemiousness not from greed but from the delights that God means us to have: "But the greater portion of the sectarian world consider it sacrilege to give way to any such pleasure as even to listen to sweet music, much more to dance to its delightful strains." (1:48:52.) The voice of revelation has told the Saints, however, where to put their priorities: "And out of the ground made I, the Lord God, to grow every tree, naturally, that is pleasant to the sight of man; and man could behold it." (Moses 3:9.) Trees were made in the first instance to be looked at and enjoyed; we are aware of that before research and experience show our intuition to be quite sound—but the feeling for beauty must come first if we are to survive.

#### *Use All Gently*

It behooves us as fortunate visitors in the King's palace to behave circumspectly, to look and admire, damage nothing, take nothing with us, and leave everything as nearly as possible as we found it. Restraint is the watchword in dealing with God's earth: The products of the earth are "to please the eye [that always comes first!] and to gladden the heart; yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell . . . to be used with judgment, not to excess neither by extortion."

(D&C 59:18-20.) We may neither waste nor exploit what we find around us; Webster defines *extortion* as "undue exaction; specifically, an oppression by color of right." We have a right to take what we need, but when we would extend that right to justify taking things we do not need, that is extortion, and is expressly forbidden: "It is our privilege and our duty," says Brigham Young, "to search all things upon the face of the earth, and lean what there is for man to enjoy, what God has ordained for the benefit and happiness of mankind, and then make use of it without sinning against him." (9:243:62.) Sinning against him? "It is not our privilege to waste the Lord's substance." (11:126:65.)

For "whatever you have, it is the Lord's. You own nothing, I own nothing. . . . The Lord has placed what I have in my hands, to see what I will do with it. . . . I have neither wife nor child, no wives and children; they are only committed to me, to see how I will treat them. If I am faithful, the time will come when they will be given to me." (10:298:64.) The same applies to the world of nature, which we also hold in trust: "Not one particle of all that comprises this vast creation of God is our own. Everything we have has been bestowed upon us for our action, to see what we would do with it—whether we would use it for eternal life and exaltation, or for eternal death and degradation." (8:67:60.) We are being tested to demonstrate to the heavens, to ourselves, and to our fellows just how we would treat the things of a glorious and beautiful world if they were given to us as our very own.

Those who insist on "clinging to the earth" as if they owned it have forever disqualified themselves from receiving hereafter the mandate: "There is a vast eternity stretched out before you; now organize as you will." (8:341:61.) We are placed in the position of a lover who is engaged to be married; if he cannot wait until he is properly wed, or if he displays an arrogant and brutal nature toward his promised bride, then the wedding had best be called off—he is not worthy of the prize.

"We should love the earth," says Brigham. "We should love the works which God has made. This is correct; but we should love them in the Lord." (11:112:65.) We should look forward to a time when this earth "will be given to the Saints, when they and it are sanctified and glorified, and brought back into the presence of the Father and the Son." (15:127:72.) But that time is not yet; the question is, Can we wait? "*Why do men set their hearts upon them in their present organized state? Why not lay a sure foundation to control them hereafter?*" (1:272:53.)

We may enjoy these things in anticipation, but in doing so we must display the spirit that shows we can be trusted: "It is the privilege of the Saints to enjoy every good thing, for the earth and its fulness belong to the Lord, and he has promised all to his faithful Saints; but it must be enjoyed without [the] spirit of covetousness and selfishness." (8:82:60.) That is where all but a few fail the test: "The earth is organized for a glorious resurrection, and life and death are set before the people, true riches and false riches; and the whole world are gone after the false riches." (1:274:53.)

To honor God's creation is a high moral principle with Brigham Young. First, because it is God's wonderful work and bears his mark upon it, and man, try as he will, is in no position to improve on it. "Man's machinery makes things alike; God's machinery gives to things which appear alike a pleasing difference. . . . Endless variety is stamped upon the works of God's hand. There are no two productions of nature, whether animal, vegetable, or mineral, that are exactly alike [N.B. when you've seen one, you have *not* seen them all!], and all are crowned with a degree of polish and perfection that cannot be obtained by ignorant man in his most exquisite mechanical productions." (9:369-70:62.)

