

The Dilemma of a Pernicious Zion

The Dilemma of a Pernicious Zion

Richard G. Ellsworth

Mormon history and letters are replete with accounts of the conversion and immigration of the faithful to Zion and of their lives of hard but repaying labor settling the desert territories under the strong yet benevolent leadership of the Prophet Brigham Young. Difficulties, though sometimes belittled, were more than compensated for by the spiritual satisfaction gained through contributing to the building of Zion in the last days. Such accounts glow with religious joy and testimony, and rightly so; for those saints who actually achieved the latter-day vision and followed it with all their hearts enjoyed a reward greater than any but themselves can know. Theirs was a great joy and belonging.

But what of those among these early immigrants to Zion who did not catch the eternal vision—or, at best, glimpsed it only darkly, losing it swiftly in the dust and death and loneliness of a barren promised land? What of those among these multitudes who were not converted but instead were carried along in the tide of more determined testimonies and others' stronger wills? Some there were who, honest but lost, came reluctantly, caught in forces they couldn't understand, pushed by circumstances beyond their control, feeling driven by an almost vindictive Fate. These were they who were not recipients of the eternal vision; these were they who achieved no great belonging. Yet, humanly, they struggled to live, hoping against hope that in the Mormon "Zion" Fate might also grant them happiness, and that all would be right, finally. And sometimes, if they "adopted" the vision, or, at worst, simply ignored it, things did, in a sense, come somewhat right; but more often they did not. More often, their experience in Zion proved pernicious. Their long, weary, unvisioned immigration and the hard life thereafter ended in hurts, criticisms, disillusionments, lost allegiances, and, almost irrevocably, in a final tearing away from once-loved ones, leaving broken marriages, orphaned children, bitterly quarreling families, and sometimes memories of physical violence. For such as these "Zion" brought not peace, but instead, the sword.

Some who suffered the sharp sword edge fought back with harsh anti-Mormon tracts and extravagant anti-Mormon stories which reeked so of personal hurt and the will to hurt that the human story they might have told is utterly obscured. Seldom is found in non-Mormon or anti-Mormon accounts any real revelation of the honest inner man, caught in this emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dilemma. Seldom is heard a voice from the

dust relating this reality, a reality which was, and which, far from destroying or disturbing modern testimony, instead strengthens it by making the whole Mormon experience more wonderfully alive and true and human than ever before.

Just such an account is the record of Nels Bourkersson,¹ non-Mormon, of Skane, Sweden, who, just one month short of his thirty-ninth birthday, with his Mormon convert wife and their three children, reluctantly trudged those final emigrant steps across the crowded Malmo docks and up the waiting gangplank, bound for Denmark, Germany, England, and America. His was the emigration forced by Fate, uninspired by vision. And for him, almost vindictively, there resulted no joy, no great belonging and becoming, but only swift destruction of all of his pressured hopes—the loss of all his means and all his property, his own near death and rumored death, the wanton murder by Indians of his only son, the gradual disaffection of his wife and final dissolution of his marriage, and the agonized loss to him of his two remaining daughters in willed rejection by the older child and forced separation from the younger. In just three short years Nils Bourkersson would return again across the docks at Malmo, beaten, alone, dismayed, unconfident, and confused. He would have cause enough, surely, to be bitter. For him the promised Zion proved bafflingly pernicious; it yielded only intellectual frustration and emotional turmoil and horror.

Nels Bourkersson's situation was not exceptional. He traveled back from Salt Lake City to Omaha with a wagon train of over fifteen hundred disillusioned "saints," all sad, all lost, lacking husbands and wives and children. Was this perhaps the price exacted for the lack of the vision?

But where indeed was vision—where was truth? Nels Bourkersson himself is not sure. Perplexedly, he concludes that it has to be with the Swedish Lutheran Church religiously, but that it isn't morally, and perhaps not sociologically. He points out that the Mormon way of life is not completely deception and evil as some would say; much in Mormonism is honorable and good. Yet, for him the Mormon Zion, in spite of what the missionaries preach, certainly is no kingdom of God on earth. How could it be, when the religious doctrine is impossible the law of tithing, "celestial" marriage, polygamy, absolute obedience to ecclesiastical authority, inspired "calls" to settle new areas, interminable church services and tedious sermons, long family prayers, repetitive blessings on the food, secret temple "endowments," oracular "patriarchal" blessings, and so on. Yet, even so, he notes that the Mormon way of life most often creates morality and, usually, personal goodness. He states that Mormons exert little pressure upon non-Mormons to conform to their Mormon way of life. None was exerted on him during all the time he lived in Utah. He was never asked to pay any tithing, nor to attend any meetings, nor to be anything other than moral,

