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Chapter 11

In the year 1851, President Brigham Young sent colonies to extend the Mormon territory to the south. Those who went had to fight four adversaries: the Utes, the Navajos, the renegade whites, and nature, which seemed at times the greatest adversary of all. No treaty with the United States could guarantee the settlers from the depredations of the Navajos. Even Kit Carson who displaced the Indians had found it impossible to quell them. Jacob Hamblin and Thales Haskell genuinely loved the Indians, and time after time won them to a reluctant peace, only to have it broken again because of the actions of the renegade whites. But at last the Mormons had begun their settlement, in the face of Indian attack and nature.

The Piutes grinned their perfect security and took every un- guarded thing they wanted. The coming of the Mormons to their country was a most fortunate wind-fall which they intended to gather in spite of Mormon protests, Mormon guards, and Mormon herders also, with extra contempt, in spite of imaginary evils which Haskell had predicted upon them. Erastus Snow had predicted that the unfriendly Indians would melt away, yet the most unfriendly of them were enjoying good health and unusual prosperity. They lived easy and fat and fearless. Their grand champion, Frank, was the image of Navajo affluence. But the end was not yet. These vessels of tribulation, called to the peculiar mission of "turning the other cheek also," and acting as the indispensable shock absorber between Utah's older settlements and a pack of threatening evils, were destined to be brought low many times within an inch of their lives, but never to perish under the heel of their major enemies. True, they had not yet conquered the first of those enemies, but they were to fight on and on, panting and persisting and praying on the edge of despair. The changes which come in human fortunes may be by slow and imperceptible degrees, but there are times when they come with stunning suddenness. That is the way they broke on the despoilers of the fort. A big Navajo came slowly on his pony from the way of the river. Carefully and pantingly he dismounted at Haskell's door and went stooping inside with feeble step. It was the grand champion, Frank, his vigorous physique blighted like a squash in the frost of October. Something in the nature of quick consumption had made his great lungs cave in as a deflated balloon, and he wheezed and gasped for enough breath to keep him alive. "Tell your God-" he gasped, in desperation of appeal, and paused for more breath, "tell your God I've quit stealing your horses." "Until you get well?" asked Haskell, without looking up. "Tell him if he'll let me live, I'll never touch any of your horses again," and Frank leaned despairingly on the table as he delivered the last words of his appeal. A strange and deadly malady seized Norgwinup's two roughneck sons, and left them stark and stiff by the fire in the wickiup. A cold chill ran through both tribes. While the chill lingered, half a dozen other inveterate Piute thieves met with heavy misfortune or death, and some of Old Frank's most ardent disciples suffered

surprising reverses. Frank lived ten or fifteen years after that, a poor, broken, humbled wreck of the splendid figure he used to be, and he had a story to tell about the fury of the Mormon God and his love for his people.

Cattle and horses were safe for the present, so far as the Indians were concerned, but in as much danger as ever from thieves. As the immunity from arrest in San Juan was whispered more widely in the realm of crime, the stream of "white trash" swelled in volume. If they could just reach the borders of San Juan, they could work in safety for a grubstake with one of the cow-outfits at Blue Mountain, or at the worst they could appropriate a fresh horse, or hide among the rocks eating somebody's beef till they could go farther. From San Juan they could skip in any one of ten directions with nine chances to one of not being followed, and then with a sure chance of obliterating whoever might be so stupid as to follow them. With a pistol on each hip and a long gun under their saddle-fender, they stopped frequently at San Juan Co-op for coffee and bacon, appearing from nowhere and vanishing into the same place. Every good horse not being watched or hidden in some terrible gulch, or on some inaccessible mesa, vanished with mysterious suddenness never to be seen again. The men of the fort clung for their very lives to all the cattle and horses they could save from the prowlers, but they had no summer range. It was hard on cattle to live through the warm months in the low country, and then have to winter on the hills they had grazed bare. This, even without any other of their hindrances, would prevent them from increasing their herds. Blue Mountain was claimed by the aggressive cattle kings who had come in from Colorado, and they would endure no crowding. LaSal, too, besides being rather too far away, was taken by them, and the flat-topped Elk Mountain, fifty miles to the northwest of Bluff, was claimed and monopolized by the Piutes. It was their sacred hunting ground, a reserved area of primeval wilderness such as their fathers had enjoyed before the invasion of white men. Also, it was a safe and ready retreat after the punitive expeditions they had made and would yet make against those white invaders.