Frankly, Brigham was not much impressed by "progress": "The civilized nations know how to make machinery, put up telegraph wires, &c., &c.; and in nearly all branches they are trying to cheat each other, . . . they have been cheat-

ing themselves for the golden god—the Mammon of this world.” (MS 22:741:60.) They think it wonderful to “dwell amid the whirl of mental and physical energies, constantly taxed to their utmost tension in the selfish, unsatisfying and frenzied quest of worldly emolument, fame, power, and maddening draughts from the syren cup of pleasure.” (MS 20:218:57.) Having “obtained the promise that he should be father of lives, in comparison with this, what did Abraham care about machinery, railroads, and other great mechanical productions?” (8:63:60.)

In the second place, we should use extreme restraint, because it is immoral and foolish to destroy what we cannot replace. As Joseph F. Smith, Brigham Young’s disciple, was wont to quote: “Take not away the life you cannot give, For all things have an equal right to live.”<sup>6</sup> “Did you ever organize a tree, gold, silver, or any other kind of metal, or any other natural production? No, you have not yet attained to that power, and it will be ages before you do. Who owns all the elements with which we are commanded and permitted to operate? The Lord, and we are stewards over them.” (4:29:56.) By their own manipulations and sophistries, men get legal authority to destroy what they will of nature, but Brigham Young believed that “a man has no right to property, which, according to the laws of the land, legally belongs to him, if he does not want to use it . . . to do good to himself and his fellow-man.” (1:252:53.)

Not only have we no right to rifle the treasury that God has laid up for coming generations on the earth, but we can never justify such plunder on the plea of necessity. “If we have our hundreds or thousands we may foster the idea that we have nothing more than we need; but such a notion is entirely erroneous, for our real wants are very limited. What do we absolutely need? I possess everything on the face of the earth that I need, as I appear before you on this stand. . . . I have everything that a man needs or can enjoy if he owned

<sup>6</sup>*Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company) 1:371-72 (Melchizedek Priesthood manual, 1970-71).

the whole world. If I were the king of the earth I could enjoy no more.” (MS 32:818-19:70.) “When you have that you wish to eat and sufficient clothing to make you comfortable, you have all that you need; I have all that I need.” (13:302:70.) “I do not desire to keep a particle of my property, except enough to protect me from a state of nudity.” (4:55:56.)

Paradoxically, we are learning to live *without* things so that we can learn to live *with* things. God wants us to “handle the gold and silver of the whole earth without having a desire for it, only as a means with which to gather Israel, redeem Zion, subdue and beautify the earth, and bring all things in readiness to live with God in heaven.” (3:160:55.) As long as we go on accumulating stuff in this life, we are playing the devil’s game, for “there is no such thing as a man being truly rich until he has power over death, hell, the grave, and him that hath the power of death, which is the devil.” (1:271:53.) We will have a right to do as we please with our own only “when we can speak to the earth—to the native elements in boundless space, and say to them—‘Be ye organized, and planted here, or there, and stay until I command you hence.’” (1:269:53.)

### *Sin Is Waste*

Brigham Young had a Yankee passion also for thrift, but it rested on a generous respect for the worth of things and not on a niggardly desire to possess them. When he says, “I do not know that, during thirty years past, I have worn a coat, hat, or garment of any kind, or owned a horse, carriage, &c., but what I asked the Lord whether I deserved it or not—Shall I use this? Is it mine to use, or not?” (8:343:61), he is expressing the highest degree of human concern and responsibility. “If I have horses, oxen, and possessions, they are the Lord’s and not mine; and all I ask is for him to tell me what to do with them.” (6:46:57.) “Without the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot enjoy the good things of

