

(*The Improvement Era*, January 1949)

Chapter 4

In the year 1851, President Brigham Young sent a colony to build a fort and establish Parowan, thus extending the Mormon territory to the south, encouraged at first by the Ute Chief Walker. As the thin line of forts began to reach farther and farther into Chief Walker's land, he viewed this influx with alarm and incited his people to attack. Foremost among the Mormons who genuinely loved the Indians were Jacob Hamblin and Thales Haskell. The Mormons had to fight three other adversaries as well as the Utes: the Navajos, the renegade whites, and nature, which seemed at times the greatest adversary of all. In cold blood an Indian shot George A. Smith with his own gun which the Indian had borrowed, and Jacob Hamblin and his company had been forced to go on and leave the body. The plunderers followed Hamblin's trail homeward and raided the herds of the weary settlers. No treaty with the United States could guarantee the settlers from the depredations of the Navajos. Even Kit Carson who had displaced the Indians had found it impossible to quell their depredations. Black Hawk was finally vanquished, but the Navajo War grew steadily worse. Jacob Hamblin at last won the Indians to peace until four Navajo brothers were attacked by renegade whites, three of the four being killed, and the fourth crawling wounded back to his people with the tale of the attack-which was laid at the door of the Mormons.

The call found Hamblin sick and in no condition to travel. Also, among all the multitudes of men who heard it, there was not one with the courage or the inclination to go with him. To go among that frenzied horde of savages looked like walking into the open jaws of death by ignominious torture. The wild cry of the Navajos for vengeance, as repeated by the Utes, declared that the Mormons by their treachery had brought their blood on their own heads. Sick or well, with company or alone, and though it was early in January with the main grip of winter still ahead, Hamblin staggered out of bed, saddled his horse, and started across the desert, a solitary ambassador of peace to a nation howling for war. When it became known he had gone-gone in spite of his sickness, in spite of a chorus of protesting friends, the ward bishop, actuated by deep love and concern, sent Hamblin's son to follow him fifteen miles and beg him to return. "No, Son," Hamblin answered, the charm of his benevolent purpose like a robe of glory around him, "I have been appointed by the highest authority on earth to this mission. My life is of small consequence compared to the lives of the Saints and the well-being of the Lord's kingdom. I shall trust in him and go on." He went on. His son returned. Thirty miles farther on another messenger came toiling after him, imploring him by all means to come back. He refused flatly and proceeded again, a lone horseman across the desert stretch towards Lees Ferry on the Colorado. In sickness and exhaustion, with limbs chilled and numb, he prayed heaven to spare his life that he might meet the misguided Indians and dissuade them from their rash purpose. When he came dragging into Lees Ferry, his

appearance and the perilous nature of his undertaking enlisted the warm sympathy of the Smith brothers who kept the crossing. Although not of his faith, and having no interest in the orders of Brigham Young, they insisted on going with him. At Moencopi Wash the three men were found by a company of Navajos, austere and silent, who took them prisoner and sent word in every direction of the important capture they had made. A Mormon had been seized for the murder of the three Kacheenebegay brothers! He was the one Mormon most guilty of all, the very one who by his false representations had lured them into the deathtrap at Grass Valley. Their disposition of this one man would be deliberate and intensified in a way to compensate for his being the only one they had to punish for the many who should suffer torture.

It was winter now: these hills which had reeked with the smell of sheep sixteen years before, when Hamblin left his dead companion on the sand by the trail, were no more hospitable in appearance than on that November day in 1860. The somber faces of these men who talked only among themselves, ignoring all other questions, intensified distressing memories of that awful day. It was necessary for Hamblin to communicate through a Piute interpreter, since he spoke the Piute but not the Navajo language, and he could get no idea of what his captors intended to do. Taking no notice of his queries, other than to make contemptuous comment among themselves, they took him away to a spacious hogan, twelve by twenty feet inside. The Smith brothers stayed faithfully with him, though they were given to understand it was Hamblin the Navajos wanted and not they. Men of the reservation gathered in that hogan till it became stifling with human breath. Great tension prevailed in the stuffy atmosphere-throaty words half spoken, whispers, signs, a general and unmistakable boding of anything but kindness. They made Hamblin know that they held him personally responsible for the murder of the Kacheenebegay brothers in Grass Valley, and demanded to know what he proposed to do about it. They brought in the surviving brother, showed his wounds, called attention to his emaciated condition, and worked themselves into a fury so terrible that the Piute interpreter had no courage to repeat what they said. It became necessary to get another interpreter before they could proceed with the trial, or whatever this inquisition might be called. When Hamblin affirmed that his people had nothing to do with the murder of the boys, they told him he would be willing to admit the truth when they began roasting him over the fire before them. Not allowing a muscle of his face or his body to betray the least disturbance, he clung firmly to his faith in what true love would do, and the potency of its appeal to the better side of men. Even that second interpreter became petrified with terror and dared not repeat what the Navajos told him. When they drafted a third interpreter into the service, he knelt near Hamblin and asked in a trembling whisper, "Aren't you afraid?" "Afraid of what?" Jacob answered coolly. "Of these terrible men around you," and the Piute's reference to them showed his mortal terror of giving them the least offense, "can't you see what they are going to do?" "I am not afraid of my friends," Hamblin declared, calmly. "You haven't one friend in all this reservation," the kneeling figure half whispered. "Aren't you afraid?" "I don't know what fear is," breathed Jacob