If the San Juan Mission were ever to succeed as a buffer state, to endure as the lightning rod for catching and neutralizing every blast of fury before it could cross the Colorado River, and if the mission were ever to become sufficiently strong and influential to soothe and tame the source from which the lightning generated, then it would have to lift its head above the sluggish tide of poverty. If it were ever to master its three major adversaries, it would have to have more cattle, and that meant a summer range. With this vital phase of the situation in mind, Platte D. Lyman, Joseph F. Barton, and Orrin Kelsey rigged out with pack horses to explore the mountain, known to the Indians only who guarded its trails from all intruders. Those trails had not yet been found by the outside, and the Piutes intended they should never be found. The Elk Mountain is a tableland, and much of its precipitious rim length is difficult or impossible of ascent. The Piutes occupied the three valleys east of the mountain, and they made it their business to see that no one passed through to climb the steeps west of them. Platte Lyman and his companions succeeded in getting into First Valley without being

seen, but when they undertook to climb the mountain, there was no trail, but a steep surface of rugged rock. Tying their horses to the cedars, the three men scrambled up afoot to the top and found a wonderful country of tall timber and waving grass, rich underbrush, and flowers. They walked all day, going as far as what is now known as Wooden Shoes, and returned in the evening enthusiastic over the prospect. They got back to Bluff without being seen by the Piutes, but their tracks through that sacred solitude nettled the Indians, and their resentful responses along with other worries and surprises hindered the Bluff men for months from exploring further.

When, after a long time they were free to go again, Platte Lyman, Kumen Jones, and Hyrum Perkins succeeded only in getting into the edge of First Valley before the vigilant Piutes rushed out and formed themselves into a dark half circle across the trail ahead of them and back along each side. Every one of those dusky faces was hard and unyielding; not one of them would answer a question nor speak, but among themselves. They simply sat there on their cayuses looking as grim and terrible as they could, a silent and fearsome protest against any admission to their sacred mountain. The three men, exercising such benevolent chivalry as they could with an adversary frozen to silence, turned back around one end of the half circle and rode forward again, hoping to follow the trail they were on to the top of the mountain. That trail led through the cedars to Second Valley and on to the ridge of rocks and trees to the north, but there it had been camouflaged with jealous care: a web of tracks in all directions, no trail at all, and they stopped in bewilderment looking for a possible way to go. Then out from the forest around them came the slender Piute boy, Henry, riding a lean roan colt; Henry, whose honest, youthful heart, like a gem nestling, with crude stones, had made glad response to Haskell's fervent words. Hurriedly in an undertone he directed the three men where to go, and when they turned to ask him more questions, he was gone. Yet again when they paused in perplexity, he appeared as before, showed them the way and vanished in a. clump of cedars. Up along the narrow backbone, hidden by the trees, and then along the shelf to what is known as Dwarf Spring, he directed them, riding out many times from the cover of trees and brush and dodging from sight lest his people should know the part he was taking. He led them to Kigaly Spring, and to the other good springs of the mountain, his copper face agleam with the radiant light of friendship. The three explorers camped at Kigaly Spring, and in the evening that ugly half circle of Piutes from First Valley, having followed them up, came stringing down through the quaking asps and stopped silent and sinister around their camp. With their dark faces set in harder lines than they had worn in the valley below, they appeared to be resolved on some vengeful action. Henry was not with them; he had been in sight but a few minutes before and was no doubt watching from cover. The three explorers took silent account of what this demonstration was intended to suggest, and what it might really mean. They considered how they were beyond the end of the known trail and fifty miles from Bluff, and how Bluff was three or four times that far from any help on whom they might call in case of trouble. They could appreciate also how serious this matter was to the Piutes