life." (8:82:60.) But with it we need never feel guilty: "It is the privilege of the Saints to enjoy every good thing, for the earth and its fulness belong to the Lord." (8:82:60.) It is a magnanimous thrift that never hesitates to take and spend whatever is needed but under no circumstances will touch a molecule more. We may take all we need, because it is the Lord's but wo to him who dares to take more—for it is the Lord's! This is the exact reverse of the world's economy. Who would expect our most competent businessman to proclaim as his slogan, "Never count the cost"? "If I am going to build a temple, I am not going to sit down and count the cost. I care not what it will cost. I have built a great many houses, and never counted the cost before I built them. I never wanted to know anything about it." (8:355:61.) "I have built what I have built without asking how much they cost, or where I was to get the money to do it." (17:158:74.) "When the Saints are required to embark in any public enterprise, the word should not be . . . 'What will it cost, and will it pay, etc.?' but, 'It is a work for the public good, and we can do it.'" (10:362:64.) Strange as such a policy may seem, it is but the honest expression of the belief that God really does own everything and that he really will provide. "When we learn this lesson, where will be my interest and my effort?" Certainly not in personal acquisition: "Every man and woman has got to feel that not one farthing of anything in their possession is rightfully theirs." (4:29:56.)

All waste on this earth becomes garbage—*waste* is in fact the proper English word for garbage. To throw anything on the trash heap is to cast it aside in contempt; what do we know about its true worth? Who are we to despise what we do not understand? "*Never let anything go to waste. Be prudent, save everything.*" (1:250:53.) Even sewage has its uses: "Everything, also, which will fertilize our gardens and our fields should be sedulously saved and wisely husbanded, that nothing may be lost which contains the elements of food and raiment for man and sustenance for beast."

(11:130:65.) Brigham was aware of one of the basic facts of economy, that man, whatever he may say, does not create or produce—he merely takes:

Man cannot control the heavens; he cannot control the earth, nor the elements; he can fertilize and prepare the ground for the reception of seed; he can plant, water, till, and reap . . . but until his mind is opened by the Spirit of God, he cannot see that it is by a superior power that corn, wheat, and every kind of vegetation spring into life, and ripen for the sustenance of man and beast. (3:119:55.)

Moreover, "we cannot own anything, in the strict sense of the word, until we have the power to bring into existence and hold in existence, independent of all other powers." (8:118:60.)

Since man cannot create, he must face up to the number one fact of ecology, which Brigham Young enunciated long before even the scientific community began to take it seriously: "There is only so much property in the world. There are the elements that belong to this globe, and no more. We do not go to the moon to borrow; neither send to the sun or any of the planets; all our commercial transactions must be confined to this little earth, and its wealth cannot be increased or diminished." To this he adds the observation—over one hundred years ago—that the resources of the earth are being placed out of our reach by an irreversible process of buying short-term prosperity on promissory notes that science will never be able to make good: "And though the improvements in the arts of life which have taken place within the memory of many now living are very wonderful, there is no question that extravagance has more than kept pace with them." (13:304:70.) The dangerous policy of converting all into cash as quickly as possible is another expression of that lack of faith that will invest nothing in a hereafter: "It is all good, the air, the water, the gold and silver; the wheat, the fine flour, and the cattle upon a thousand hills are all good. . . . But the moment that men seek to build up



themselves . . . and seek to hoard up riches it proves that their hearts are weaned from their God; *and their riches will perish in their fingers, and they with them.*" (1:272:53; italics added.) It is natural for anyone to grab what he can get when he can get it, but "who will commit to that man or woman the great things of the kingdom of God that are to be attained on this earth" when the time comes? (8:295:60.)