deliberately, clinging to the solid substance of his unruffled soul, for he felt sure that what had never failed him before would be to his salvation in this crisis. "We must be ready to shoot it out," suggested one of the Smith brothers in an undertone, clinging to his pistol and resolved that Hamblin should not suffer while he sat idly by. "No," Jacob answered, appearing to be talking about some commonplace matter, "if we make no start, they'll never find a place to begin."

Plainly Hamblin had some unaccountable lead in the game-some power of soul on which they could not make their intended assault. An intangible breastwork of his love-armor protected him from their wrath, even in their own hogan while the young hot-bloods resolved not to back an inch from their demands. They wanted sweet revenge and intended to have it. More than that they wanted to preserve their field of profitable plunder from the trivial and unimportant benefits of friendship. The Navajos nursed their fury to keep it from losing pitch, and they maintained themselves at the extreme point of violent action as long as it was humanly possible to do so without acting, and then they had to weaken. Hamblin had endured it longer than they could. He had worn them out. Forced to recede from their terrible threats of torture and death, they demanded a hundred head of cattle for each one of the boys who had been killed, and fifty head for the one who had survived. "Tell them I'll promise absolutely nothing for what my people did not do," Jacob ordered, aware that he was getting the whole gang of them under his knee. "Tell them to come over into Grass Valley and be convinced for themselves that the Mormons have not broken faith with them." Slowly, slowly, by the most persistent concentration and resolution he backed them down from the extreme stand they had taken. They would not promise to go over into Utah and prove how much they had been misled, but after they had held him there twelve long, tense hours, from noon till midnight, their frenzy had spent itself to a point where they permitted him to step out into the midnight air. He tried to relax from the tortuous strain and stood gazing in a confused reverie at the faraway stars, while a friendly squaw offered him some boiled meat and goat's milk. He knew he had won them-the thought of it was almost overwhelming. In an ecstasy of wonder and gratitude for the potency of this unique power of human conquest, he poured out his heart in gratitude to the Source of that power. Also he thanked the courageous Smith brothers for their constancy, and he heaved a great sigh of relief when he saw the big river between him and the people whose vengeance he had so narrowly escaped.

From that gaping river gorge he traveled the two hundred miles or more over mountain and desert, and told the people at home to look for the Navajos with the coming of spring. They had refused to promise they would come, but he had foreseen their intention as he told them good-bye. When spring came, some of the leading men of the southern nation appeared at Kanab-Tom Holiday, Husteele, and others, to be conducted to Grass Valley and convinced beyond question that Hamblin's people were in no way responsible for the murder. The blessed monument of friendship was raised again, and its blocks cemented with new confidence. The people of the reservation came again in glad groups to

