

**A VISIT TO NAUVOO**  
**BY SAMUEL A. PRIOR, METHODIST MINISTER**  
*from the Times and Seasons*

I feel somewhat unwilling to go from this city until I have returned my sincere thanks for the kind treatment I have received from all with whom I have had any intercourse since I first came into this place. I must confess that I left home with no very favourable opinions of the Latter-day Saints.--I have had the misfortune to live always among that class of people who look upon a *Mormon* as a being of quite another race from the rest of mankind, and holding no affinity to the human family. My ears had been so often assailed by the tales of their vice and immorality, that I could not but reflect, in spite of my determination to remain unprejudiced, that I should witness many scenes detrimental to the christian character, if not offensive to society.

My friends crowded around me, giving me many cautions against the art and duplicity of that deluded sect, as they called them, and entreated me to observe them closely and learn the true state of their community. I set out on foot, making my arrangements to continue there until I was satisfied what kind of beings the *Mormons* were. It was something over sixty miles, and on the road I often had time to reflect upon the errand of my journey, and fancy to myself the condition in which I expected to find them.

On my arriving at Carthage, I accidentally met an old and much-beloved friend, who was himself a member of the church. Having been apprised of my design in visiting the church of Latter-day Saints, he very kindly offered to accompany me to Nauvoo, the city of the prophet, but stated that he would be compelled to visit a little town called Macedonia, before he could go up, and wanted me to go with him as it was only eight miles distant. I kept up a lively discourse upon the subject of *Mormonism*, and the ready and appropriate answers he gave to the numerous questions I put to him, convinced me that their doctrine was not as bad as I had anticipated.

At Macedonia I was kindly received by Mr. Andrews, who, being informed by my friend, who and

what I was, cordially received me, bidding me welcome to his humble abode with all the feelings of a long absent though respected brother. This reception, so vastly different from what I had expected, totally enamoured me, and put to blush all my former anticipations of cold, harsh, and morose expressions which I expected to meet from all who became acquainted with my calling and station in life. I found Mr. Andrews a man of general intelligence, of good moral notions and correct religious ideas. Although I could not agree with him in all points, yet I found him liberal and open hearted, far beyond my fondest expectations.

The next day at eleven o'clock, I had the honour for the first time in my life to hear the prophet preach, a notice of which had been circulated the evening before. I will not attempt to describe the feelings of my bosom as I took my seat in a conspicuous place in the congregation, who were waiting in breathless silence for his appearance. While he tarried, I had plenty of time to revolve in my mind the character and common report of that truly singular personage. I fancied that I should behold a countenance sad and sorrowful, yet containing the fiery marks of rage and exasperation--I supposed that I should be enabled to discover in him some of those thoughtful and reserve features, those mystic and sarcastic glances which I had fancied the ancient sages to possess. I expected to see that fearful faltering look of conscious shame, which, from what I had heard of him, he might be expected to evince.

He appeared at last--but how was I disappointed, when, instead of the heads and horns of the beast and false prophet, I beheld only the appearance of a common man, of tolerable large proportions. I was sadly disappointed, and thought that although his appearance could not be wrested to indicate anything against him, yet he would manifest all I had heard of him when he began to preach. I sat uneasy and watched him closely. He commenced preaching, not from the Book of *Mormon*, however, but from the Bible: the first chapter of the first of Peter was his text. He commenced calmly and continued

dispassionately to pursue his subject, while I sat in breathless silence, waiting to hear that foul aspersion of the other sects, that diabolical disposition of revenge, and to hear that rancorous denunciation of every individual but a Mormon.

I waited in vain--I listened with surprise--I sat uneasy in my seat, and could hardly persuade myself but that he had been apprised of my presence, and so ordered his discourse on my account that I might not be able to find fault with it; for instead of a jumbled jargon of half connected sentences, and a volley of imprecations, and diabolical and malignant denunciations heaped upon the heads of all who differed from him, and the dreadful twisting and wresting of the scriptures to suit his own peculiar views, and attempt to weave a web of dark and mystic sophistry around the gospel truths which I had anticipated, he glided along through a very interesting and elaborate discourse, with all the care and happy facility of one who was well aware of his important station, and his duty to God and man; and evidencing to me that he was well worthy to be styled "*a workman rightly dividing the word of truth, and giving without reserve, "saint and sinner his portion in due season;"*" and I was compelled to go away with a very different opinion from what I had entertained when I first took my seat to hear him preach.