### *Brigham in Action*

On March 27, 1846, as the Saints were about to go forth on the first leg of their long journey west, we find President Young charging "the Captains in particular to instruct their respective divisions, to be very careful about setting the Prairie or woods on fire . . . to prohibit all discharge of fire arms in the camp and to keep their guns and pistols out of sight."<sup>7</sup> A month later, as the first company moved out, he reported in his journal: "Traveled 19 miles. The prairie appeared black being covered with immense herds of buffalo. May 7th. I preached in camp and advised the brethren not to kill any more buffalo or other game until the meat was needed."<sup>8</sup> To appreciate the farsightedness of the man, let us recall that twenty years after he gave this warning against fires, the youthful Mark Twain sat in a canoe on Lake Tahoe and watched with delight as the flames spread from his *own* campfire to set all the woods ablaze in a holocaust that destroyed everything "as far as the eye could reach the lofty mountain fronts."<sup>9</sup> All he could think of was the splendor of the spectacle, for in his eyes the forests of the West were inexhaustible and men could do as they pleased with them.

As to the buffalo, on a single day in the year 1884 Buffalo Bill killed 285 of them and left their carcasses rotting on the plains. In the following two years the last of the great herds disappeared, but William Cody instead of going to jail

<sup>7</sup>Brigham Young History, Manuscript in Church Historian's Office, under March 17, 1846.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>9</sup>Mark Twain (S. L. Clemens), *Roughing It*, chap. 23.

became a national hero.<sup>10</sup> So far were the Americans, forty years after Brigham Young's admonition, from feeling the necessity of exercising the restraint which he felt so urgent in our contacts with nature.

All who attended, at President Young's invitation, the great 24th of July celebrations at Brighton "were requested to show their tickets at the gate" to the canyon road. The tickets were free, and on them was printed: "All Persons are forbidden to make or kindle fires at any place in the kanyon, except on the camp ground." (MS 18:673ff:56.) A hundred years later people in Utah still resent limitations on campfires as an infringement on their God-given freedom. The prophet ended his 24th of July speech with a ritual admonition "to see that the fires are well put out" (ibid., p. 679). The event at Brighton was magnificent enough to get coverage in the eminent *New York Herald*, and the reporter who described the doings in the year 1860 tells how at dusk of the last day, after all the wagons had gone home and the dust had settled on the canyon road, he beheld a singular spectacle: "By 9 o'clock the last team had left the camp-ground"; but one man remained behind "to see that all the fires were extinguished." And who should that man be but Brigham Young: "'The Prophet' left the last, satisfied that all was right, and that his disciples had enjoyed themselves to their hearts' content; and thus ended the great celebration of 1860." (MS 22:702:60)

### *Reverence for Everything*

What guided and prescribed the teachings and acts of this great man in all his earthly dealings seems to be before all else his constant awareness of being in the presence of the Divine. To the picnicker at Brighton, he said, "Here are the stupendous works of the God of Nature, though all do not appreciate His wisdom as manifested in his works. . . .

<sup>10</sup>On the passing of the buffalo, see the final chapters of J. W. Schultz, *My Life Among the Indians* (Boston, 1941), especially chap. 34.

I could sit here for a month and reflect on the mercies of God." (MS 18:675:56.) Everything around him reminds him of what is holy:

In gazing upon the intelligence reflected in the countenances of my fellow-beings, I gaze upon the image of Him whom I worship—the God I serve. I see His image and a certain amount of His intelligence there. I feel it within myself. My nature shrinks at the divinity we see in others. (13:171:70.)

It is seldom that I rise before a congregation without feeling a child-like timidity; if I live to the age of Methuselah I do not know that I shall outgrow it. There are reasons for this which I understand . . . this mortality shrinks before that portion of divinity which we inherit from our Father. This is the cause of my timidity. (13:139:69.)

Where is the man who can rise to address children without feeling this same modesty? (13:170:70.)

This same reverence, which the Greeks called *aidos*, for Brigham Young extends to all things; for if life is holy, for him "there is not a particle of element which is not filled with life, and all space is filled with element." (3:277:56.) "Well, how many lives are there in this grain of corn? They are innumerable, and this same infinity is manifest through all the creations of God." (15:138:72.) "There is life in all matter, throughout the vast extent of all the eternities; it is in the rock, the sand, the dust, the water, the air." (3:277:56.)