upright, and honest. He feels that Mormon missionaries, however, in their zeal to gain new converts, exaggerate the good in Zion, and ignore the bad. Zion, actually, he says, is a barren desert. Death by starvation or Indians lurks behind every cliff and sandhill. Realistically, one could not even hope to succeed. Yet, he notes that many Mormons do succeed, and seem happy. And honestly so. His experience has taught him, he says, that Mormons are honest to a fault, at least the laity. He feels that the trouble lies with the Mormon leaders, and with the people's foolishness. For Bourkersson, the most terrible temptation in Zion is to be a Mormon leader, for the Mormon priesthood has too much power. Mormons believe anything their leaders tell them. He points out that his own wife had wanted all the blessings the priesthood promised—and he, as a nonbeliever, couldn't get them for her. He didn't believe this Mormon foolishness about "celestial" marriage. Wasn't his own Swedish Lutheran marriage valid? Not according to Mormons. Not according to his Mormon wife. "I don't even belong to you!" she'd snapped at Wyoming City. And his children—weren't they his? Better had his wife died, or had they all died. Better had they all never left Sweden.

So goes Nels Bourkersson's dilemma, the almost vindictive dilemma of the forgotten man in the Mormon migration, the honest non-Mormon, caught in a web he can't understand, and needing, because of the fate which overtakes him, to make explanation for the sake of his soul. The picture Nels Bourkersson paints shows the progress of the personal dilemma: the gradual emergence of feelings of separateness, irritation, personal defensiveness, criticism, ridicule, opposed by honest recognition of social values and attainments—and all of this resulting in intellectual indecision, emotional frustration, and a final giving up and retreat with loss to the old, safe ways of life. It is a picture worth noting.

I am thankful to God that I have returned with my life and my health to my fatherland; and thankful to all the good people who have been kind to me. . . . I hurry now to assemble the records I made during the three years I spent among the Mormons in the hope that my story may be useful to some of my countrymen. This is all the reward I desire. . . . (p. 1)

There was little other reward, for he was soon forgotten. Yet one wonders how such a person came to be among the Mormons, trudging that long journey without the vision and the hope? What was the pattern to the dilemma and the course of disintegration? Why did they feel "fated," or, as Nels Bourkersson put it, "driven," to that "strange corner of the world"?

Nels Bourkersson was born May 13, 1825, in Marsvinsholm, Skane, Sweden, and was baptized, taught, and confirmed in his country's state church (in his case, the Swedish Lutheran Church), as were most citizens of European countries throughout the Nineteenth Century. Like most young men coming of age in that century, he was taught his father's trades—

farming and dairying—as a matter of course; later, in the hope of improving future fortunes, he was apprenticed to learn a more skilled trade, more economically remunerative and more socially approved. But again, as with most young people in all times, young Nels was dissatisfied with this management of his life. “I endured it only so long as I was forced to, that is, the length of the apprenticeship, and then, as soon as I was free, lay the whole profession aside.” (p. 6) Free at last from adult pressure, Nels Bourkersson knocked about a bit, doing “a little of everything,” as he says, until finally,

In the middle of my 24th year, I decided it was time for me to take my part in the world. I purchased from my father a piece of property, and, about the same time, became acquainted with a young spirited girl, about eighteen years of age, who was good looking and had a little inheritance. Our feelings being mutual, and her parents approving, we were married. . . . (pp. 6–7)

The fifteen years that followed were spent in the normal pursuit of raising and supporting a growing family—farming, running a bakery business, dairying, and after 1853 or so, listening to the Mormon missionaries’ vibrant appeals to “come out of Babylon” and “flee to Zion.” During these years, two of Bourkersson’s sisters accepted the missionaries’ message and joined the Mormon faith, immigrating to Utah. Twice during these years, economic circumstances in Sweden caused business failures for many farmers and small business men, and as the year 1864 dawned, it brought with it the second business disaster for Nels Bourkersson; emigration to “the Mormon Eldorado” began to be something to think about. That spring his dairy business completely failed—and other things, too, were particularly bad. “We were without house, and without occupation, for I had sold that house which I had before owned in the little church village. . . . It seemed now that wherever I sought for a new position I had consistent bad luck.” (p. 8) He felt “fated” to failure. The pressures at home were mounting. His “spirited” wife was not happy. “She was not the kind anyway to be what one might call ‘a comforter in times of need’; in fact, I must admit that a good deal of the time, she proved quite contrary.” (p. 8) Yet, in the midst of all this darkness gleamed the proffered promise of the Mormon Zion, the new land of new hope.