who, if they allowed any invasion of their retreat, would lose their precious hunting-ground and be overrun by the outside. Their appreciation of this very thing showed in their angry faces, and they had nothing to fear from any method by which they might want to register their objections. It was their own world where they were and had ever been supreme. Uncle Sam's laws could not reach them whatever they decided to do. Fighting silently a battle for calmness within, yet hiding all outward signs of the conflict, the scouts searched their souls for all the strategies of the new warfare. The prime objective just now was not to get a summer range for the people of the fort, but to foil what might be death in this. trackless mountain. They talked freely with each other about things in general, preserving an appearance of complete unconcern. Moencopi Mike was the leading spirit of the gang-he with the Berkshire boar neck and the one who, according to the sworn statement of the Navajos, had murdered Mitchel and Myric with his own hand. He glared at the three men with muddy eyes, toying all the time with the stock of his pistol as if about to take it from the holster. Mike's men stood waiting for his initial word of beginning on the big things he had boasted he would do, but whether or not his gang was aware of it, he was exerting himself to his utmost in an unseen conflict with these bold invaders. It was that inevitable contest which begins the moment when eyes of enemies meet. Mike glared at them and searched eagerly for any tremor of fear, for the least sign of any weakening under the weight of his wrath and could find no fit moment for his initial growl. They were simply wearing him out with their stubborn composure, and finding it impossible to maintain such a mighty pitch without it even being recognized, and his dignity about to shrink in the estimation of his waiting braves, he signaled them to move on, and they camped in a grove of oak fifty yards down the canyon. Henry came down the hill over their trail as if he had been following them and joined them where they seemed to be holding a powwow. Mike had to make some face-saving explanations; he had met with something unexpected, and in spite of all his boasts, his men had to watch in vain while he did nothing. In half an hour he came back along to where the three men had camped, still with no word to say, apparently hoping to take up the fight where he had left off, to inspire the fear and find the opportunity of redeeming his dignity of leadership. Platte Lyman spread a big slice of bread with homemade molasses and held it forth to him without a word. And without a word Mike took it and closed his ponderous mouth over one wide corner. It made but a few bites for him, but he got a second and a third slice, munching them with audible relish. His dark countenance changed, there was a weakening around the corners of his wide mouth, "Nini tooitch tickaboo," he grunted. (I like you.) Full of bread and molasses, he sauntered away to bring the other Indians and talk it over. As the night winds moaned over them through the tall pines, they reached an understanding in which the Piutes agreed to a certain price for the use of their mountain. But besides the stipulated amount which they knew would be paid in liberal measure, they had dreams of finding fat cattle and valuable horses in the thickly-wooded canyons of their retreat where they could enjoy much desirable privacy in helping themselves. It was easy to track a thief on the half-naked

desert hills, but not in the thick grass and flowers of the mountain, and the years proved that the Piutes had not dreamed in vain.

By the spring of 1883, Bluff ditch with its cribs, its washouts, its breaks, and its indispensable cleanings every new moon from the silt spit into it by the path of the river, had cost the people $69.00 an acre for all the land they still had left to cultivate. That amounted to $48,300.00 for their seven hundred acres. Their tithing for the previous year was $760, about $25.00 to the man. Even then it was not intended to represent a tenth of their gain; part of it was deliberately paid on loss for better returns next year. In the spring of 1884, Mitchel, who ran the trading post twenty-five miles up the river, suddenly broke off friendly relations with the Indians again, and ordered soldiers to his assistance. This time it was a killing, and the Indians received the blame. In a quick minute he touched off the Indian situation in San Juan where it was most desperately inflammable, the fighting zone where Utah's Indian annoyances had all been concentrated. The very first howl of the trouble rode at once on the wind to the most remote camp. The Navajos moved back twenty miles from the river to their mountains, but the Piutes registered their response by killing more cattle, painting their faces in hideous colors, and bellowing their war chant all night in eager relish of the prospect. Although Indian wars had become a thing of the past in all the rest of Utah, San Juan was still the delicate safety valve where, if the pressure became too strong, it could blow off without disturbing people on the outside. That Mitchel trading post, getting hot and smoking at every change of the moon was a source from which a disastrous flame could start suddenly and spread soon to the faraway, if not checked in its early stages. For the best good of the Indians, and the welfare of everybody concerned, the way to head off these wild starts, with fairness to all, was the way Hamblin had headed them off, and brought them, by good will and kindness, to his way of thinking. There was always the Indian's side to the trouble, a side which no fair mind could ignore. The diligence with which Hamblin always took that side into careful account was the main source of his power of persuasion. All the same, how was Bluff with its wretched ditch in the sand, its pony-teams, its tribulation with a complete circle of enemies, and its accumulation of poverty, ever to soothe the wild native passion when once it became inflamed? The colony was distressed and afflicted with unending commotion. A weight of gloom like dark shadows hung threateningly over them in its great isolation. The gloom was not only in their world of thought, but black clouds above them also poured out torrents of rain on their mud roofs, and the water came drizzling through on everything in their homes. It rained all over the wide river basin above them, and the river roared more and more angrily over its bed of quicksand and climbed its banks with startling rapidity. The people felt great anxiety for those of their number who had been caught by the storm on the range or the freight road, and they kept a close vigil day and night lest the river should sweep them away. Yet the wrath of the torrent was no more to be feared than the wrath of the Indians because of the soldiers and the popular way of soldiers with women. The Piutes chanted their war songs from dusk till dawn with an eagerness to see the trouble develop, but the Navajos kept far back to the