This vitalism, supported by interesting and ingenious physical speculations that we cannot go into here, was something that Brigham Young felt very strongly. He laid special emphasis on the importance of human esteem for the animal world, for one of the peculiar doctrines of the Latter-day Saints is that animals are living souls destined to participate in the resurrection as they did in the preexistence. "Learn to control yourselves and that which is immediately around you, and always keep in view that the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms—the earth and its fulness—will all, except the children of men, abide their creation—the law

by which they were made, and will receive their exaltation." 8:191:60.) "Every tree . . . that is pleasant also to the sight of man . . . became also a living soul. For it was spiritual in the day that I created it; for it remaineth in the sphere in which I, God, created it. . . . Every beast of the field . . . they were also living souls." (Moses 3:9.) The four beasts of Revelation are symbolic animals, but they denote that very real "happiness of man, and of beasts, and of creeping things, and of the fowls of the air" in "the paradise of God . . . that which is spiritual being in the likeness of that which is temporal; and that which is temporal in the likeness of that which is spiritual. The spirit of man in the likeness of his person, and also the spirit of beast, and every other creature which God has created." (D&C 77:2.)

Granted there are different levels and degrees that exist within as well as between species, still it is the privilege of every form of life to multiply in its sphere and element and have joy therein. Adam's dominion was a charge to see to it that all went well with God's creatures; it was not a license to exterminate them:

Every living creature that moveth . . . and every winged fowl after its kind . . . all things which I created were good, and I God blessed them, saying: Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the sea; and let the fowl multiply in the air, and everything that creepeth upon the earth . . . I God saw that all these things were good. (Moses 2:21.)

There is a forgotten teaching of the early Jews and Christians that the dominion that God gave to Adam in Eden over His other creatures was nothing less than the holy priesthood, the power to act in God's stead. In making His covenant with Abraham, God is represented as saying to him, "As I put Adam and then Noah in charge of all my creatures, so now I put you in charge, and order you to give them my blessing."<sup>11</sup> To Adam He said, "From now on it is all given over into your hand, and the creatures will fear you as they

<sup>11</sup>Midrash Ps. I, 5; other Midrash passages in M.J. bin Gorion, *Die Sagen der Juden* (Frankfurt, 1914), 2:17f, 424.

fear me."<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, Adam enjoys God's authority only insofar as he exercises it as God himself would, with perfect love and understanding.

"Even the fierce beasts of prey," says the Zohar, "fear man as long as he keeps his covenant, his kingly dignity, and his eye fixed upon God in whose image he is."<sup>13</sup> Adam's calling, says an equally venerable source, was to take care of the animals, not to dispose of them as his property. The spirits of all beasts have their proper paradise, and at the judgment man will have to give an exact accounting of how he has treated them.<sup>14</sup> "Man by his sovranity [sic] over nature resembles God," says an early Christian writing, "but he enjoys that authority only as long as he behaves in a godlike manner."<sup>15</sup> Only in a noble, generous, and forbearing spirit can the powers of the priesthood be exercised (D&C 121:36-46), and to that spirit in us all creatures have a right to appeal.

"It is not only wicked to destroy them," said Joseph F. Smith, speaking of "our innocent little birds . . . it is abominable, in my opinion. I think that this principle should extend, not only to the bird life, but to the life of all animals. . . . I have known men—and they still exist among us—who enjoy what is, to them, the 'sport' of hunting birds . . . (the birds having had a season of protection and not apprehending danger)—that makes it worse than wicked—it is base, contemptible, ignoble: It is wrong, and I have been surprised at the prominent men whom I have seen whose very souls seem to be athirst for the shedding of animal blood. They go off hunting deer, antelope, elk, anything they can find, and what for? 'Just for the fun of it.'"<sup>16</sup>

When the famous missionary Mildred Cable asked the inhabitants of a remote oasis in the Gobi Desert why they did

<sup>12</sup>bin Gorion, 1:82f.