During the last few years, my wife had let me know, time after time, that the Mormons were generally right in their religious views. Add to this situation the further fact that every year for the last ten years I had received glowing letters from my two sisters, who had themselves during that time settled among the Mormons, describing all the advantages and none of the hardships of their life, always going on to say that I should be most welcome to live in their “paradise” even without my becoming a Mormon—And so it was that my sisters’ flowery portrayals of their Mormon “paradise,” my own wife’s ever increasing interest in “the Saints” and their principles, plus all the aforementioned economic misfortunes became the reasons for our emigration. (p. 9)

Thus, “fate” drove Nels Bourkersson to the final decision. On April 10, 1864, he and his wife, and their three children (ranging in ages from eight to fourteen) stepped aboard the steamer *L. T. Bager* at Malm” and became a part of a large group of emigrating Latter-day Saints. But already he was beginning to feel the dilemma of his differentness. “My wife was already a Mormon and was thus a ‘Saint.’ I was the only ‘gentile’ among them all” (p. 9).

His growing feelings of differentness are typical; they loom larger as the journey continues. The Mormons seem glad to be leaving their homeland. He is sad. While the Mormons sing their joy, he goes below decks with two passengers who are not Mormons and drinks away his sorrow. Later, the saints’ singing about “coming out of Babylon” embarrasses him. Nor can he comfortably join in the saints’ prayers; he doesn’t feel the Mormon unity of purpose. When groups of saints from Denmark, England, and Ireland join their group, he can’t overcome his national antagonisms. Amalgamation seems unnatural. He doesn’t like foreigners. Of the Irish saints he says, “After my judgment they should have been called *beggars*, to avoid saying anything worse.”

But the Mormons apparently are satisfied. They sing of their Zion and they pray, and they endure. He can’t comprehend their patience, but he himself admires it. Crowded, uncomfortable, taken advantage of by cheating shipping companies, mocked and ridiculed by jeering crowds at Malmo, Lubeck, and Liverpool, these Mormons suffer it all in silence. He is amazed, but somehow resentful. How can this be? At last he concludes that Mormonism takes most of its converts “from the lower classes” and therefore Mormons don’t feel the imposition of their situation. On the ship from Hamburg, Germany, to Grimsby, England, his irritation and disdain mount until he angrily scales the high wooden wall erected across the deck to separate the Mormons from the “other passengers.” He finds to his chagrin that the forward deck is filled with sheep!

I sat there a moment—and puzzled over it; now, thought I, now am I certainly among the saints, indeed. Surely the familiar Bible saying applies here—for lo, I see that the sheep *are* verily separated from—us. Unavoidably, I perceived to which group I actually belonged! (p. 13)

But he concludes before the journey is over that Mormons are more like sheep than like goats. They’re foolish, gullible, easily led. Their immigration to Utah is prime evidence, and their conversion to Mormonism even more prime. The long dusty trail to Utah is no road to celestial glory to him, but actually one long “graveyard” filled, paradoxically, with the bodies of the “simple, innocent Latter-day Saints, giving their lives to establish a thousand year kingdom on earth, and this in order that *they* might see the coming of Christ!” (p. 38)

According to pattern, self-defense and irritation move toward criticism and ridicule. He begins to take personal offense from the things that happen during the long journey. In the wagon in which he and his family cross the plains, a young mother of three children sickens and dies. The wagon stops but a few moments while the men bury her near a telegraph pole. Her children are so little “that even the oldest doesn’t know enough to cry.” The Mormons hardly seem to respect the dead enough to carve the woman’s name on a board marker for the grave. Bourkersson misses his lunch to do this and is personally offended thereby. He decides that immigrants’ lives are cheap, even in the eyes of the Mormons. Is it possible then that he is being taken advantage of? He wonders about the stories he has heard of Mormons whom some say have become rich by taking advantage of immigrants. Food and lodging on the journey have been poor, and transportation extremely uncomfortable—yet, he hastens to admit in all honesty that *he* has never seen real proof of anyone’s being taken advantage of, nor has he ever met any such “rich” Mormons.

