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Chapter 7

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 attacks and nature.

No trees shaded Bluff in 1880. The sun beat down on the white sand with terrific force, dazzling the eyes of all who looked from their improvised shelters, and the winds came loaded with clouds of dust and sand from the dry desert of the reservation. It buried things up as in snowdrifts. Food was always gritty. The settlers had started from southwestern Utah with foundation stock for herds of cattle, and they had brought with them as many good horses as they could afford. It was but a remnant of this foundation stock that had survived the hard winter in the rocks, and these few were indispensable to the life and growth of the colony. Yet all these animals, even the work teams and the milk cows had to hunt for forage away among the unprotected hills, and the range cattle had to be driven to very distant places, some of them beyond Clay Hill. O what a bonanza for these avaricious tribes who had been devouring each other on this borderland for generations! Horses to ride! Cattle to butcher! And the owners of these animals too few in numbers to dare anything but plead and preach -nothing like it ever before around this desolated crossing! Platte D. Lyman wrote in his diary, "We are about to be crucified between two thieves." With dark prospects of being left afoot, they spared one of their number to guard the horses twenty-four hours a day, but no thief appeared while the guard was watching. The hills took on an innocent expression, for the prowlers, peeping from gulches or summits, knew that the best way to beat this game was to keep out of sight. That ditch in the sand, and the new fields with their uncertain old bullfences to protect them from starving stock called loudly for the strength and attention of every able man, and they left the horses for a little while and then for a longer while, telling themselves they would be safe for a day-two days. Their horses were never safe for an hour, night or day, even though the ditch was empty and the fields burning up. Navajo Frank, robust and self-sufficient as a well-fed boar, took up his abode near Bluff and set out to monopolize opportunity as it was opened to him by these strange Mormons. If a horse were left unguarded, he got it. If a milk cow wandered far into the willows, she became his beef.

However, there was a brighter side to this picture, and some people saw in it a promise of better things in the future. Kumen Jones, one of the leading men, went among the Navajos to curry their favor and learn their language, and in his early contact with them he met Jim Joe, a man about his own age, twenty two years, and they loved each other from the first. Changing scenes and vexatious conditions failed to estrange them. Like David and Jonathan they embraced when they met. Jim's people had been trained from birth to steal, and the passion of thieving ran in their blood, but Jim Joe scorned to take anything not his own, or to tell what was not true. The splendid love-tie between these two men constituted the beginning of an important link which was to develop between their white and red brethren. By happy little incidents and by slow degrees it dawned on the toilers in Bluff that these Navajo people were not so bad as they had seemed to be. Among those who came to inspect this strange project on the San Juan Crossing, there appeared at intervals some very wonderful men and women who, without seeming to do so, pleaded the cause of their kinsmen and revealed a delightfully human and lovable side to the Navajo nature. Corpulent old Pee-jon-kalev, pleasant in form and face, came always with a smile or a refreshing joke. Even the children liked to see him. Pishleki, another pleasant and portly personality, made valuable contributions to the cause of good will by his cheerful words and fine sense of humor. An old brave and his grown daughter came quietly through the doorway one day, and stood listening in silence to soft music from an adjoining room. Suddenly the young woman dropped into a chair by a table, and bending over with her head on her wrists, she cried and sobbed like a broken-hearted child. The old man stood regarding her tenderly, and when asked why she cried, he explained that she had recently lost a little boy, and she could hear him calling in the music. An old Navajo mother came into a Bluff home where a weakly skeleton of a baby was fighting for its life with some problem of malnutrition: The Navajo woman bent tenderly over the child, breathing the love and solicitude which only a true mother can know. Next day she came- from her distant hogan with a little bucket of goat's milk to nourish the starving child. She continued to come from day to day with the bucket till the pinched little bones began to be hidden with healthy flesh.