<sup>13</sup>Zohar 1:191f.

<sup>14</sup>This is explained in the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch* (Slavonic text, II Enoch), chap. 15.

<sup>15</sup>V. Aptowitz in *Revue des Etudes Juives* 75 (1922), pp. 4-6, citing St. Ephraim and other early Christian and Jewish teachers on the subject.

<sup>16</sup>Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 1:71-72.

not still their hunger by eating the doves that visited the place in large numbers, they replied that "to trap and eat a pigeon would be contrary to all right feeling, and the oasis dwellers' standard of ethics would not admit that a gentle, harmless, self-constituted guest like a wild bird could be deceived, slain, and devoured. 'The Princely Man,' he would say, 'is not a betrayer of trust.'"<sup>17</sup> God will justify the taking of animal life to sustain man's want, but He reserves a special blessing for those who place their own nobility before their necessity.

This is strikingly illustrated in Brigham Young's declarations regarding the meanest, most repulsive and destructive of creatures—the crickets of the plague. "Last season when the grasshoppers came on my crops, I said, 'Nibble away, I may as well feed you as to have my neighbors do it; I have sown plenty, and you have not raised any yourselves.' And when the harvest came you would not have known that there had been a grasshopper there." The moral of this, he says, is "Pay attention to what the Lord requires of you and let the balance go." (3:159:55.) Years later it came again: "According to present appearances, next year [1868] we may expect grasshoppers to eat up nearly all our crops. But if we have provisions enough to last us another year, we can say to the grasshoppers—these creatures of God—you are welcome. I have never had a feeling to drive them from one plant in my garden; but I look upon them as the armies of the Lord." (12:121:67.)

### *The Day of the Destroyer*

Because of the Fall, man has become the enemy of his own environment, at odds with the whole creation, allergic to all manner of things good in themselves that afflict and torment him: "The animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms abide the law of their Creator; the whole earth and all things pertaining to it, except man, abide the law of their creation."

<sup>17</sup>M Cable and F. French, *The Gobi Desert* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), p. 114.

(9:246:62.) Conflict is inevitable, with man stubbornly refusing to “become subject to the most sensible and self-exalting principles,” determined to subdue the earth in his way. “We see all the world trying to lord it over God’s heritage; it is in this spirit that the evil principle and power is trying to overcome and rule over the divine principle planted there. This constantly leads the children of men astray.” (9:107:60.) So there is a fundamental conflict here, and it goes back to the beginning. It is said that Satan approached Adam with certain propositions that he later presented to Cain, Noah, Abraham, and Job,<sup>18</sup> in which he set forth his plan for running things: (1) He claimed all of God’s earth, “most glorious and beautiful” from end to end for his own; (2) then he put up everything in it for sale to anyone who had the money; (3) and finally he revealed the source of power and dominion under his system: it all rested on possession of the treasures of the earth, with which one can buy any military and political power necessary to rule, or rather misrule, among the children of men. John Taylor, Brigham Young’s great successor, told the story in simple verse:

This world was once a garden place,  
With all its glories common,  
And men did live a holy race  
And worship Jesus face to face,  
In Adam-on-di-Ahman.

That was long ago, when “Enoch walked with God above the power of Mammon,”<sup>19</sup> but it was this power of mammon that changed the whole picture. Two fatal flaws stand between us and that time foreseen by Brother Taylor, “when

<sup>18</sup>Satan’s confrontation with Adam (bin Gorion, op. cit., 1:255) and his shrewd business propositions were also repeated in the case of Noah (Midrash Rabbah Noah 36:3 end; bin Gorion 1:226). The Testament of Job follows the story of Abraham; particularly enlightening is the conversation between Satan and the wife of Job, wherein he explains to her that “you can have anything in this world for money!”

