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Chapter 9

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 al. 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.

The second year of the fort, like all its early years, was a year of major calamities. Exasperated to the limit, Haskell sought out Frank, and warned him again in solemn words, "If you don't quit stealing our horses, you'll die." Husky and rugged with never a pain nor symptom of decay, Frank laughed loud in contempt. The Mormons could never spring any such cheap scare as that on him. In bantering gusto he went right on with his thieflly enterprise. Haskell went also to the camps of the Piutes-it was with bowed head, slow step, and stooping with age, his hoary hair in full keeping with one who pleads. He told them why his people had come: "We were sent all this long way to be your friends-to help you, to show you a better way of life." He spoke their dialect as one born among them. He knew their customs, the meaning of certain tones and gestures which gave color and force to their speech. His words were few, and he drove them in like arrows by the courageous glance of his penetrating black eyes. He even knew how to be silent in the Piute language, which may seem like a contradiction, but his timely silence added double potency to what he said. He knew the resistless power exercised by Jacob Hamblin when their pathway was dark with danger and death. "If you steal our horses or our cattle, you will die," he affirmed, nailing them with his unblinking gaze. They flinched. They felt the thrust of his unusual power, the majesty of his prophetic appearance. Some of them declared they had never stolen from his people; some of them hung their heads in silence.

In the midst of the growing season, that year, with crops of corn and cane giving bright promise of cow feed and molasses in the fall, the ditch broke in one of its bad elbows three miles up the river. The ditch, in this nearly-level valley, was five miles long, and even with that length it had very little fall. That was five miles of daring challenge to the age-old supremacy of the San Juan-more than the river had ever endured, more than it would endure then. So it spit out its thick blue the freight up the hill on his back, sediment to fill the ditch up, and not content with that, it reached out through its sand to a big section of that ditch and licked it up clean. The fields of precious crops began to wither. Much of Bluff's man power was in Colorado or elsewhere working for provisions or trying to save the

remnant of their cattle, and the withering had to continue, no matter if they might wring their hands in anguish at sight of it. Flour sold in Durango that summer for sixteen dollars a hundred. If the trail over which they hauled it with their pony teams all the way to Bluff be taken into account, the journey required more time than it now takes to circumnavigate the globe. Not only was that flour an indispensable item of food in Bluff, but the sacks in which it came were also a big item of clothing. It was a common joke that on the underwear of children you would find in red and blue letters in spite of the washings, "Pride of Durango." A freight-team consisted then of never fewer than four horses, very often six, and seldom with one wagon only. The "trail-wagon" arrangement enabled the freighter to make the steep hills by taking one wagon at a time, where otherwise he would have to unload and carry an extremity to which all freighters had to become inured. With their "three span and trail," they followed that devious old track to and from Durango as if their very lives depended on it. The fact is that as their San Juan Co-op became a paying institution through the purchase of wool and pelts and blankets from the Navajos, and the sale to them of merchandise from Durango, freighting, was one of the very important factors on which the lives of the people did depend. That break in the dangerous elbow of the ditch could not be repaired in time, and the fidgety old San Juan, chewing ever with unsatisfied cravings on its banks, ate away a merciless stretch of ditch and reached for more. It not only slicked up that segment of ditch, but it also took away all the land for a long way where a ditch could be made and boiled victoriously against the valley wall, a hundred rods of smooth, vertical rock. Sickening prospect! No more water that year. Apparently no possible way of getting water along there again. And that would mean the end of Bluff. Yet the river was not one of the three evils they had been sent to overcome; they were compelled to fend themselves from it while they fought, but it is still a blustering outlaw while the other three have been licked to a whisper. It mattered little that no one could break the contrary old San Juan of its mean tricks, but if a pirate's empire should take root on the river's banks, and if the two wild tribes should be left to spread their de- predations beyond their homeland, that would matter much to all the surrounding states and territories. If the scum of the earth should be allowed to collect in the impregnable rocks of San Juan, it would be the most dreadful den ever known since the time of the old buccaneers.

