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Chapter 5

In the year 1851, President Brigham Young sent colonies to extend the Mormon territory to the south, encouraged at first by the Ute Chief Walker. As a 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 them. 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. Jacob Hamblin arose from a sickbed and made his way to the Navajos, who, threatening vengeance, spoke so violently that even the interpreter quailed before them. But Jacob fearlessly maintained his ground-the Mormons were guiltless, and in the end he won their reluctant admiration and a grudging promise of peace.

Moving off over the sand and rocks with their pack train towards Black Mountain, the first concern of Captain Smith and his men was to find enough water in the desert stretch for themselves and their animals. The matter next in consequence was to get through the country without leaving any unfavorable sentiment in the hearts of the natives who watched them with distrust from the nearby hills, and came to their camps to look and listen for anything which might bode evil. A third problem was that of calling for their wagons, for which they would send back from their first permanent stopping place. Sometimes the Navajos forbade them to water their animals at the small and infrequent water holes, and the wandering Piutes (also spelled Puiutes, Puhutes and Pah-Utes) contrived to capitalize on their helplessness by demanding extortionate figures for permission to pass through the country. The Navajos had not forgotten Carson and his terrible men and the years of anguish at Bosque Redondo, but it was a bitter memory always echoing with resentment, and not a safe thing for a stranger to mention. They were back now in their native sand hills, reverting exultantly to their former selves, and white men were by no means welcome among them. One day when the Mormons toiled wearily up a sand wash and were about to water their horses at a little seep, the giant Navajo Peokon, ordered them to keep all their animals away from the water. He boasted of being the one who had killed George A.

Smith, and he stood over the water, gun in hand, while the scouts dug a well in the sand below. When the little well was completed and had served the scouts that night and the next morning, they presented it to Peokon with their good wishes, telling him to use it freely as his own but asking him to let travelers water there when they came through the country. This little affair was typical of the many diplomatic strokes which were to characterize the policy and determine the outcome of the mission. It reached so nearly to old Peokon's hard heart that he bade them a pleasant good-bye when they left. Harder hearts and darker days of the future were yet to be relieved by this kind of "soft answer which turns away wrath." At another place the petty Piute chief, Peogament, with a dozen or more ragged followers, demanded a hundred dollars for permission to proceed with their outfit. Captain Smith told his men to take no notice of it, and before they left camp in the morning, they contrived to make some kind of present to every Piute but the old chief himself, who watched the company in silence as they moved away, while his own men grinned at him for his stupidity. This foreshadowed the way of the lightning rod in neutralizing every threatening bolt.

As the scouts approached the famous faraway Four Corners, where Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado corner on a pile of stones in the desert, they turned northward from the mountain and toiled down a sandy slope to the San Juan River. One account says it was latter May, another, the first of June, when they stopped on the south bank under a giant cottonwood to ascertain, if possible, just where they were. In their hundred and seventy-five miles of wandering from Tuba City, they had entered a region which on the maps was marked with a blank yellow, and they knew only that the river marked the boundary between the Piutes and Navajos, and beyond that river they could see a big country which they knew was unexplored. From the tribe on the north side they expected to receive a more slim and doubtful welcome than they had enjoyed since leaving Tuba City, yet they resolved to cross, for the place of the settlement was not to be on the reservation, although it could be, and would have to be in the country from which the Piutes had defiantly refused to be moved. Since the San Juan was notorious for its quicksand, the captain sent a man to find a safe ford, and when that man rode out on the north side, behold a lone tent, or wickiup, and in it, not an Indian, but a white man! It was the same man who had in his blood such a passion for the firing line that he and his family had converted their house into a fort and fought Indians all winter on the distant Pahreah. When he discerned that his beloved frontier was slipping away into some distant unknown, he went with a pack outfit to hunt for it in western Colorado, but he answered the lure of unexplored southeastern Utah, and had found his way down to the San Juan and had built himself a canoe. This was the Daniel Boone of Utah, Peter Shirts. He had explored and named Montezuma Valley in Colorado, and thinking this canyon came from the valley where he had been, he named it Montezuma Creek. Borrowing old Peter's canoe to help in the crossing, the scouts moved over and listened eagerly to all that he had to tell them about the country. He had been down the river ten miles to a creek which he called Recapture, and he had intended to do more exploring in his splendid