<sup>19</sup>John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1950), p. 70.

all the earth in glorious bloom, affords the Saints a holy home,” and the situation is explained with perfect clarity in the 49th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, where we are told (1) that “the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which cometh of the earth, is ordained for the use of man for food and raiment, and that he might have abundance.” We may take what we need, but (2) “wo be unto the man that sheddeth blood or that wasteth flesh and hath no need.” We may not take more than we need. (3) Above all, we may not use this substance to exercise control and dominion over each other. “But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin.” (D&C 49:19-21.) The sweeping indictment against the whole world gets down to fundamentals: Before the “blighting influence” of “inordinate appetite and love of this world . . . the strength, power, beauty, and glory that once adorned the form and constitution of many vanished away.” (12:118:67.) Zion has ever been supplanted by Babylon, which is ever bent on converting the treasures of God’s world into “the substance of an idol, which waxeth old, and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall” (D&C 1:16); while with Zion the earth is to be “renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.”

The issue between the old and the new was drawn when Joseph Smith changed the up-and-coming name of Commerce, Illinois, to Nauvoo, “the Beautiful,” and at Far West rebuked the speculators who would retain the techniques of Babylon in building Zion: “Brethren, we are gathered to this beautiful land to build up Zion. . . . But since I have been here I have perceived the spirit of selfishness. Covetousness exists in the hearts of the Saints. . . . Here are those beginning to spread out, buying up all the land they are able to, to the exclusion of the poorer ones who are not so much blessed with the world’s goods, thinking to lay foundations for themselves, only looking to their individual families and those who are to follow them.” Most Americans call this “vision,” but

the Prophet Joseph had another word for it: "Now I want to tell you that Zion cannot be built up in any such way. I see signs put out, beer signs, speculative schemes are being introduced. This is the way of the world, *Babylon* indeed, and I tell you in the name of the God of Israel, if there is not repentance . . . and a turning from such ungodliness, covetousness, and self-will you will be broken and scattered from this choice land to the four winds of heaven."<sup>20</sup> Within a short time this prophecy was fulfilled to the letter, and only the faithful remnant of the Church went West.

What happened there? A generation later Brigham Young addressed the conference of the Saints: "Have we separated ourselves from the nations? Yes. And what else have we done? Ask ourselves the question. Have we not brought Babylon with us? Are we not promoting Babylon in our midst? Are we not fostering the spirit of Babylon that is now abroad on the face of the whole earth? I ask myself this question, and I answer, Yes, yes . . . we have too much of Babylon in our midst." (17:38:74.) "One man has his eye on a gold mine . . . another for selling his cattle . . . another to get a farm, or building here and there, and trading and trafficking with each other just like Babylon. . . . Babylon is here, and we are following in the footsteps of the inhabitants of the earth, who are in a perfect sea of confusion. Do you know this? You ought to, for there are none of you but what see it daily." (Ibid., p. 41.)

And what has this to do with the environment? That whole economy was based on seizing and selling the treasures of the earth beyond one's own personal needs—the land itself, the minerals, water, soil, forests, grass—all are converted into means of making or purchasing the long list of unnecessary wares that John the Revelator sets forth as the quintessence of Babylon, whose "merchants are the great men of the earth." (Revelation 18.) In the process their

<sup>20</sup>Edward Stevenson, *Autobiography* (Microfilm in Church Historian's Office), pp. 40-41, quoted by J. Grant Stevenson in *The Life of Edward Stevenson* (master's thesis, BYU, 1955), p. 43.

beauty and value are destroyed, the short-lived finished product soon joining the earlier industrial wastes to cumber the earth with refuse. Why are we so foolish? For the same reason the Nephites were, because "Satan had great power . . . tempting them to seek for power, and authority, and riches, and the vain things of the world." (3 Ne. 6:15.) The "love of this world" is not an appreciation of the wonderful things that are in it, but the desire to possess it here and now, before we have shown that we can deal lovingly and wisely. The voice of Brother Brigham still pleads: "Do not obey the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the groveling grasping after property." (8:125:60.)

