

THE MORMON ROAD

The trackless wilderness was an awful, impenetrable dread, which lay across the western horizon, during all the early years of our national life. A few intrepid explorers had gone into it, and brought back marvelous reports, but news was precious in those days, and over all the region of the Middle West that dread still hung. The story of Lewis and Clark, and that wonderful journey to the Pacific, was not generally accepted, and its full meaning understood. Up to 1830 the Mississippi River remained the border of a vast unknown, where wide, impassable deserts and still more impassable mountains of rock, were the homes of wild beasts and still wilder men.

But the general prosperity of the first thirty-five years of the nineteenth century, the increase of wealth and knowledge which gave birth to the era of internal improvements, and built the Erie Canal and the Cumberland road, was pressing for an outlet. That great reservoir of virtue and grit which had been so long gathering was about to break forth. That magnificent genius of the American people, which Horace Greeley so well typifies, was to express itself in a great Westward movement—in that unparalleled energy, in the undaunted heroism, in the unconquerable will, that overran and subdued the deserts and mountains of our vast Western domain; and within the space of little more than half a century has transformed its wild areas into peaceful, prosperous, progressive communities. It is this which has amazed the countries of the old world, and has given us our position of power among them.

So complete has been this work that the present generation, which rides across the continent in the sumptuous cars of the railroads, has no conception of what those first explorers did, or what that work was. So rapidly has it all taken place that there still remain, alive among us, a few whitened heads who were witnesses—who were among it and saw it all.

By the year 1840 the advancing tide of emigration had rolled on to the wide, muddy waters of the Missouri River. Not all the territory east of that had been occupied, but the advancing crests of the wave, wrought up by reports coming in from the Pacific—of temperate climes, of fertile fields, of wealth inexhaustible, bordered by deep rivers and the ocean which afforded highways to the markets of the world, was gathering its strength for that mad effort. At different points along the Missouri had the waves of this immigration gathered, to rest and,

in some degree, prepare itself for the supreme effort which they felt lay ahead.

The marvelous fact about the first four emigrations to Oregon is that they got there at all. There were no roads. There were only wandering trails made by fur traders to their few scattered posts, or paths of adventurers bent on exploration. There had been no surveys or routes or marking of directions, or maps of the country, that were of very much value. Colonel Bridger complained to Brigham Young, when they met at Green River, that the map of J. C. Fremont, of 1843, was incorrect and misleading. From the Missouri River to the Columbia, with the exception of the trading post of Fort Laramie, and possibly of Fort Hall, there were no relief stations—no aids to emigration westward. When it came to streams, it must plunge in; at narrow defiles, filled with rocks and fallen timber, it must drag itself through; at precipitous mountain ridges it must pull itself up and let itself down with ropes. And if any one became sick or fell by the way, he must be left to perish, or be borne along on the backs of others. And these first emigrations did not take the same way. Because of the greatness of the difficulties, or the weariness of those going, they were taking new ways and making cut-offs. It was yet a trackless wilderness, and only the distant Oregon beyond. For 900 miles along the wide, treacherous Platte and up the Sweetwater to South Pass, and then about 700 miles over mountains and streams, through forests and defiles, across the Green, and Big Sandy, and Black, and Bear, and Snake Rivers to the Columbia, there was only the wreckage—the remains of camps—the bones of animals and men, to mark the way of the onflowing crests of this emigration.

In 1831 Joseph Smith had gone west of the Missouri, at Independence, and set his stake; and in a very solemn service had consecrated the ground for a Mormon Zion. He had a special revelation, denoting that place as the future home of the Saints. Elder A. S. Gilbert had opened there a general store. And from there the "Evening and Morning Star" was issued till it was burned in 1833. The Mormons had obtained large tracts of land about Independence and along up the Missouri, and made considerable settlements. These were a great aid to the first emigrations as resting places and outfitting for the great journey before.

Whatever view we take of the great Mormon movement, we cannot fail to recognize the very important part it had in the settlement of the great West. It was essentially a "westward movement." It employed the strongest elements of our nature—the religious, the family, the patriotic and the home loving—and bound them together in a long con-

tinued, unwearied, supreme effort to find a place to establish themselves. And the material it had, both from our own peoples and from its accessions from foreign nations, was of the best for such a purpose. History must acknowledge that.

On the eastern bank of the Mississippi River, opposite the point where the northern line of Missouri would meet it, where the river makes a wide bend to the west, there was, in 1846, the Mormon city of Nauvoo. It was the largest city in the State of Illinois, twice the size of Chicago at that time. Colinel Thomas Kane, a brother of Dr. Kane, the Arctic explorer, who saw it at that time, says: "The city is of great dimensions, laid out in beautiful order; the streets are wide and cross each other at right angles; it rises on a gentle incline from the rolling Mississippi; at your side is the temple, the wonder of the world; round about and beneath you you may behold handsome stores, large mansions and fine cottages. Upon the noble Mississippi are numerous steamships, carrying the Mormons from all parts of the world to their homes." Joseph Smith himself describes the temple: "It is built of white limestone, wrought in a superior style; is 128 by 83 feet square, near 60 feet high." It was surmounted by a pyramidal tower, ascending by steps 170 feet from the ground. The Mormons having grown rich and powerful under persecutions, expended nearly a million dollars upon this edifice. It was two-storied. Conspicuous in the first was the great baptismal laver, resting on 12 full-sized oxen, with its noble ascent, all carved in marble. Besides the two main halls there were chambers, and all richly decorated with signs and mystic letters and insignia. The gilded angel of its lofty spire was visible from afar. This was a weather vane, and was afterward taken to Barnum's Museum, New York. Besides the large tracts of land on the east side of the river, the Mormons owned thousands of acres on the west side in the half-breed tract—part of the town of Keokuk, the whole of Nashville, and part of a settlement named Montrose. The troubles which had been growing up between the Gentiles and the Mormons had by the latter part of 1845 broken out into open warfare. Joseph Smith, the prophet, and his brother had been killed. After much effort Governor Ford had secured an armistice and a promise from the Mormons to move as "soon as water should run and grass grow in the spring." Accordingly, in January, 1846, a proclamation was issued by the elders announcing immediate removal. At that time there were 20,000 inhabitants in the City of Nauvoo, and by the middle of October of that year not a Mormon inhabitant remained.

