



AMONG THE MORMONS.

An Inland Sea among the Mountains of Utah Territory—The Legend of Swan Lake—Captain Codman Discovers (by Report) the Elusive Sea-Serpent—"Baptism for the Dead"—The Preparations made for the Final Salvation of Captain Codman and his Family—The Captain gives away a Number of his Eastern Acquaintances in "Celestial" Marriage to his Mormon Host—A New Theory as to the Place where the Ark was Constructed.

[Correspondence of the Evening Post.]

SWAN CREEK, Utah, September 8, 1874.

Two or three rude cabins, a sawmill and grist-mill constitute the settlement of Swan Creek, and all these are the property of our host, Mr. Clark. He could not have selected a more picturesque situation. It is marked by a rushing torrent which spouts up in an immense spring from beneath a great boulder of the mountain two miles away in the background, and then pours itself into the lake through a grove of tall cottonwood. His wheat and corn fields are on either side, and the green meadows where his cattle feed extend far and near. Ever-varying mountain shadows at sunrise and sunset spread themselves over the surface of the beautiful little inland sea, which appears like a basin held in the lap of the hills. Although twenty-five miles in length by eight in breadth, the height of its surroundings reduces it by comparison to this apparent size. In the transparency of its water it is like Lake George, and in its delicate color of blue it rivals Lake Geneva. When this part of the country becomes better known tourists will frequent it, hotels will line its banks, and steamboats will clatter over it. But now only a passing stranger visits it. Here and there may be found a little hamlet of log huts on its shores, and perhaps the only navigable craft upon it is the little skiff in which we paddled out on its deep waters and beheld the bottom, many fathoms beneath, as clearly as the blue sky over our heads. It abounds in salmon trout and fish of various other kinds, and has a romantic reputation.

No Indian was ever known to launch his canoe upon it, to bathe in it or even to fish from its banks. They believe it to be sacred to the monsters of its depths, and dare not pollute its waters or take from them a single fish put there for the food of the dreaded proprietors. The legend is that centuries ago, when the Sioux and Bannacks were at war, a chief of the former tribe became enamored of a dusky Bannack maiden. The course of true love, which never did run smooth, led them over mountains and cañons in their escape from the pursuit of the hostile tribes, whose members were for the time in league for mutual vengeance. At last, like the High-landers and the daughter of Lord Ullin, they came to the shores of the lake, their angry relatives close behind. There was no gallant old ferryman willing to risk his life for the "winsome leddy," and so they plunged into the waves to become targets for arrows and tomahawks. But, suddenly, the Great Spirit transformed them into two enormous serpents. Rearing their heads from the water, they shot from their mouths a volley of beach stones on their paralyzed foes, but few of whom escaped to hand down to succeeding generations the warning to beware of this enchanted lake.

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Aside from all such superstition as this, there really is good reason to believe that the lake is inhabited by some abnormal water animals. We conversed with seven persons, among them one friend, the bishop, who at different times and separately had seen them, and they told me that many other individuals could verify their report. The length of these monsters varies from thirty to eighty feet, and their bodies are covered with fur like that of a seal. The head is described to be like that of an alligator. In one instance the animal came close to the shore, and became entangled in the rushes, where he squirmed and splashed and made a horrible noise like the roaring of a bull. It is true the Mormons are a very credulous people. They believe in all sorts of revelations and appearances, angelic and diabolical. Some allowance should therefore be made for this tendency of their minds, but with all that considered it cannot be possible for so many people to be utterly mistaken. There are unquestionably in Bear Lake some fish larger than the ordinary salmon trout. Whatever they may be, they did not exhibit themselves for our benefit. There was an enchanting beauty, however, which abundantly satisfied us without the enchanted water snakes.

We remained three days with the kind people on whom we had been quartered. Mr. Clark is a man sixty years of age. His sister, Mrs. Jewett, who has just left her husband in the eastern states and joined the Mormon Church, is sixty-three years old. The two wives of our host are respectively fifty-one and thirty-nine years old. The children of both mothers, more than twenty in all, range from manhood down to infancy. I have not been slow to criticise the bad features of polygamy, but, with a disposition to do the institution the justice which he who is supposed to have been its founder always asked for it, I readily admit that this was in every respect a happy family. The utmost conjugal, parental and fraternal affection prevailed among them all. The head of the establishment is a sincerely religious man. His devotions, morning and evening and before every meal, breathed the spirit of earnest love for all mankind and of desire for their conversion to what he believes to be the truth. He had implicit faith in every dogma of his church, and oh how he did wrestle with the Lord for the strangers under his roof, and how he did urge upon us the duty of entering the fold! Like all Mormons, he believed in "baptism for the dead." He said he had been baptized in one day two hundred and forty times for his dead relatives and friends. He seemed to wish that I might die before him, in order that he might be baptized for me; and in case his wish for my early death was not gratified, and he should pass first through the dark valley, he enjoined it upon his sons to go into the water for me. So all the male members of the Clark family are enlisted for my salvation. Good, kind-hearted old enthusiast, far be it from me to ridicule your faith! Jane and Adeline, the two wives, were equally interested in the eternal welfare of my wife. If either of them survives her, whenever her death is announced baptism by proxy will be performed for her, and if their death precedes her, as, with all due regard for these excellent ladies, I hope may be the case, then one of the little girls is to take the mother's place in the ceremony.

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The elderly Mrs. Jewett has all the zeal of a new convert in complying with all the formalities of Mormonism. She must now be "sealed" to some other man. She remarked: "This troubles me more than anything else. I don't see who they can get me. At my age I am not very marketable, and then I was always so neat and particular. Folks out here are most of 'em dreadful dirty. To be sure it will be celestial marriage, and I needn't stay with 'em on earth without I've a mind to; but I wouldn't like dirty folks even in heaven!" Mr. Clark proposed to seal himself "celestially" to any unmarried ladies of our acquaintance, and we gave him a list of several who have passed beyond matrimonial chances in this life, and who are probably now, without their knowledge, the brides of Mr. Clark for the future world. Poor man, he little knows what hard bargains he has made!

I have no space to write about all his revelations, manifestations, and various extravagances. According to his belief, the garden of Eden was in Ohio, and the ark was built in Missouri. He produced the Mormon bible to prove that it could easily have drifted to Ararat in seven months. As this could not be denied, he claimed for himself the full force of his argument.

Such were some of the wild notions of this curious family; and yet with all this religious insanity they attended most industriously to their farm and their mills. Their house was scrupulously neat, and their table loaded with substantial food. The brethren were always welcome at their board, and no stranger who passed, were he Mormon or Gentile, asked their free hospitality in vain. We know this from experience. We record their emotional vagaries as curious experiences, but written upon our hearts are the pleasing memories of their Christian hospitality.

J. C.