From these unpremeditated pleas from the Navajos for good will, a sense of appreciation and sympathy like an awakening kinship began to grow like a little flower in a choking tangle of ugly weeds. Yet the steady disappearance of horses and cattle was unbearable. The people viewed it with dismay. It would have to be checked or they could not survive. They had no defense but the charm of entreaty as it was supposed to be employed in the new warfare, and it was strangely difficult to employ. At all events, they had not learned how to make it protect their livestock wandering unguarded on the range. With their wives and their children they had staked their fortunes and their lives on this unprecedented venture for the protection of the older settlements, and they hung suspended on their hopes of the Providence which had been promised as their deliverer. How long could it still be delayed before they would starve? Navajo Frank and his pack of greedy rivals gnawed at them every day like coyotes on a carcass, and

the Piutes in general gobbled them up slick and clean with every opportunity. Years of hair-raising experiences in this ancient trouble zone were to prove that these Piutes had been the melting-pot for Indian outlaws from all directions. They had discovered it as a criminal's paradise long before it was recognized as such by white men. It is well the hopeful toilers on the ditches and fences- and nondescript log houses did not see at first this inevitable phase of their monstrous task. Its fortunes good and bad were now all obscured in mists of uncertainty, and like a lamb between two snarling packs it wondered how long it was to survive. The Saints appealed to the Church leaders who had called them, and wanted to know whether, in the midst of all these things, they would still be expected to stay. If they were to stay, how were they to do it? In answer to their petition, Erastus Snow, Brigham Young, Jr., and Francis M. Lyman, came all the long, long way from Salt Lake City to review the situation and to give advice. They reminded the people that in the undisciplined hearts of these two native tribes rankled a savage-something which had menaced the peace of Utah for thirty years. The colony had been planted in this important position to transform them by the magic of kindness. It was intended, and the intention had carried thus far, that there were to be no more Indian scares among the old settlements. It would have been poor consolation to the people of Bluff to have it pointed out that no more Indian troubles in the rest of Utah would almost certainly mean that the quelling of the inevitable passion for war would be at the cost of troublesome times and frequent bloodshed in San Juan with its solitary town a hundred miles from all other white men. Nothing but the kind of magic which saved Jacob Hamblin from the flames could save them from destruction.

To Erastus Snow and his companions the people poured out the story of their hardships: robbers, white and red, stripping them of their property till they hardly had a horse to ride or a cow to milk. Like great kind fathers the three leaders listened to them as they would to the children they loved, reminding them that a great trust had been reposed in them, and much depended on the success of the mission they had been called to fill. "You are far from the more populous and more prosperous towns of the territory," they said, "and in your obscurity you may feel that you are forgotten by all the outside world. You may therefore conclude that your work is of no importance. But as the main fort on the front of the firing line, you are acting as sentinel for the rest of Utah. It is imperative that you stay and carry on. You are here to end the costly troubles which have been breaking out for a long time, and to forestall greater troubles which, but for you, will break out in the future." The people believed and accepted what they said. Their strongest intuitions assured them that merit could not fail in due time to come into its own. "If you are true men," declared Erastus Snow, "and if you do your part to uphold this mission, the Indians who are unfriendly to you will waste away." The people believed it. Yet when the three leaders had gone and the inspiration of their personalities could no longer be felt, when the people went from the meeting in the old bowery to find the prowlers still among their cattle, -they wondered how this "wasting away" would be accomplished, and how soon it would begin. If it didn't start promptly and with a vengeance, it might as well

never start at all. The three leaders had directed the people to build a meetinghouse, to stay together, and to make their homes in the form of a fort. The leaders had directed the people not to defy Providence by making places of residence remote from the little community; to be wise and patient in their afflictions and in all their dealings with the Indians; to refrain always from flying into a passion and doing some unwise thing; and to cherish every suggestion of friendship and love which should spring from their more pleasant associations. They built their houses joining in a hollow square covering about three acres, with all the doors and windows on the inside, peepholes or portholes in the backs of the houses look from the fort in every direction. Four heavy gates wide enough to admit a wagon opened into each corner of the fort, and the log meetinghouse stood in the north center looking south.