One day in September two fellows came riding in through the gate of the fort on jaded horses. They wanted to trade horses, though they saw no horses in the fort. They contrived by sly and apparently indifferent questions to ascertain where the horses of the people were, and nobody realized till afterwards that it had been made altogether too clear that most of the Bluff horses were in Butler Wash, and that the wash was ten miles off to the northwest. The strangers rode leisurely out through the gate and headed without concern for nowhere. Two weeks later some of the riders came in from Butler Wash to report that the horses for which they had been sent were not to be found. By "cutting a sign" twenty miles wide, the hunters found at The Twist the dim tracks of horses going westward which they believed to be their own because of a solitary mule track

among them. What should they do? Following these tracks into the maze of trees and rocks was dangerous business, but without these horses everything at Bluff would be brought to a standstill. They were needed at once to begin on the ditch, if ever they were to begin again at all, and if they made no start again at the ditch, they would need these horses to get them out of the country. Hurrying home the hunters reported to Bishop Nielson, and he advised that they follow the tracks very slowly, keeping safely behind till the thieves reached the towns in western Utah where help would be available in making the arrest. Lem Redd, Jr., Hyrum Perkins, and Joseph (Jody) A. Lyman were to undertake this dangerous assignment. Friends and loved ones watched the three men leave the fort and ride off over the sandhills to the west. All they could do was to watch with aching hearts, realizing that the three men might follow the tracks a month or six weeks and return in safety after all that time, or they might be waylaid in three or four days and lie wounded or dead a month or six weeks before a searching party would go to find them. When Lem Redd and his party took up the trail at The Twist, they wondered that the tracks were so much more fresh on top than at the bottom of the hill. At Cane Gulch and other places beyond they were disturbed at the increasing newness of the trail, and they waited deliberately at different places to let the two fellows get well beyond the river before they appeared at the crossing. The crossing now was not Hole-in-the-Rock; the rains had scooped the deep cleft clear of all its hard-shoveled sand, played havoc with "Uncle Ben's" peg-anchored dug-way along that "slantindiclar" surface, and no wagon was ever to slide down nor to toil up through the chute at Hole-in-the-Rock again. A place had been found thirty or forty miles up the river near the mouth of Bull Frog at what came to be known as Hall's Creek, and the crossing that was improvised there by the two Hall brothers, was known as Hall's Crossing. Approaching this Hall's Crossing after making what they thought was sufficient delay, when the men from Bluff reached the east brow of the cliff overlooking the Colorado River, they saw one of the horse thieves and his string of stolen horses leaving the west bank. That was a strong signal to the men from Bluff to go into the delaying business again, for there were still seventy-five miles of uninhabited wilderness between them and the first little frontier towns west of the river. So they deliberately killed time in getting their outfit across; they traded stories with the Hall brothers and learned all they could about the thieves, imagining all the time that those thieves were hurrying away, now that they had seen someone in pursuit.

When at length the three left the river, they decided to make still another delay for good measure, and coming to a little cutoff trail across a gravel bench, they dismounted and sat down to play jacks, a popular way at that time of disposing of unwanted minutes or hours. The thieves had not known of this cutoff, and had followed the wagon track out around the rocky point of the bench, which was at what could be called the toe of a kind of horseshoe bend in the road. The fact that the thieves had lost time in following that long crook in the wagon track, made it all the more necessary to give them extra opportunity to get a good head start. The two wanted no head start, and refused to take it. When they saw the