But the possibility of it still nags at him. Soon he begins to sense other offenses, and he takes them personally. He feels that the immigrants are not provided with enough food by the Church agents for the eight-day train journey from New York to St. Joseph, Missouri. And after they reach St. Joseph, he is offended that they must camp six weeks at Wyoming City south of the Platte River to await the Mormon wagons which are coming from Utah to carry them to Zion. Many immigrants sicken and die during the wait. He is further offended at this, wondering if the plan might be to have less people to carry thereby. When the wagons do finally come, there is a charge which he had not figured on—fifty dollars for each adult and twenty-five dollars for each child, plus ten dollars each for provisions, plus a ten-percent interest on the now-necessary loan. He feels deceived:

This was something altogether unexpected. Everyone had trusted in what they’d been told: “The Saints will be met at the Missouri River and transported from there in wagons belonging to the Church.” No one had “remembered” to mention to me that there would be a charge. . . . (p. 53)

Besides this, he is told that each immigrant family would be allowed only so much baggage: the great wagons could carry no more. Resentfully, he notes that most of the wagons also carry merchandise labeled “Church Goods,” for which he surmises his baggage must be restricted. He feels personally imposed upon. It is not his “Church.” Why should he pay to carry its merchandise?

Yet, even so, in the midst of all this impatience and personal imposition, he notes that there are advantages to his being among the Mormons crossing the great American plains. In the great swell of the rolling country

beyond Wyoming City, the growing danger of Indian attack makes him grateful for the leaders of the wagon train, the rough Mormon plainsmen for whom at first he had had only disdain and ridicule. The wagons pass a settler's house, still aflame from Indian raid—the settler's wife and children have vanished, but the man himself lies there, dead, his bloody head smashed in. The wagons pass a long commercial wagon train wildly afire, piling great billows of black smoke high in the hot air. Men lie butchered about the burning wagons. Practicality thus overcomes emotional impatience, and Nels Bourkersson is thankful for experienced leaders. The big Mormon plainsmen know what they are doing. They are a wild and hard-looking lot, sun-tanned, longhaired, rough, seemingly uncouth. Some are Scandinavians now much Americanized, speaking better English than they do their mother tongues. Nels Bourkersson admits his respect and awe at the swift, competent way they work together, bringing the great wagon train safely through the Indian danger. As the long journey continues, the dichotomy of impatience and respect sharpens. Misconceptions result. Major premises of disrespect and respect, though founded in his own observations, are most often conceived in rather trivial incidents which more specifically involve him and his personal patterns of reaction than any large social norms. For instance, he concludes that in spite of his admitted admiration for the Mormon plainsmen, the majority of the Mormons are ridiculously impractical. They have misplaced practicalities. If Mormonism be true, if it is indeed the "original" gospel restored at last with power, why should its adherents have to wade the swollen South Platte River simply because the weary oxen can pull only the baggage and food and supplies through the mud and the current? It seems strangely impractical to him that the Mormon Prophet doesn't use his "restored" priesthood powers to divide this "Red Sea" for his children's convenience! If Moses could do it, why can't Brigham Young? As for himself, even though he has no priesthood, Bourkersson, with practical good sense, arranges with one of the drivers of the commercial wagons to carry him and his family across. While they wait on the east shore for the wagon to come up for them, he ridicules the "silly" Mormon women who mill about on the shore chirping to each other like so many chickens, trying to get up enough courage to wade into the water. He laughs at their impracticality, for when they finally do wade in, most of them are too embarrassed to lift up their skirts and petticoats and hold them high above the water, instead choosing to struggle for "their modesty's sake" against the heavy wet weight of their clothing and the swift pull of the water's current. Some, he says, are nearly "shipwrecked." He finds it an enjoyable show. But when a few hours later thirty pairs of yoked oxen stampede wildly across the trail, wrecking wagons and scattering people and baggage, he becomes violently angry at the same kind

of “foolish” Mormon-female reaction. He comes upon a woman weeping over a broken coffee cup, and he vents his anger upon her in violent, impatient language, calling her “a dumb ass, and much more—In fact,” he says, “I would have emptied the whole cup of my wrath out upon her. . .” (p. 41) but one of the Mormon plainmen hears him and tells him to stop. He obeys, respecting the Mormon leader, but he resents the situation. He feels justified in his anger and his language. Some things, he feels, in practicality, are worth swearing over, yet never so it seems for the Mormons. “There are fewer sweaters among the Mormons than any people on earth,” he says, and in his resentment he wonders if this is not misplaced humility on their part. He finally decides that only God can be the judge of that.