It was in that square with doors and windows on every side that the writer of this story first became aware that he was a living being in a most wonderful world with other living beings. The memory picture of that old fort is still vivid in his mind with the log walls, the dirt roofs and the quaint old-fashioned windows and doors all facing the big log meetinghouse as if in the attitude of worship. When Silas S. Smith, returning from petitioning the Territorial Legislature, caught up with his company settled at Bluff, he brought with him an authorization and appointment for the organization of a county to be named from the river, San Juan. But the order to organize, maintain, and finance any kind of civil government with laws and standards in this rendezvous of thieves and murderers was about as easy to give and as difficult to execute as the fabled order of the rats to bell the cat. All the same, the invincible spirit which had dared to ride on a rickety old wagon and yell orders to a four-head team of clumsy oxen while they dragged that wagon along a perilous trail over a "slantindiclar" surface, was not going to turn pale and surrender at the thought of hoisting the banner of law in a den of thieves. They organized a county with Bluff as its county seat, the home of every one of its officials, and practically the only permanent community within its wide border. This, however, is not forgetting that Montezuma, fifteen miles up the river, still had half a dozen families and hopes of carrying on. And now, with the little new organization hatched out in the doubtful shelter of the log fort, must they keep it hidden away there, and its existence a kind of secret lest the bullies and gunmen ride over it roughshod and rush it before it could get feathered out and develop its fighting spurs? To announce itself openly would be to flaunt the red rag in the bull's face, a challenge to the rule of anarchy where it had boasted of being supreme. And where would it get revenue to power its projects, enforce its orders, and build up the country? The big cattle kings that had come into the county from Colorado and located at La Sal and Blue Mountain, the formidable outfits with their gangs of terrible gunmen, had yelled their exultant farewell to taxation when they crossed the line, and they had surrounded themselves with fighting elements calculated to frighten any assessor from venturing into camp. The new county appointed Lemuel H. Redd, Jr., assessor and collector, who taking with him Kumen Jones, went to the cattle barons to assess their livestock. They told him with a confidential sneer that no taxes would be paid. "I'm going to

assess every horse and cow in your outfit," Lem Redd declared, aggressively, "and when the time comes, I'm going to collect every cent of it." He felt in his hands the splendid power of the big cause he represented, and when the time came, he collected in full. That was victory number one on the new firing line, but the enemy had been taken unaware, and would fortify more carefully for the future.

Besides the political organization which had been made for San Juan County, the visiting brethren from Salt Lake City had organized San Juan Stake, with Platte D. Lyman as president Thales Haskell, loved and trusted for his courage, his wisdom, and his unfaltering fidelity as an aid to Jacob Hamblin, was called by the Church to be interpreter, diplomat, and mediator between the people of the fort and the native tribes. Haskell was the soul of loyalty. He regarded his life and his ability as a trust reposed in him for the good of the needy wherever he could help them. He feared God too much to deal with any degree of unfairness, but if ever he feared the face of any man who walked the earth, nobody found it out. With solemn words of firmness and love he went to Navajo Frank and other chronic thieves, his gray hair and white beard in fitting accord with the dignity of his message. "Do you rob your friends?" he asked, in genial tones of familiar confidence, for Haskell knew the language of the natives as well as they knew it themselves. He knew them better than they knew each other. "We are your friends," he went on. "We have come a long way to sit down by you and help you. Why do you reward us evil for good by stealing our horses and cattle?" Some of them protested their innocence; some of them laughed mockingly. "If you steal from us, you will die," Haskell declared, solemnly. "Remember what I tell you." But those who had been stealing, stole again as industriously as before. Frank specialized in the business, in spite of Jim Joe, Tom Holiday, and other big souls who were in sympathy with Haskell and his people. They could remember the terrible corral at Bosque Redondo, half a generation before. Yet in these strange white people of the fort they had discovered something surprisingly different: the unusual lure of love, the winning of entreaty, the absence of threats to employ force. But the oldest brave among the Piutes had never heard of his people being corralled or of being brought back from the rocks where they fled redhanded with scalps and plunder. They had never known a Basque Redondo; they had never been punished in any way for their boldest outrage against human rights. They had always been supreme -they were still supreme. They mocked at Haskell and helped themselves with impudent banter.