south of the river. Anguish of dread dragged on the heart throbs of helpless women and children in the mud-soaked fort-anguish smothered to silence lest it should be intensified by expression; dread of violent man and violent elements, painted Indians, desperate white men loaded with guns, the wicked old San Juan making war on its banks with dreadful flotillas of driftwood and seething depths of quicksand! Bluff was pitiably at the mercy of a multitude of enemies, but to its stalwarts it was at the mercy of God only. Necessity of food, clothing, and many things called men away to the range and the road, no matter the hazard; and families without their protectors lived ever in grave concern. On many a terrible night the writer's mother knelt with her children and prayed heaven to temper the fierce elements and to soften the hearts of the Indians towards the helpless little townspeople. No prayer was complete with these vital matters omitted. While the rains descended and the floods came, that detachment of soldiers continued near the Mitchel post, and the Navajos kept away from all their visible territory across the river. Something ominous hovered over their empty dwellings and silent campgrounds. Rumbling echoes drifting back from the hills where they had gone sounded not like fear, but rising anger. Navajo Jim Joe and some of the wise leaders might be able to discern between the peaceable people of the fort and the hostile men from the outside, but the hotheaded masses could be guided by nothing but their craving for revenge. The river was too terrible for them to cross in the night, and at its present fury they would not brave its current in the daytime. So the people watched the rising flood and sent their anxious gaze searching through the storm for any sign of hostilities beyond it. In the darkness they heard above the steady purr of the rain and the roar of the flood, the strong voice of a man, calling-calling. The voice echoed in the cliffs; although they, could not make out the words, it alarmed them, for it seemed to come from the other side of the stream. They approached through storm and the night as near as they could and shouted asking who spoke, and what was wanted. At length by supreme effort the voice made its message clear: it was Jim Joe; he had come back through the darkness from distant camps to tell the people of his friend, Kumen Jones, that they need have no fear of the Navajos, but to keep away from the fighting men so they would not be mistaken for them. What a relief! The heathenish chant and the wild yells of the Piutes echoed still in the cliffs around Bluff into the late hours of night or early morning, but the Mormons had learned to count on a certain immunity from their wrath. This northern tribe had among them certain brave souls like Henry who had already restrained them in a wild moment, and they were more susceptible to his gentle suasion than their war songs would suggest. They contented themselves in killing more cattle, stealing more horses, and making themselves chesty and offensive by looks and words. The cowmen, the soldiers, the fugitives skulking in the hills, figured it risky, business to venture beyond protecting walls without ample guards, yet they all considered the people of Bluff to be in no danger at all.

