

R. A. Christmas

*AT TEMPLE SQUARE,  
SALT LAKE CITY*

This was the dream, beginning with a quest  
For isolated work, that brought them west  
To Salt Lake Valley, looking for new starts  
And land in Zion, pushing stock and carts  
Out of the world into Millennium  
In the Rocky Mountains. This was kingdom come:  
To have their land, their God, and privacy,  
Hold goods in common, try polygamy,  
Rough out new law and language, colonize,  
Convert the Indians, plow the hills to size.  
They saw this Temple when the ground was bare  
Of everything but sagebrush; from the Square  
They measured streets by its unbodied touch,  
As Second South, Eleventh East, or such:  
Through forty years of building, here was grace  
For every passing dream; this was the place.

This is the place! Now monuments are cast  
As bronze and stone memorials to the past.  
Seagulls, handcars, and prophets on the lawn  
Remind us of a season that is gone.  
A large museum features guided tours,  
Brigham Young's pants, and various furnitures  
From Mormon history; and a guide invites  
Our questions on religion, or the sights.

This is the place! Each hour a show begins,  
An organ concert, talk, or drop of pins  
To prove the fine acoustics in a hall,  
And justify the ways of God to all.  
This is the place! Outside is paradise!  
New Salt Lake City, full of bright surprise  
For modern pilgrims rushing out in cars  
To find department stores, hotels, or bars.  
This is the place that Brigham sought by dreams  
And built for Christ: today the Temple seems  
Abstracted from the life around the Square;  
This is the place, but most are not aware.

And they no longer measure life by streets  
Or dreams of Zion; and the past competes  
Both with its opposite and something new,  
The unexpected it should carry through,  
But somehow comes up short behind the plaque  
Or monument they raise to bring it back;  
A half-success, the work less wrong than strange.  
While the indifferent quality of change  
Sends buildings higher, Temple Square grows dim;  
And southward, neon pulses, from its rim  
The valley bottoms out and falls away,  
And men in business suits pursue their day.  
Some watch for Christ, and after snow at night,  
They wake to their Millennium of white  
And count this blessing, quiet, soft and deep,  
And think of dreaming, in a dreamless sleep.