In the evening I was invited to preach, and did so.--The congregation was large and respectable--they paid the utmost attention. This surprised me a little, as I did not expect to find any such thing as a religious toleration among them.--After I had closed, elder Smith, who had attended, arose and begged leave to differ from me in some few points of doctrine, and this he did mildly, politely, and affectingly; like one who was more desirous to disseminate truth and expose error, than to love the malicious triumph of debate over me. I was truly edified with his remarks, and felt less prejudice against the Mormons than ever. He invited me to call upon him, and I promised to do so. The next morning I started for Nauvoo, but my feelings were beginning strangely to alter. I found one stay after another fast giving away, and a solemn and awful reflection was awakened in my mind.

But there was one thing yet remaining. I had not yet seen Nauvoo, and so often having heard that it was the most degraded place in the world, the very sink of iniquity, and that all who lived there were liars, thieves, and villains; who were the refuse of society and the filth

of the world, that in spite of my better judgment, I expected to see some traces at least of that low prostitution which I had so often heard charged upon them.

At length the city burst upon my sight, and how sadly was I disappointed. Instead of seeing a few miserable log cabins and mud hovels which I expected to find, I was surprised to see one of the most romantic places that I had visited in the west. The buildings, though many of them were small and of wood, yet bore the marks of neatness which I have not seen equalled in this country. The far-spread plain at the bottom of the hill was dotted over with the habitations of men with such majestic profusion that I was almost willing to believe myself mistaken; and instead of being in Nauvoo of Illinois, among *Mormons*, that I was in Italy at the city of Leghorn (which the location of Nauvoo resembles very much) and among the eccentric Italians.

I gazed for some time with fond admiration upon the plain below. Here and there arose a tall majestic brick house, speaking loudly of the genius and untiring labour of the inhabitants, who have snatched the place from the clutches of obscurity, and wrested it from the bonds of disease; and in two or three short years rescued it from a dreary waste to transform it into one of the first cities in the west.

The hill upon which I stood was covered over with the dwellings of men, and amid them was seen to rise the hewn stone and already accomplished work of the temple, which is now raised fifteen or twenty feet above the level of the ground. The few trees that were permitted to stand, are now in full foliage, and are scattered with a sort of fantastic irregularity over the slope of the hill.

But there was one object which was far more noble to behold, and far more majestic than any other yet presented to my sight--and that was the wide-spread and unrivalled father of waters, the Mississippi river, whose mirror-bedded waters lay in majestic extension before the city, and in one general curve seemed to sweep gallantly by the devoted place. On the farther side was seen the dark-green woodland, bending under its deep foliage, with here and there an interstice bearing the marks of cultivation. A few houses could be seen through the trees on the other side of the river, directly opposite of which is spread a fairy isle, covered with beautiful timber. The isle and the romantic swell of the river soon brought my mind back to days of yore, and to the bright

emerald isles of the far-famed fairy land. The bold and prominent rise of the hill, fitting to the plain with an exact regularity, and the plain pushing itself into the river, forcing it to bend around its obstacle with becoming grandeur, and fondly to cling around it to add to the heightened and refined lustre to this sequestered land.

I passed on into the more active parts of the city, looking into every street and lane to observe all that was passing. I found all the people engaged in some useful and healthy employment. The place was alive with business--much more so than any place I have visited since the hard times commenced. I sought in vain for anything that bore the marks of immorality; but was both astonished and highly pleased at my ill success. I could see no loungers about the streets, nor any drunkards about the taverns. I did not meet with those distorted features of ruffians, or with the ill-bred or impudent. I heard not an oath in the place, I saw not a gloomy countenance; all were cheerful, polite, and industrious.

I conversed with many leading men--found them social and well informed, hospitable and generous. I saw nothing but order and regulation in the society. Where then, I exclaimed, is all this startling proof of the utter profligacy of Nauvoo? Where, in the name of God, is the

immorality charged upon the citizens of it; and what dreadful outbreaking crimes have given men the license to deprecate this place so much as they do? Where is the gang of marauders, horse thieves, and ruffians, the drunkards and vicious men of Nauvoo? Where are the horrid forms of human beings distorted with hellish rage and maddened ire? Where are the dark and diabolical superstitions? Where are those specimens of credulity and ignorance? Where are those damning doctrines of demons? Where, in fine, is this slough, this sink of iniquity of which I have heard so much?

Surely not in Nauvoo. They must have got the wrong place, or wilfully lied about it. I could but blush with disappointed shame for my friends who had so misinformed me, and very soon made up my mind, like the Queen of Sheba, not to believe any reports of enemies, but to always, like her, go and see for myself. Reader, go thou and do likewise; and if you have heard the place praised, go up and see, and lo and behold, you will find the half has not been told you.

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