(*The Improvement Era*, November 1949)

Chapter 14

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 the Mormons persisted in their settlement, in the face of Indian attack and nature.

The six tall Navajos came up the hill, their guns in their hands, and straight towards the shed where the women bent over their prostrate protector. If the Navajos discovered that Barton was still alive, the best to be hoped for was that they would shoot him to death, even if they spared the rest of the family. Whispering frantically in her husband's ear, Mrs. Barton urged him to close his eyes and appear to be dead. He seemed lost to all that was going on around him, yet he closed his eyes and lay perfectly still while the six fierce men lined up over him, looking for any sign of life. The women watched in killing suspense-what if they should feel for his pulse! No, their pronounced superstition forbade them to touch the dead, and after leaning carefully over him and seeing no signs of life, they turned their ravening eyes on Mrs. Barton. She was young and fair, and she tried with terrified eyes to read their intentions. "What do you want?" she asked in their language, hiding her emotions as best she could. "The store," one of them demanded, with a gesture meaning the key. She gave them the key and left them to take what they pleased. The robbery Old Eye had planned went forward wholesale while he lay sprawling on the sand where the bully had dropped him. The six men in eager haste carried the goods from the store in backloads to the boat, rowed them across in load after load, and stopped only when one of their vigilant sentinels warned them in a loud call that horsemen were approaching from Bluff. Cheepoots had honored his trust with all diligence. Platte Lyman and Kumen Jones came loping over the sandhills where the old man had disappeared, reaching the store before it was thought possible they could have received the word. When Cheepoots rode his lathering cayuse into Bluff with Mrs. Barton's note, he found but six men in town, and by three in the afternoon all but one of the six had gone to Rincone, figuring that was the place of greatest danger. Somehow they clung to the belief that the town was immune to attack. Immune or not, Bluff that afternoon became terrible with forebodings. Only one man to protect it, and the Navajos probably working themselves into a fury as they threatened at the time of the murder of the three brothers in Grass Valley! Time dragged painfully, the long shadows reached out as indicators of fate. Towards evening Bob Allan came from Rincone bringing from the bishop a suggestion - that all the families of the town gather together at one home for the

night. Bob left again to warn his father and others camped in Little Valley east of Elk Mountain, and night came on with but a solitary male sentinel in Bluff. The women and children carried their bedding to the home of "Aunt" Kisten Nielson, spreading them down all over the floors of the two rooms, and then around the house on the outside. Some of these women expected to be massacred before morning, and one of them dressed her children in their Sunday clothes, figuring, by some strange philosophy of desperation, that this would be the most fitting way to meet their doom. More gloom came with the darkness. That one remaining man, Peter Allan, stood guard with a gun over the thirty women and children who sensed now, more than ever before since they had come to this fort in the borderland, that just across the river within sound of their voices, lived fifteen thousand or more unconquered Navajos, who had terrified southern Utah at intervals for a quarter of a century and who could be inflamed in an hour to a white-hot fury by the merest trifle. Those Navajos believed now that a man of the fort had killed one of their number, and what extravagant revenge they might claim was hard to guess. Whether the hours of the night became still or whether they were disturbed by sounds echoing in the cliffs, they were all ominous and slow in passing. The mothers listened and peered mistrustingly into the darkness.

Next day men came in from the camps, from the freight roads and other places in answer to the call of night riders who told them of the danger. Everyone felt grave concern for what might happen. Then onto that stage of dreadful things pending, came a well-meaning actor, who threw the builders of the fort completely off their guard. Amasa Barton lingered a week before he died, and in the first half of that time the men from Bluff kept fearful watch over him, and all the time they kept a vigilant eye on a mob of Navajos peeping from the cliff beyond the river. In the broad light of one of those May days, instead of in the nighttime, as the watchers had feared, they saw a man come straight down from that mob to the river, to the boat. He made no effort to keep out of sight; he rowed with deliberate stroke to the north side, and climbed to the shelf to where the weary watchers sat by the dying man. It was Tom Holiday, one of the important chiefs who had been twice to Salt Lake City at the invitation of Brigham Young and John Taylor to hear and subscribe to peace treaties between his people and the Mormons. Impressive in size, magnetic, and intelligent, he marched boldly up to the Barton home, gave them friendly greetings and asked what the trouble was all about. They told him what had happened, showed him the unconscious man, and assured him they had no desire for anything but peace, not the least preparation for anything but peace. "I have been telling my people you are our friends," he said. "I told them you have always been our friends. I told them to go home and let the matter pass. I shall go back and send them home." He returned to the boat and up to the hiding mob from which he came, and very soon it was apparent they had all gone away; none of them could be seen. The crisis seemed to be past. When Barton died, his funeral was held in Bluff without fear of further trouble from the Navajos. Men returned to the freight road and the camps to take up their work where they had dropped it. Tom Holiday, Jim Joe, and the cream of the tribe

lived on a plane high above the unprogressive herd. In the emotional hearts of that herd rankled memories and traditions of wrongs they had suffered; wrongs real or imaginary which had never been duly avenged. The soldiers of Spain had shed their blood, but the Navajos had taken two drops of Spanish blood for every one they gave, and they had driven the Spanish power from all countries adjacent to their own. The United States had driven them away and shut them up like cattle for three years-the memory of it was a sting! The mention of it an insult! These Mormons had shed their blood in many a shameful fight beyond the big river, and now they had come to shed their blood right at the nation's door. The three brothers had been massacred in Grass Valley! Tom Holiday and other old cranks had tried to explain that somehow it was all right, but it was all wrong. The Navajos were in no humor to admit anything was right where Navajo blood had been spilled. Old Eye had been shot through the heart in a Mormon's store, and they were asked to believe it was done there by one of their own people, and a friend to the murdered man. How ridiculous! The chronic agitators waved their firebrands and raised a war whoop. It stirred the blood of fighting generations, and they painted their faces in hideous colors, seized their guns, and rode away in a jostling gang for the detested little colony. Danger, prolonged and intensified, had bred courage in the builders of the fort, not only in the hearts of the men, but also in the hearts of women. It was often their duty for long periods at a time to man the fort, to be its watchmen, to preserve the vigil which was ever the price of their peace. It was a woman who first sighted that dreadful horde of a hundred Navajos - riding in fury towards Bluff. It was a woman who soothed her terrified children and ran to calm the little folk who had been left alone across the street. It was another woman, Mary N. Jones, known to the Navajos as Estomuskeezy, who answered their call and met them in the street, to laugh banteringly at their painted faces and feverish excitement, and to ask in their own tongue what kind of joke they had come to play. She was the plucky interpreter and clerk and diplomat for the San Juan Co-op. Without "Aunt" Mary, and other women with her courage and resourcefulness, Bluff's assignment in the wilderness never could have been filled. Yet Aunt Mary, from her varied experiences with the Navajos in the store, could not fail to recognize this as a grave threat of violence to the helpless little community. In these hundred men, surrounding her with their guns in their hands and glaring uncompromisingly down from their saddles, she saw the im placable spirit which had resisted Spain-the wrath and resentment of a people unconquered by three years of captivity. This was the crisis hour of a generation; the fort must hold its own today or it could be a fort no longer. If the peculiar ethics which saved Jacob Hamblin from the flames could not be successfully invoked for this situation, the fight of the years was ignominiously lost. Estomuskeezy contrived to send for her father, Bishop Nielson, and for her husband, Kumen Jones, two of the only three men to be found in Bluff or in its nearby fields. Until they came, she wielded the charm of her calmness on the restless mob.