Yet there were exceptions, even among these insolent Piutes. They cannot all be named here, but it would be unfair to overlook a certain slender youth in his early teens, a boy known as Henry, who caught the charm of Haskell's fervent words and was a true friend to Haskell and his people then, and through all the changing scenes of the years. Erastus Snow's counsel to stay together met with willing response; it was what the people wanted to do, what they had been doing, and yet a solitary deviation from that rule was destined in a few years to result disastrously and imperil the life of the mission. For the present, however, when

they rode the range or followed the long winding freight road, it was in numbers of two or more, and vigilance became a habit even while they slept. They had to unite on their ditch, their buildings, and all their enterprises, whether in and around the fort or distantly beyond it. They could not fence their fields separately but in a community enclosure. The passion for individual gain was lost in concern for the general good. When they planned a store, it had to be a cooperative institution: The San Juan Co-op, known as such with good credit. Their molasses mill and all their machinery of any size were community property. Difficulty and danger from all around compelled them to unite in one harmonious family, living in one circular house. Bishop Nielson. The head of the family, counseled them in all their affairs, helped them to make their decisions and adjust their difficulties. The sorrow of one was the sorrow of all, the success of one the joy of the community. They had gay parties and dramas and dances. Old Brother Cox and his fiddle helped to amplify the chivalry they had evolved at Hole-in-the-Rock, and it became more chivalrous with cultivation. It is not to be implied they had circular house. Bishop Nielson, the head of the family, counseled them in all their affairs, helped them to make their decisions and adjust their difficulties. The sorrow of one was the sorrow of all, the success of one the joy of the community. They had gay parties and dramas and dances. Old Brother Cox and his fiddle helped to amplify the chivalry they had evolved at Hole-in-the-Rock, and it became more chivalrous with cultivation. They believed they had been divinely guided to this strategic location for the sake of their important assignment. A wise Providence was delaying the day of their prosperity till they had established themselves in the hearts of most of their enemies. Their foundation stock of horses and cattle which should have increased and given them a claim to the range, had been reduced to a sorry trickle, and the range had claimed by the big herds from Colorado. They crowded out from the most profit, able areas of the country they had come to inherit. But the most stubborn adversary with which they had to contend, it might even be classed as enemy number four, was the San Juan River, implacable, unconquerable, on whose sand they had built their fort. That restless, roaring, moaning, gnawing old river had raged back and forth from cliff to cliff in that valley from the dim ages of antiquity with never a challenge from any source. It had been undisputed proprietor of the sand along its banks; it had ground that sand fine in its own mill and laid it down on one side or the other of its right-of-way while it took an excursion to the other side. It would of course come back, and anyone found squatting on its property would be duly evicted. That long ditch the people had made by their hard toil in what they trusted to be good old terra firma and the fields they had plowed and fenced and planted-in all this they were trespassers; that sand belonged to the river. The river made frequent demonstrations of how, in a few short hours, it could gather up its deposits and carry them away to occupy the place where they had been. At any unexpected hour, morning, noon, or night, behold, the ditch was empty, and following up its bank they found the river rippling gaily where the ditch had been a little while before. After the first year they discarded as worthless all the stock they had worked up in the ditch, and began again exactly as if there had been no ditch at all. The loss was distressing to contemplate, yet they were destined to

discard the stock in that ditch again, and still again after twenty years. They had saved seven hundred acres from the ravages of the river, and when the cost of their discarded ditch was divided by that number, it showed a tremendously high cost for water and little to show for it. Disappointment, loss, humiliation, and poverty continued as the stern schoolmaster teaching ethics of the new warfare to the people of the fort. It was borne in upon them that Bluff was not essentially an enterprise, but a mission; not a project for making gain, but for making sacrifice. It was generating in them the kind of gratitude which, when at length it saw their accounts crawling slowly up from destitution, would give special thanks and pay extra tithing.