solitude, where he had really outrun the illusive frontier, but now the frontier had come crawling upon him from an unexpected direction, so he piled his tent and outfit in his canoe and, pushing out from the bank, rode away down the current of the winding river into regions unknown. Old Peter was never heard of for sure again. From the vast maze of deep canyons and high mesas into which his frail bark floated, tormenting echoes have come drifting back at infrequent intervals for more than sixty years. One of them relates that an old man, sick and speechless, was found by two prospectors in Henry Mountains. They could not make out his name nor whence he came, but they cared for him tenderly till he died, and then carried him to Salina for burial.

The scouts made their headquarters where old Peter had been camping, and sent five of their number back to Tuba City for the women and children, the wagons and the cattle. The Navajos disliked the thought of these wagons going through and leaving their ominous tracks across the country. To the Navajos a wagon was tsin-a-paz, the wooden thing that rolls. They could remember seeing wagons among other hateful things around them in Bosque Redondo, and it was not a welcome sight in their homeland. Old Peokon came to the little wagon company and was pleased to discern how terrible he appeared to the women and' children. They relate that he hatefully kicked dirt into their food by the fire, and he took their knives and rubbed their edges on stones. The families had with them a devoted Newfoundland dog of generous size, and when she comprehended that Peokon was offering indignities to her friends, she sprang with a fierce growl and held him in her great jaws. And now old Strong-back, for that is what his name meant, was furious and loud in his demands that he be indemnified in cash for the outrage, and that the dog be killed. It is a rather long and thrilling story, but suffice it to say, it levied a heavy tax on their cash and their diplomacy to get started peacefully forward again. And still they feared that more trouble might come of it and watched in suspense through the following night. In the morning an old Navajo came to them, telling them to harness their horses at once and travel fast, that angry men were gathering behind them. He kept urging them to hurry, and was impatient when they allowed their reeking teams to stop. He stayed along by them with a solicitous devotion, looking back often or scanning the nearby hills. But at length he relaxed, told them they could stop, that they were safe. Then he told them he had been in the Davis home in Cedar City, that they had fed him and treated him kindly, and it was because he remembered and loved them that he had come to keep them from harm. It was after the middle of July that the little wagon-company reached the mouth of Montezuma. The scouts built two log cabins in which the two families were to live near together, and here in this faraway land, on the second of August, Mrs. Davis gave birth to a daughter, the first white child born in this corner of Utah.

Captain Smith and his scouts prospected the country in every direction. Up the river they found a Mr. Mitchel running a little trading post, and eighty miles to the east, beyond Montezuma Valley in Colorado, they found a few scattered ranches on Mancos Creek. Fifty miles to the north, in the center of what was to become

San Juan County, they saw the big grass, the tall timber, the streams, and beaver dams of Blue Mountain. They looked longingly at a level, timbered mountain to the southwest but had no time to go there. From the mouth of Montezuma they explored the country westward down the river twenty-five miles, and stopped short at a place where nature had stood the petrified strata on edge in a fantastic barrier north and south fifty or more miles long. It was John Butler who approached nearest to this rim, and the canyon where he stopped is still known as Butler Wash. But neither he nor any one of the outfit took so much as a peep over the higher barrier at the hidden country, beyond. The impassable miles and miles of this mighty reef presented no problem to the scouts; they simply turned back and worried about it no more. But later on, when a weary band of pilgrims came toiling from the west to the base of this wall, they had to meet the ponderous task of getting over. The big problem of Silas S. Smith and his men was to select a place on the Navajo-Piute boundary for the unusual peace-mission which the Mormon leaders had decided to establish. They considered with care but with disappointment the wide stretches of unusual territory. It presented a hard prospect, rough and wild, as if not intended for civilized man. There were of course no roads, but also no good place nor suitable material with which to make roads, and few streams which did not go dry in the early summer. It was the howling center of remoteness, devoid of all law for ages past, and claimed by men who wanted it to be without law for all time to come.