Misconceptions are increased by lack of the vision. The Mormon “Law of Tithing,” for instance, is incomprehensible to him, or at least Mormon obedience to it is. Mormons, he says, will pay tithing when they and their families are starving. They will labor “for the Lord” when their own fields need their labor much more. “I have seen my close friends carrying on in such foolishness so many times that I have wondered if every tithe-payer were not ripe for the insane asylum.” (p. 81) And all of this in the face of what seems to him to be obvious fact—that tithing goods and services are being used by the Mormon leaders for their own personal benefit. But he puzzles, even if these tithes *are* used as Mormons say they are, that is, to benefit all, why then are not all those benefited logically taxed? In Sweden everyone pays the Lutheran assessments; yet, here in Utah, non-Mormons are not required to pay at all. It seems utterly impractical and foolish to him that as soon as a man “accepts the gospel” he automatically becomes liable to such high taxes, taxes which he could avoid quite easily by simply remaining unbaptized. Obviously, he concludes, it’s more sensible in Utah to be a non-Mormon than a Mormon.

It is in such major conflicts as these, that the intellectual dilemma of the honest non-Mormon shows up the strongest. Bourkersson exemplifies this. He broods over his own questions: if tithing be cheat and imposition, why then do his good, respected friends continue to pay it? If the Mormon “call” system—wherein Church members are delegated by the Mormon priesthood to leave their homes and farms and personal accomplishments and migrate to new, desolate, unsettled areas to make new settlements—is merely a social means for maintaining local power by bishops and their counselors, why then do not more Mormons refuse to obey the “calls”? If Mormonism is based on lies and deception, why then are the Mormons so honest in their social dealings? He bears positive witness that Mormons *are* honest, that Mormon postmasters, for instance, contrary to rumors in Scandinavia, do *not* open the mails; that even money is safe in the Mormon mail. He states that he has seen that property in Zion is very seldom bought

or sold by contract. It is transferred instead simply “upon a man’s word, with a simple handshake,” and it makes no difference whether there be witnesses to the transaction or not—there are few disputes. Yet, even so, Bourkersson is sure that Mormonism breeds deceit, lust, and the hunger for power into its leaders—but why then, he puzzles, why the competence and service of some of them, such as the roughhewn plainsmen, and why the sincere religious attitudes of many of the Mormons he has known, and why is Brigham Young so respected “even by his bitterest enemies”? President Brigham Young is “in all his dealings, in all respects, so honest, so well-bred and refined, that he exemplifies a gentleman of the first rank.” (p. 185) But, if all of this be so, how then can polygamy be what it seems obviously to Bourkersson to be—a means to fulfill Mormon leaders’ lustful natures, a means to increase their power by increasing the number of their adherents? But further, if taking another wife be a light thing, as it often appears to him to be, why then all the business about a “recommend from the bishop” (especially as “this may be difficult to obtain should the bishop be angry with you”)? And why, he questions, does only Brigham Young himself grant approval for polygamous marriages? And if polygamy be wrong, as he concludes it most certainly must be, why is the moral standard so high among the Mormons? Why could he not find evidences of illegitimacy or prostitution in “Zion”? In all the three years he was in Utah, Nils Bourkersson unequivocally states, he saw no “fallen women,” nor any women “plying the prostitute’s trade.” He heard of no young girls “ruined—as in Sweden.” Nor any youths “brought forcibly to law for the support of unclaimed offspring.” (p. 108) He found instead that children from Mormon polygamous unions were equal with each other. Each child enjoyed his father’s “good” name. Each had an equal right of inheritance. And, in spite of many stories he has heard to the contrary, he observed that there *was* peace in most polygamous homes. He states that he has visited many polygamous families—he has many friends who live in polygamy—and never has he seen any physical strife between wives, nor among children.

“Zion” thus, for the honest non-Mormon presents an impossible picture. Laws which seem to him to be unfair and wrong nevertheless yield worthwhile results. A gospel which to him appears to be lies produces high moral character. People who seem foolish and impractical and deceived grow exemplary in patience, peace, and diligence. It is dilemma. And unlivable. Nels Bourkersson’s personal family situation at last convinces him of this and pushes him finally to his unwilling antagonism and bitterness.