Kumen Jones and his wife, returning from attending conference in Salt Lake City, heard in the north end of the county that there was serious Indian trouble. At Blue Mountain they met the big English cattle baron, Harold Carlisle, and asked, "Is

there any danger from the Indians?" "Not fo' yo' so't," drawled the old man. It was a most remarkable state of affairs, this collection of Utah's thirty-year-old Indian annoyances all tucked away into the remote southeast corner of the territory, for the vital issue to be fought out there to a finish by a handful of poverty-stricken toilers wading through deep tribulation and sinking often to the brink of despair. The storm center of the whole territory was the solitary fort in San Juan, obscured by magnificent distances from every other civilized community, and the only one of its kind still surviving in the west. To the obscure, yet indispensable guardians of this pivotal point, it was a matter of wonder that they should enjoy favors and immunities seemingly in excess of their importance. Besides the killings in the reservation and along the river, besides the murders at Piute Spring and at LaSal, there was at least one secret murder of a white man in Wooden Shoe Breaks, and the end was not yet, with more murders ahead. Jim Joe's promise of safety to the people of Bluff if they would stay near home, meant no cooling-off of the war spirit on the reservation. Aflame with indignation, Jim Joe came to confer with his friend, Kumen Jones. "They have insulted us as a people by their treatment of some of our women," Jim declared, meaning the soldiers from nearby Mitchel's store. "We can't stand it. If we are men and not children, then we must fight." Kumen Jones threw' his arms around Jim Joe and regarded him with sympathetic eyes, "You can't do it, Jim," he declared, "You must not think of doing it. You will be as a weak child in the hands of a powerful man. It would be the greatest mistake you could make." "But our women! Our girls!" and Jim's light brown eyes blazed fiercely with his gesture of hot resentment. "I know it, Jim!" and Kumen Jones looked his keen understanding through sympathetic tears, "It's too awful, but you go hack and tell your people not to think of such a thing as trying to fight the United States. That would be the end of them. Tell their old men to tell them about Bosque Redondo, and that to fight again would be worse than that." Jim shook his head bitterly; it cut deeply into his great sense of justice to pass such base insults without registering any of the indignation he felt. Yet he could not doubt the word of his friend, and springing to the back of his mustang, he rode away to quiet the cry for revenge.

In that spring of 1884, the uncommonly heavy rains swelled the old San Juan till it reached the top of its banks, and still it rose. It reached out with great arms across wide bottoms where, judging from the size of the giant cottonwoods, it had not run for at least a century. It ripped into sandhills where no one imagined it could possibly go. It swept away the houses of the people still remaining at Montezuma, and it whittled that Bluff ditch into a hopeless wilderness of mud and gullies. It buried the fields half-way up the fences under a blanket of sand and clay, and it stood two feet deep in some of the homes of the town. No ditch for that season-no crop! The "white trash" among the hills became more daring, and the Piutes, to say the least, were no better than at the first. Neither had any permanent improvement become noticeable among the Navajos as a people. Surely the mission had failed; it had butted against the impossible; the Mormon leaders had underestimated the difficulty of the work they had assigned. The people of the mission were reluctant to report again to the Church leaders that

the task was too hard, but they were distressed, afflicted, at the end of their resources. They reported the condition of affairs as they stood, and devoted themselves to saving what they could from the wreck while they awaited the expected permission to look for places to make peaceful homes beyond this disordered borderland. They believed that they could find in any direction a country better adapted to human habitation than this sand-bed in the midst of ten thousand thieves. Joseph F. Smith and Erastus Snow of the General Authorities made the long trip from Salt Lake City to inspect again the important outpost. They gazed with amazement at the havoc of the flood. They heard about thieves, desperados; remoteness of isolation with no roads on which to get out; the heard of the festering elements a ways ready to explode on shoe notice at this unsheltered end of the trail. They showed their sympathetic comprehension of all these thing, yet when they spoke to the people assembled in the old log meeting house, they said in substance. "We love you for the heroic part you have taken; you have made a wonderful beginning towards a most important work; and if it is no more than you can endure, we release you with our blessings to go, but we cannot give up this essential post. Those who go will be blessed, but those who stay will be doubly blessed." The unexpected assurance and positive promise in that last sentence, as the people listened, fell soothingly on the sting of their disappointment. Somehow it was the main thing they heard. The General Authorities promised the people that if they would stay, they would become prosperous; their fortunes would change for the better; and in due time they would accomplish all the major labors for which they had been called. To Bishop Nielson, then in poverty with the rest of his people, they promised plenty of means if he would stay at his post without compromise. Feeling repentant for having faltered, and accepting the assurance of final success, the men of the fort agreed to stay and tried to imagine themselves going to be successful over all their ugly adversaries.