trade as before. In August 1876, a sizable company of them visited Salt Lake City, and a year later a delegation of fifteen of them made another official call on the Mormon leaders, seemingly fearful they were yet to be victims of some hidden cause for misunderstanding. They met enthusiastic welcome and friends who were glad to see them wherever they went. How refreshing! Sweet peace again, peace made the more sweet by the peril so hardly averted. Yet dark shapes stood nearly visible behind the wings of that pleasant stage, shapes not to be overlooked as they had been before. These few Navajos making the long journey into Utah were the peace-loving, the progressive. Beyond the inhospitable stretch of no-man's-land over which they had come, still lived the persistent spirit of raid and plunder which had defied all outside governments for centuries. This cherished passion of an ancient family of robbers had been intensified as it was transmitted down through succeeding generations, and it was not to be set at once aside by this treaty with the Mormons, any more than it had been set aside by six successive treaties with the United States. Moreover, beyond that hazy stretch of desert and mountain and yawning river gorge, roamed that other fierce people, the Piutes, more to be dreaded than the Navajos, always in poverty from indolence, with nothing to lose, as free and ready always as a wildcat to fight; the tribe who had tormented the Navajos for generations, the implacable warriors who loved the game so well they helped in the raids of the Mormons when Navajo courage faltered. Besides these Piutes, with their impregnable walls and gulches behind them, their country was becoming known as the surest and safest retreat from the arm of the law in all the United States. Desperate fugitives fled to it from many states and territories. Its precipitous terrain bade fair to fill up with the kind of men who shot away the foundation of peace in Grass Valley. If these fugitives from justice should establish themselves in the rocks by these irritable tribes, they would foment trouble more sure and more deadly than the killing of the Kacheenebegay brothers. They might start it at any time, possibly right away, and its red flame would quickly be fanned beyond all control. It formed a most grave situation calling for wise diplomacy. The problem was of sufficient proportions to engage the attention of the general government, yet it concerned no one so much as the impoverished Mormons; no one else was under such great necessity of framing immediate measures against it. Others had not suffered from it enough to appreciate its danger. However straitened their circumstances, and however much the Mormons were occupied already, it was up to them to keep this dangerous element from going on the rampage with greater disaster than ever before.

The Church leaders met in solemn council to consider, and the thing they decided to do to head off the impending disaster seemed altogether weak and out of proportion to the magnitude of the problem. Their announcement was surprising; it was in keeping with nothing but the ethics of that peculiar conquest which is accomplished by the appeal of soul to soul. It took little account of the conventional notion of danger, the strength of arms, the defense made possible by superior numbers. The plan they proposed could hope for success only

through the faithful use of the policy which saved Jacob Hamblin from the flames and made him victor over a nation crazy for war. The decision of the Church leaders was to plant a little colony of Mormons in the very heart of all this incipient danger; right on the turbulent border between the Navajos and Piutes, and squarely on the trail of the fugitive-desperado wolfpack from all over the west. It was a perilous venture, as the years were to prove, its objective to be achieved through great sacrifice, hardship, and danger. With few in numbers and nothing in the way of military defense on which to depend, the little colony would be compelled to hang its hopes of survival on the hand of Providence, and the faithfulness with which it could wield the agencies of peace. Besides the precarious problem of saving itself with its women and helpless children from the wrath and rapacity of these three breeds of savages, its principal purpose was to save the rest of Utah from further Indian troubles by constituting itself a buffer state between the old settlements and the mischief which might be incubating against them. It was to be a shock-absorber to neutralize what otherwise might develop into another war. If any man had been shown the country, and a true picture of the prevailing elements where this peace-mission was to be filled, he would have declared it utterly impossible, even in the forty-three years which the task was actually to take.

The leaders of the Mormon people considered their new plan with great caution from every angle, its difficulties, the dangers it involved. They made no undue haste. Remembering how many of their people had been massacred by Indians in border towns, they resolved to forestall every unnecessary hazard in selecting the place for this important venture, and in the selection of the families whom they would call to do the job. In the spring of 1879, President John Taylor, successor to Brigham Young, called twenty-five special scouts to explore the region from which the trouble might at any time blaze into life again, and to select there, in the lair of these three evils, the place for the important colony. It was to be a strategic location where the right kind of community could serve as a lightning rod to absorb or neutralize such deadly bolts as had been reaching for years with disastrous results to the peaceful Mormon towns in the southern valleys. They called Silas S. Smith, a hardy frontiersman and natural leader, to head the company, and they left Cedar City about the middle of April, crossed the Colorado at Lees Ferry the first of May, and followed a dim road to Tuba City, Arizona, near to the Hopi village of Moencopi where a few Mormon families had settled. The scouts carried much of their provisions and equipment on horses, and most of them rode in the saddle, but they had at least three wagons, and two of the men, Harrison H. Harriman and James Davis had their families with them. According to James Davis there were twenty-six men, two women, and eight children in the company. Besides their string of pack horses and mules they had twenty-five head of loose cattle. Tuba City was the end of every dim road leading in the direction they wanted to go, and very little was definitely known about the region north and northeast where the uncharted course of the winding San Juan River marked the southern boundary of the obscure Piute region. Let no one imagine the Piutes confined themselves to the north side of the river; when

Carson and his troops had swept the country, they came over to plunder whatever remained. They stayed there around Navajo Mountain, and joined the Navajos, when they returned from Bosque Redondo, in their raids on the Mormons. Prudence suggested that the two women and their children should be left with the wagons for safety in Tuba City till it could be known what kind of country and what sort of reception was awaiting off to the northeast, where the scouts hoped to find a way into the southeast corner of Utah.