

Chapter 2

Early Life in Oregon, 1910-21

Sometime in late 1909 or early 1910, Agnes Sloan Nibley and her husband, Alexander Nibley, traveled from their home in Portland, Oregon, to visit relatives in Salt Lake City. Agnes was in the middle of a difficult pregnancy and went to an endowment session in the Salt Lake Temple to seek some spiritual peace and physical comfort.

There she met an old family friend, John R. Winder, who was then serving both as temple president and as first counselor to Church President Joseph F. Smith. The revered eighty-eight-year-old leader, venerable with glossy white hair and a flowing white beard, smiled at Sister Nibley. His eyes twinkled behind his wire spectacles. "Sister Nibley," he asked, "may I give you a blessing?" Naturally, Agnes consented. President Winder led her into an adjoining room and laid his hands on her head. As he spoke, he not only gave Sister Nibley a blessing of comfort, but also spoke prophetically about the son Sister Nibley would soon deliver, stating that he would accomplish an important work for the Church. A few months later, President Winder died in Salt Lake City on 27 March 1910. On his deathbed, he asked whether Sister Nibley had yet given birth. On that very same day, over 700 miles away in Portland, Agnes Sloan Nibley gave birth to her son. The parents named him Hugh for his maternal grandfather but in honor of President Winder also gave him the middle name of Winder: Hugh Winder Nibley.²

Hugh's father, Alexander Nibley, the second son of Charles W. Nibley, was thirty-three years old when his son was born and Agnes was twenty-four. El, as he was known to family and friends, was only one year old when his father, Charles W., left on his mission to Europe; he was three when his father returned. One year later, his father took another wife and then his time was divided between the two families. Years later when Charles Nibley took a third wife, there were three families to provide for. As the anti-polygamy crusades heated up and as his father's business interests grew, El saw less and

²Hugh Nibley, Interviewed by Boyd Petersen, 9 June 1996.