

Chapter 1

A Scottish Heritage, 1810-1930

In November or early December 1931, Hugh Nibley came to Salt Lake City to visit his ailing grandfather. Charles W. Nibley, who was living in his suite on the seventh floor of the Hotel Utah, was bedfast with a severe bladder infection. Hugh's grandfather had been the Presiding Bishop of the Church, second counselor to President Grant, and a very successful businessman. Now he was eighty-two years old and only days away from death. Hugh was very close to his grandfather; and Charles, who loved Hugh dearly, had always taken a keen interest in his grandson's intellectual development.

Hugh, recalling that last conversation with his grandfather, remembered that the frail old man advised Hugh to stay out of business, then reflected with some grief on some of the actions he had felt compelled to take as a businessman. "He did what he had to do to help people out as much as he could," Hugh remembers his grandfather saying, "but sometimes he had to cut corners. . . . In his business you had secrets and you played tricks and all sorts of things." At one point in that final conversation, Charles turned his head and looked at the Angel Moroni atop the temple, then turned back to his grandson and commented, "You see that window there? If an angel were to come through the door I would jump right through that window."¹ Soon thereafter, pneumonia set in and Charles died on 11 December. But Hugh never forgot that last conversation and the ambiguous legacy of his grandfather.

Charles W. Nibley was born in Scotland where life was bleak for his parents and their neighbors. They worked in Scotland's coal mines, supporting the burgeoning Industrial Revolution. It was a grindingly cruel existence. Most of these working families lived in one-room stone huts built by the government. Typically, they were about fourteen feet long and twelve feet wide with a thatch or straw roof, stone walls,

¹Hugh Nibley, "Remarks about Charles W. Nibley on the Occasion of the Celebration of his 150th birthday, 5 February 1999," transcript, 10.