big rocks at the point of the bend, they decided that was their ideal place for an ambush. They took their horses and outfit on a safe distance farther, tied them all to some brush and trees, and went back afoot with their guns to the big rocks at the point to wait for the men whom they had seen as they left the river. When that jack game had given the outfit ahead ample opportunity to a good distance in the lead, the Bluff men rode on across the gravel bend, and at the other heel of this horseshoe bend in the wagon track, they ran right into the whole outfit of the thieves-packs, horses, everything but the two fellows themselves and their guns. The Bluff men cocked their guns, rode into the outfit and loosed them all from the trees and brush, and started back with them in a rush for the river, while the horse thieves waited eagerly behind the big rocks at the point of the bend. Down Hall's Creek in a thundering herd Lem Redd and his companions drove their horses to the west bank of the river, and prepared to get them across with all possible speed to the east side. But the roar of violent hoofs on the gravel drifted away to the ears of the thieves behind the rocks, and they crept cautiously out to investigate. Finding that cutoff trail and the deep-cut tracks leading back to the river, they knew they were afoot, no blanket in which to sleep, not a bite to eat. They ran frantically towards the crossing and sneaked into some thick willows to fire on the boat. Lem Redd, cool and resourceful, had anticipated this very thing, and he lay hidden with his gun to protect his men while they worked. When he saw the willow moving, he sent a bullet in there, and the two sneaks got back. Then the five men worked in feverish haste to get everything, including the belongings of the Hall brothers, to the east side of the river, before the thieves could fire on them from some other quarter. Leading a string of horses behind the boat, they shoved out into the river with the last load, the coast apparently clear. The towering wall of the river to the west of them reached up and up, sloping gradually near the top to a half-level brow from which the base of the cliff was not visible. The middle of the river was the nearest point to the bottom which could be seen from the top. When that last boatload of men and swimming horses reached the middle of the big stream, two shots rang out above them, and two bullets struck in the boat-seat, barely missing one of the Hall brothers where he sat pulling at one of the oars. Lem Redd, wary and watchful, was ready to return the fire at once, but shooting with a pistol and from the unsteady boat he had little chance of hitting one of the two heads peeping from the top of the rock so far above. His shooting did, however, have the merit of keeping those two cowards from staying up in sight long enough after their first shots to take careful aim. The two first bullets striking so near to that oarsman threw him into a panic of alarm, and springing from his place he ran to the other end of the boat, leaving the boat to begin turning aimlessly in midstream, and drifting towards a pass between vertical walls below, from which they could not return. A few minutes more and they could not possibly make it to the bar on the east side but would hit the smooth wall, and nothing could save them from the narrows and the rapids of the winding canyon below. As well be shot as to drift around that bend and capsize in a whirlpool! Lyman and Perkins had their hands full with the swimming horses, and an oar going on one side of the boat only. Lem Redd grasped the situation-something drastic had to be done at once. He had unusual power of

rising to emergencies, and turning his gun on the oarsman he ordered him on pain of immediate death to get back to his oar. They headed again for the bank with a fighting chance of working their way through the current to a landing, and they strained at the oars till the veins stood up big and blue on their temples. All this time the bullets came whistling down into the water or in the boat with such accuracy of aim as they dared to take in the face of Redd's vigilant fire. The thieves fired thirty or more shots while the boat was on the water, although it was a big target as seen from above, it was moving, and its return bullets prevented any careful aim. But the minute the boat struck the bank, it became still, and the return fire stopped, for all five men were busy getting the horses out of the water and the boat anchored. With less fear now of getting hurt by the hot lead from Lem Redd's pistol, the two fellows above took more deadly aim, and one of their bullets shattered the bone in Jody Lyman's leg just above the knee. The four dragged him up a sand bank towards the willows, while bullets from the cliff whined into the sand around them as fast as the thieves could shoot. When the men reached cover, panting and out of breath, they got safely out of sight and lay still till dark. As soon as the night was too thick for them to be seen, they gathered their horses and packed up, while the thieves called through the darkness from the other side of the moaning stream, begging them to come over with the boat. They made no answer, no light, and no unnecessary noise. When they lifted Lyman on his horse, he fainted with pain, and they had to hold him in the saddle while they moved slowly off to climb the rugged east wall of the gorge and head slowly away into the dry shadscale desert towards Bluff a hundred miles distant.