Within a year and a half of his coming among the Mormons, two important personal aspects of the dilemma emerge cold and clear: first, that he cannot, under any circumstances, honestly accept Mormonism; and second, that his wife, who has accepted Mormonism, is determined to have

the promised “blessings” of “celestial marriage,” so determined, in fact, that she is willing to divorce him to get them. That his readers may understand, Nels Bourkersson explains the Mormon doctrine of “celestial marriage,” that celestial marriage is not necessarily polygamous marriage, but simply marriage sealed by the Mormon priesthood according to the “celestial” Mormon ritual. This requires among other things that both participants be baptized believers in the Mormon gospel. Mormons believe that to reach the highest heaven they must be “sealed” in this kind of marriage which lasts into the next life; otherwise, they cannot hope to enjoy the highest proffered blessings of God. His own particular situation thus becomes obvious: “Because I was a ‘gentile’; and my wife was a ‘saint,’ so was it impossible for her to be ‘sealed’ to me for the next life and so she must give me up and seek to join herself to a man who was ‘worthy’ . . .” (p. 29)

So comes the final tearing away, the loss and the bitterness, the sharp edge of the sword. He tries with both argument and tears to convince his wife to stay with him though it be only “for the sake of the children,” but she is unwilling. Again, the dilemma—for even though intellectually he understands her position, emotionally, he cannot comprehend it, nor accept. It is intolerable, unbelievable. He is actually being separated, forced out, driven from his own wife and his own children. He feels that because he is not a Mormon, the people in the community are turning against him. He feels trapped. He begins to fear for his life. At last, frustrated, thwarted, “fated,” pushed by circumstances beyond sense to him, he agrees to a divorce.

Now follows the inevitable wrenching of children’s allegiances and the final loss of all the old emotional stabilities. His oldest daughter sides with her mother against him. “She was so indoctrinated that it was impossible to convince her of anything.” The other two children are “deliberately” sent out of town to Moroni (where their mother intended to reside), the ten-year-old daughter on “a planned visit with friends,” and the sixteen-year-old son to work for one of the counselors to the bishop there—“otherwise they never would have been able to wrench these two children away from me.” (p. 162)

The horror settles down around him; the inevitable fate is aided, he feels, by the Mormon society to which he had joined himself. It is a destruction from which there seems no escape.

The 24th of March had been chosen, unbeknownst to me, as the fatal day when my household should be plundered and my family taken away. The village was still as the grave, and even though we dwelt at the crossroads, there was not a living soul to be seen. That afternoon, the man Forsgren (of whom I have spoken before²) made his appearance with his wagon. You may judge what my feelings were when I realized what his errand was. I resolved to remain impassive, but I overestimated my ability to control myself, and finally I threw myself down on the sofa in tears. I stayed there throughout

the whole plundering, while my misled wife and that wife-robber conducted themselves exactly as they pleased. . . . Then came my wife to say her last farewell. I remember that even her eyes filled with tears when I reached for her hand and pressed it to my breaking heart. (p. 163)

A few days after this divorce is granted, and Nels Bourkersson, now alone, moves in with his sisters and their families. But the agony is not over. About Christmas time, his youngest daughter, Mari, runs away from her mother and comes to him. “. . . she hung on my neck and begged me with tears to let her stay with me. Of course she didn’t have to ask for that twice. I took her to my sister where she was taken in as one of their own children.” But in the spring, Mari is “kidnapped on the streets” and taken back to her mother. Nels Bourkersson is bitter.

I have not seen the girl since, and God knows whether I will ever see her again in this life. . . . Had she been a boy, the whole thing probably never would have happened, but women must be obtained at any price as additions for Mormon harems, and the means by which this is accomplished mattereth not. (p. 167)

His son, Anders, however, at last, does come to him:

My son had been working during the last year for a Danish farmer in Moroni. This farmer had a high position to fill, for he was “counselor to his Holiness the bishop.” When the boy made it clear that he could not in any way acknowledge as right the way his mother had acted toward me, and that the principles upon which she had acted were absolutely wrong and unrighteous, and that he wanted to be with his father—yea, even to follow his father to “the damned states,” he was fired without warning and paid absolutely nothing for his ten months of labor. And so, at last, I had my son with me, but he was the only one, and the last one, of my family. (p. 167)

Nels Bourkersson, now thoroughly disillusioned, “escapes” Zion with his son in May of 1867, feeling his every move is being watched. He can hardly wait to get beyond Fort Laramie.