The history of America during the first hundred years of Mormonism was largely the history of the frontier, and most Americans still like to imagine themselves living in a land of inexhaustible resources in which everything is "up for grabs." Brigham Young exposed and denounced that myth from the beginning, though he recognized its powerful appeal: "We want to go where we can . . . mount our horses, and ride over the prairies, and say, I am Lord of all I survey . . . that we can get the whole world in a string after us, and have it all in our own possession by and by. . . . This is the object many have. . . . Elders of Israel are greedy after the things of this world." (1:164:53.) "Some want to be separated far from their neighbors, and own all the land around them, saying, 'All is right, all is peace.'" (1:107:53.) They simply are following the example of the Adversary, who gloried in his kingdom and his greatness where none dared molest or make afraid. But that illusion is not for the Saints: "Let us learn that the earth is not ours." (8:342:61.)

"Satan never owned the earth; he never made a particle of it; his labor is not to create, but to destroy." (10:320:64.) Yet it is he who puts it all up for sale and thereby achieves his work of confusion and destruction: "The riches of the world are natural, and common to the human family, but who governs and controls them?" (1:268:53.) "The earth is

here, and the fullness thereof is here. It was made for man; and one man was not made to trample his fellowman under his feet" through the possession of it. (19:46:77.) "Light, intelligence, good, that which is of God creates, fashions, forms, builds, brings into existence, beautifies, makes excellent, glorifies, extends, and increases." But that is not the easy road to power; it is easier to doubt than to believe, to tear down a pioneer monument than to restore it, to set a fire than to put one out, so that "that which is not of God burns, destroys, cuts down, ruins. Light and intelligence lead people to the fountain of truth; while the opposite principle says, 'Don't believe a word, don't do a thing; burn up and destroy.'" (13:241:70.) It is a fundamental maxim of the Jews that wherever Satan as Mastemah rules on earth "he induces men to sin against the birds, and beasts, and reptiles, and fish, and to devour one another's flesh."<sup>21</sup> And that when Israel and mankind sin, nature itself is thrown into confusion, so that the violent destructions that overtake the wicked are of their own making. (Moses 7:13.) Brigham illustrated this principle from his own experience, describing how those parts of the land from which the Saints had been driven have since become poor and unproductive, "desolate, forlorn, and forsaken." (MS 38:344:76.) In the end, as the wise rabbis saw, it is pollution that makes the earth uninhabitable: "When you completely defile the land," Israel is told, "then I will no longer dwell in it; and then before long *you* can no longer dwell in it!"<sup>22</sup> For Babylon is the city dump, "a hold of every foul spirit, a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." (Revelation 18:2.) And so the warning goes out, "Not many years hence they shall not be left to pollute mine heritage." (D&C 105:15.) "A scourge and judgment will be poured out upon the children of Zion; for shall the children of the kingdom pollute my holy land?" (D&C 84:58f.) The process goes on while Satan operates with "wealth . . . used out of its legiti-

<sup>21</sup>II Enoch 7:5-6; Book of Jubilees 7:24; 8.  
<sup>22</sup>Sabbath, Fol. 33a:12-14.

mate channel" to "subvert every wholesome law of God and man." (10:3:62.)

But all is not lost.

The Spirit of the Lord and the keys of the priesthood hold power over all animated beings. When Father Adam transgressed the law he did not fall at once from the presence of the Lord. . . . Men continued to sin and degenerate from generation to generation . . . during this time the earth and all creation groaned in sin, and enmity increased, and the lives of man and beast decreased. . . . In this dispensation the keys . . . will be restored, and we are to return to the favor of the Lord . . . cease hostility with the serpents and lay aside all enmity and treat all animals kindly. (*Brigham Young History*, Apr. 26, 1846.)

It is not too late to heed this wisest of counselors: "Let me love the world as He loves it, to make it beautiful, and glorify the name of my Father in heaven. It does not matter whether I or anybody else owns it, if we only work to beautify and make it glorious, it is all right." (2:308:55.)