

## SOME VERY VITAL STATISTICS

by Hugh Winder Nibley

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Hugh Nibley took five years to go through the Los Angeles High School, due to the willingness with which he conformed to those patterns of intellectual non-conformity which were a 'must' in the 1920s. In the spirit of the times he published poems in the *Lyric West* and various anthologies and designed and constructed astronomical instruments of Eolithic simplicity and refinement.

At 17 he went to the Swiss and German Mission, ending up his activities in Athens. This allowed him to consolidate studies in Greek and Anglo-Saxon begun at a tender age.

Mission was followed by four regrettable years at U.C.L.A., with emphasis on Medieval Studies. Graduating with High Honors in 1934, he went to Berkeley and took up Semitic studies, becoming University Fellow in History (the chairman of the fellowship committee happened to be the Prof. of Semitic Languages). One day the writer received a cylindrical object in the mail – a PhD certificate which was a polite way of telling him he was getting to be a nuisance in the stacks.

During four years of practice teaching at Claremont Colleges in California, the writer taught history and languages to students of Pomona and Scripps under the amusing title of Lecturer in History and Social Philosophy (they like to be different in Claremont – like everybody else).

In 1942 he joined the army to avoid a worse fate. Weather school at Chanute Field was followed, Army fashion, by transfer to the subterranean recesses of mysterious Camp Ritchie for 8 months of memorizing in minute detail the organization, strategy, and tactics of the German army – all of which had changed completely by the time the course was finished. Pleasant months in the leisurely confusion of Hyde Park Corners and the British War Office in London were brutally terminated by assignment to the 101 Airborne Div., where the author spent the entire year of 1944, parting company with the beloved division to live the life of Riley with C.I.C. spy-hunters (what a joke!), then with the frantic careerists of the Twelfth and the easy-going brotherhood of the Sixth Army-Groups. He ended up the war in Heidelberg, spending half a year in fairly intimate contact with the Russians. From Heidelberg to Provo was a natural transition.

### Background of the Present Series

At the Brigham Young University the writer soon discovered that everyone claimed to be an expert on the Ancient World – the Library did in fact possess one Greek book (Homer) and one Latin book (Manilius), even if nobody could read them – so he turned his attention to Church History. At first, however, the excellent Arabic collection which he had been able to build up in Europe suggested a study on Lehi in the Desert, while his recent contacts with the children of the Steppes stirred speculative thoughts on the Jaredites – series on these subjects duly appeared in

the ERA. But all the time the never-silent drone-base of the past 8 years in Provo has been the reading of the literature of the Early Church. The sabbatical year of 1953 was spent entirely at Harvard and Berkeley, filling in the gaps for the present study. At present a good and growing collection of Early Christian materials is being built at the Brigham Young University, so that it should be possible before many years to undertake serious study of some aspects of Church History without leaving Utah.

### The Present Series

The events and discoveries of the years since WWII have given rise to unprecedented amount of speculation on the real nature of the Christian Church. New finds have required the readjustment of all the long-established and prevailing ideas on the subject. Of key significance in contemporary discussion is the problem of the expectations of the Early Christian regarding their Church: was it to remain firm and steadfast on the earth, to convert Babylon and spread steadily and irresistibly to the end of time? Every indication is that the ancient Christians themselves anticipated no such future for their Church. Was Christ to come in glory in a few days? Was the final judgment expected momentarily? Scholars are beginning to declare that there is nothing in the record to justify attributing such a belief to the Primitive Christians. What, then, did they expect would be the Way of the Church? There is no shortage of documents to answer this question clearly and unequivocally, but the answer is so retrograde to the interests and established teachings of the Christian world that great skill and ingenuity have been exercised to conceal it.

The present series simply takes up the texts in chronological order and considers what each has to say about the future of the Church and the world. All the major periods into which the texts fall are today being reconsidered: the Apocryphal background of Christianity has been given new importance by the discovery of the Scrolls in Palestine; the New Testament itself read in the light of new inquiry, is leading scholars to surprising conclusions which a few years ago would have been unthinkable; the same is true of the so-called Apostolic Fathers, at present undergoing a thorough reappraisal in several quarters; new discoveries in Egypt are playing their part in a complete reevaluation of the genuine and serious elements in teaching [which] anciently went under the Christian label; throughout the centuries the later father – whose works nobody has read for generations – are found constantly to declare their belief in the temporary nature of the Church on this earth. How did they think of the Church? How could they reconcile the work of Christ with an institution which was not marked for success? In the train of those key questions a host of other questions gathers. The purpose of this series is to answer those questions in the words of the ancients themselves, so that the reader may take his own bearings in the radically shifting scene of Church history.

Edited and reformatted by  
Gary P. Gillum, 5/19/06