Yet, the horror still is not done. “Fate had yet one other bitter cup to offer me—I was forced to drain it empty also.” (p. 173) On the 10th of July, at Crow Creek, just beyond Fort Laramie, the tragedy is completed. Bourkersson’s son, Anders, had as usual fixed dinner for himself and his father, and they had eaten it together. Nels Bourkersson had afterward enjoyed a quiet smoke on his pipe, and had lain down under the wagon on a buffalo hide to take a nap: He is abruptly awakened by the cry, “Your son has been shot by Indians!”

The boy is conscious, but in severe pain. They carry him into a tent and lay him on a cot. The ball has entered his back, passed by his heart, and out his breast. There is no doctor and little can be done. “He lay there in his blood, gazing up at me with such a look in his handsome blue eyes as I shall

never forget." All night long, Nels Bourkersson sits by his son's bedside—he talks to the boy some, but there is little to say. Around five o'clock in the morning, the boy pulls himself up out of bed, saying that he means to go and fix coffee for his father. Nels Bourkersson replies that he has already had coffee. "Wherewith Anders seemed satisfied, lay his head back upon my knee, and slept—slept deep—and never more awakened. This was my only son, my only support, my last hope. . . ." (pp. 173–4)

And so the end is come. Nels Bourkersson had been to the Mormon Zion. He had gone reluctantly, with a kind of hope in hope, but without the vision. And he had reaped the whirlwind.

My wife and my daughters were in a captivity from which I had not the slightest hope to save them. My own daughters were in the power of a man whose wicked hypocrisies had destroyed their mother—and their unhappy fate would be like that of so many others. . . and my only son, who was my last support, and my hope, was lost. . . . (p. 179)

The picture portrayed by Nels Bourkersson is worth noting. Its disillusionments, its confusions and conflicts, its puzzling dichotomies between intellectual assessment and emotional reaction are representative of the honest non-Mormon who "against hope believed in hope,"³ and though lacking the vision, nevertheless left his native land to claim the proffered happiness of Zion, but who, unlike Abraham, was rewarded by losing everything thereby. "Zion," in ancient days according to Mormon scripture, was a place where all were "of one heart and one mind."⁴ Could it be that achieving happiness in the Mormon Zion required also achieving the Mormon vision? Could it be that any attempt to claim happiness there without achieving that vision brought, almost vindictively, or so it seemed, the pernicious destruction of the ill-fated illusion? Of course, none can say. And of those who lived through this dilemma, very few were percipient enough, or articulate enough, to attempt any such conclusions. Nels Bourkersson perhaps best states the most that can be said:

I have now, to the best of my ability, described that mystifying place and people. . . . I've done this according to my experience, and though this has cost me my wealth and my family, yet God knows that I haven't said one word in anger. . . . I've recounted situations only as they are. Every reader is free to judge these things according to his own way of seeing them. (p. 196)

Dr. Ellsworth is associate professor of English at Brigham Young University, specializing in mid-Nineteenth-Century American life and letters.

1. Nels Bourkersson, *Tre Ar i Mormonlandet. Berattelser efter Egna Iakttagelser* (Malmo, Sweden, 1867). All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from Bourkersson. Translation is mine.

2. Bourkersson blamed Forsgren's wives for teaching his wife, Anna Bourkersson, the doctrines of celestial marriage. Forsgren, Bourkersson said, allowed this and even encouraged it hoping later to marry Anna himself.

Bourkersson's feelings are further evidence of the dilemma and his own extreme emotional situation. In spite of what he knows of Mormon morality, he seems to want to believe the worst. He states that he has heard, and believes, that his wife Anna was sealed to Forsgren immediately after her divorce, even before he (Bourkersson) left Utah in the spring of 1867. Actually, what he chose to believe was not so. Anna Holm Bourkersson did not remarry until a year or more after Nels, to her best knowledge, had died, and even then she was not sealed to Forsgren but to Nels Jacobson, December 1, 1868. [Information obtained from family records in the possession of E. Dixon Larson, Orem, Utah, great-grandson of Nels and Anna Bourkersson.]

3. Spoken of Abraham, who believed the divine promise and was rewarded thereby. Romans 4:18.

4. Pearl of Great Price, Moses 7:18.