



The Instructor
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BRIGHAM YOUNG

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CHILDREN'S FRIEND FEATURES OF INTEREST TO THE SUNDAY SCHOOLS

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*The Meaning of the Mormon Migration in American History **

ELBERT D. THOMAS

IN 1847 Utah was Mexican territory. For years the contest for the control of what is now the western part of the United States had been going on. The Spanish-Mexican control reached as far north as what is now the southern boundary of Oregon. The Russians were in Alaska and had settlements down the coast as far as the Russian River in California. French fur traders had penetrated most of the West and traders from all nations were wandering over it. The British claimed the Pacific coast as far down as northern California. The United States, thought of today as an expanding world power, seemed then to be checked as a controller of the Pacific coastline.

We of today, sensing our debt to our pioneer fathers, never cease honoring them for their courage, their faith, their zeal, and their persistence in carrying the American flag into foreign territory. Because these characteristics of courage and faith are so worthy of honor and so satisfying to us, we sometimes fail to recognize the real significance, in an international sense, of what they did.

*This statement was entered in the Congressional Record of March 19, 1947, by Senator Elbert D. Thomas, formerly a member of the Sunday School general board.

America in 1845-47, and for many years after and before, was on the alert, on the move, and restless about her boundaries. There was the Texas independence and then the Mexican War. Both were repercussions of restlessly expanding cultural and political groups with economic hopes.

Four outstanding movements, however, were movements above that of mere adventure, conquest, or pursuit of wealth. One, although connected with war and therefore a part of conquest, was the march of Kearny's army with its Mormon battalion. This march cut the Mexican controlled empire in two. When it is remembered that this battalion was recruited from Mormons already on the march Mormon incentive and influence should be credited as a contributing force. Two were wholly inspired by Mormon thought; the pioneer journey, under the leadership of Brigham Young, into the Salt Lake Valley, and the trip of Sam Brannan and his associates around the Horn to San Francisco. The fourth decisive journey was the movement of the devout settlers carrying the Bible and the plow into the Oregon Territory.

The Oregon journeys were for home-making and home-building.

The Mormon expeditions were for the same purposes, but motivated by revelation and in fulfillment of prophecy. These purposes were high, lofty, and splendid. The two Mormon inspired movements had above their vision, their purposefulness, their relying on the plow and the Bible, and their home-building culture something more significant from the standpoint of nation-building. It was their international effect. Millions have made homes in foreign lands without affecting the international politics of those lands. But the two Mormon journeys and the journey of the Oregon pioneers had meaning bigger than is generally recognized. They meant a transferring of political sovereignty, a transporting of a culture and a civilization, and making certain a land dedicated to the free. The pilgrim fathers wanted a home where they could worship God as they saw fit. They expected it under the sanction of a king whose homeland did not let persons worship as they saw fit. This settlement with others in America were settlements that made the independent land of the United States a land of liberty and a land of freedom inevitable, but it did not come for nearly two centuries.

The Mormon journeys and the journey into the Oregon Territory brought almost instantaneous success. I do not say that these journeys are the causes of the ultimate change and the overcoming of international struggle for the western part of the United States. But viewed merely as

incidents in the restlessness and national striving which was the spirit of America at that time they stand out so strongly that if they had acted entirely alone the results would have been the same. The dividing of the Spanish-Mexican Empire, the permanent settlement in San Francisco, the permanent settlement in the Salt Lake Valley, the permanent settlement in the Oregon country would have brought by themselves the same result in time, while mere adventure, mere conquest, mere seeking of wealth would not have done it. These four movements did make certain that the intermountain and Pacific coast country would be American.

The great expansion of which this was a part did not stop with the coast. Perry with his ships was in Japan by 1853. Calib Cushing had negotiated his treaty in China even before this in 1844. And a continuing movement of the Mormon part of this restlessness was reflected in the Gibson "conquest" in Hawaii in 1861. Mormon missionaries had circled the globe before the death of their Prophet-founder in 1844 and before the migration to the Rocky Mountains began.

The Mormon pioneer movement, whether viewed as a part of the spread of the white man over the globe, or whether viewed as a movement inspired by Western United States restlessness, has left its mark on its people and in the development of American culture and traditions. It is for this reason that the thought-

—more on page 346

Ipson, Margaret, "Providing Meaningful Prayer Experiences for Young Children," (October, 1947).

Aldous, Claribel W., "Planning for the Adults Who Visit the Junior Sunday School," (November, 1947).

It is our hope that these articles will serve you in promoting Sunday morning worship activities for the young children of the Church.

—*The Editors*

NOTE: Junior Sunday School officers and teachers should turn to the Superintendent's department (page 334) and read the articles listing obtainable pictures.