The Piutes gaped in wonder at the newcomers, the wagons, the cattle, the women and children, but they ate the food offered them and smacked their lips in loud relish. These chesty Piutes were the men who had never in all their history been made to bend for anything nor for anybody. The thought of settling here in their midst, of bringing timid women and helpless children where they would have to be much of the time at the mercy of these savages - the thought of it was alarming. These were the men who knew their native rocks as rats know the holes of an old quarry, and into a thousand of these holes they could dart from sight where it would be suicidal to follow them. They had tormented the Navajos with their cruel tricks, sneaking beyond the river to steal horses, sheep, children, and women, whom they held for ransom or sold as slaves. The river had long since been the place of perilous contact from which the more peace-loving of each tribe learned to keep away, or to approach it with overtures of peace. What unthinkable tragedy would await the Mormons in the midst of these border Indians! It simply didn't do to dwell too seriously on the darker phases of the picture; they had come to find the most suitable place for the difficult work to begin, and after much deliberation they decided in favor of the little bottom where they had found old Peter and his wickiup. The mouth of Montezuma had the advantage of being fifteen miles east of the turbulent point of the main crossing of the river, where men of the two tribes most often clashed, and where the stream of white fugitives flowed northward and southward in a fitful, dangerous current. Having decided on the most tolerable place in the whole intolerable region, and having officially named it Montezuma, they appointed the Harriman and Davis families to become at once the permanent nucleus for the proposed

colony. Harvey Dunton was assigned to stay with them for the present, and the rest of the outfit was to get back to Cedar City where the main company for the colony was awaiting the word to start. Holding the fort in that border wilderness was a fearsome prospect, and the women and children looked longingly after Captain Smith and his men as they moved slowly from view over the sandhills up Montezuma Wash. They braced themselves with the thought and the hope that it would be but four or five weeks at most till the people of the colony would arrive and build all around them. Alas, these fond hopes were to be long and bitterly deferred; in fact they were never, never to be realized, and their eyes were to grow weary watching the hills for the welcome appearance of wagons or horsemen. They were to lie sleeplessly on their pillows listening in an anguish of suspense through many dreadful nights to the weird chant of Piutes around them, wondering in fear if it meant that some ugly plot was forming against them. And winter was to come creeping upon them while they waited, finding them short of the food and short of the clothing which they had expected the people of the colony to bring.

A friendly Indian came one day to warn them of warlike preparations among his people on the river above them, of angry natives who intended to make a raid on the little cabins. For the Davis and Harriman people and their little folk, with the wee little girl born in August, there was no retreat; no road over which they could hurry away, even if they had fat horses and a conveyance in which to travel. They were to stay right there and hold the fort, for Utah's safety from Indian depredations had been transferred to and hung upon this new lightning rod by the old San Juan. The two log cabins were no longer forts in a figurative sense only, for the windows were quickly barred, and portholes made in the walls through which to fire when the enemy appeared. And then they waited in awful suspense with hearts throbbing, and prayers to the Prince of Peace for the preservation of the peace they had come to establish. When the enemy came, stealthily in the night, and their soft footfalls were detected by alert ears, true to the lofty standards of peacemakers, the Harriman and Davis people opened their doors, inviting the braves, warpaint, weapons, and all, into the light of their open fireplace. Astonished at this show of splendid courage, the Indians found themselves disarmed while their bows and arrows were still in their own hands. The great Prince who had declared, "Blessed are the peacemakers," moved the hearts of the savages with love for these defenseless Mormons, and they breathed forth a warmth of love very different from the intention with which they had come. No matter that the keepers of the peace-fort were short of food, they let no one go hungry from their doors. From their little bag of wheat they ground enough in a handmill for their bread each day, and their hearts melted within them when they discerned that the little sack, like the widow's bin of meal, did not diminish though they took from it every day. Harvey Dunton, considering the threat of famine which hung over them, volunteered to go away with his gun, and live by what he could kill or bring back something for them to eat.