The Iowa Journal of Politics and History for January, 1914, has a map of the road which the Mormons built across the state of

Iowa. The western half of the state, at that time, had no settlements. For nearly the entire distance, they made the road, and bridged the streams. And while it was soon abandoned, because it did not follow section lines, yet it was noted upon the surveys, which soon after took place. They also established at Gardan Grove, Mount Pisgah and Kanessville (now Council Bluffs) camps where crops were raised and resting places built for the weary emigrants who should follow. A ferry was made across the Missouri, nearly opposite Point aux Poules, where they gained a favorable crossing, by making a deep cut for the road through the steep right bank. And flat-bottomed scows were built. They then passed up the river to a point six miles north of the city of Omaha, where they set a stake, and built dwellings for the winter. This place, which they named Winter Quarters, is now called Florence. Says Colonel Kane: "On a pretty plateau overlooking the river, they built more than 700 houses in a single town, neatly laid out, and fortified with breast-work, stockade, and blockhouses. It had, too, its 'Tabernacle of the Congregation,' and various large workshops, and mills and factories, run with water-power." The printing press was set up, and the "Millennial Star" was regularly issued. Preparations were made for the pioneer road-making expedition, that was to start out early in the spring. Winter Quarters became the Mormon rendezvous, and was not abandoned till 1853. To this place the pioneer expedition returned in October, 1847. Here that brilliant coup de etat was executed, by which the Mormon government was reorganized, and Brigham Young became the supreme head. From here was sent out by him that remarkable document,—the only revelation which Brigham has ever given, "As the Word and Will of the Lord." To the saints in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, and adjacent islands and countries, saying,—“Emigrate as speedily as possible to this vicinity. Let all the saints who love God more than their own dear selves,—and none else are saints,—gather without delay to the place appointed, bringing their gold, their silver, their copper, their zinc, their tin, and brass and iron and choice steel and ivory and precious stones, etc., etc.”

The number of Mormons in England and Scotland, in June, 1850, was 27,863. For two years before 1845, thirteen vessels, wholly engaged by Mormons, for the emigration of their people, quitted Liverpool for New Orleans. During the year 1850, the Mormon emigration from England amounted to 2,500. Messrs. Pilkington and Wilson, the shipping agents at Liverpool, wrote: "With regard to Mormon emigration, and the class of persons of which it is composed, they are generally farmers, and mechanics, with some few clerks and surgeons, etc., etc."

They are generally intelligent and well-behaved, and many of them are highly respectable."

When the Pioneer Company left Winter Quarters, early in April, 1847, it is plain that they had no definite objective point. Brigham Young, whenever he was asked, would reply evasively, "That the Lord would direct," or "They would know the place when they got there." There is conclusive evidence to show, that so far as they had any point, that was California. But where California was, how far towards the east it extended, or how they were to get there, they did not know. Before they left Nauvoo, Elder Jesse Little had been sent east with instructions, "If our government shall offer any facilities for emigrating to the western coast, embrace these facilities. * * * And in the event of the President's recommendation to build block-houses and stockade forts on the road to Oregon, becoming a law, we have encouragement of having that work to do, and under our peculiar circumstances, we can do it with less expense to the government than any other people." Elder Little reached Washington in May, 1846, and later went to New York and Philadelphia. At the latter place he met Col. Thomas Kane, who was a brother of Dr. Kane, the arctic explorer, and a prominent man, whom he interested in the matter. Colonel Kane went to Washington and received instructions from President Taylor, and immediately set out with Elder Little for St. Louis. They went together to General Kearney at Fort Leavenworth, and accompanied by Captain Allen went on to the Mormon headquarters. They reached Kanesville, in September, 1846. Here the famous Mormon Battalion was raised, consisting of 420 men. The men were enlisted for twelve months, were to receive \$40.00 apiece bounty, and were to be mustered out on the Pacific coast, in California. They were paid \$20,000 at Fort Leavenworth, that fall. There are two or three references in the "Times and Seasons" which show that they had some idea of Oregon, and even of Nootka Sound. A song, composed by Elder Taylor, and sung upon the westward march, was "The Upper California, O that's the land for me" and "along the great Pacific sea." Bancroft says: "There is no evidence that Brigham Young knew anything about Salt Lake, until he met Bridger sixty miles west of South Pass." It is a curious fact also, that at the meeting with Pegleg Smith, at South Pass, Brigham made an appointment to meet Smith two weeks later at Bear river, and go with him into the Boise country. Smith failed to keep his appointment.

Preparations had been going on at winter quarters all winter of 1846-47, and early in the spring the road-making expedition was ready to start. It consisted of one hundred and forty-three picked men, seventy-three wagons, and all the horses, oxen, plows and other tools which they

might need. A rawhide boat capable of carrying 1,800 pounds, two sextants and other surveying instruments which had come out from England, and other scientific instruments. Orson Pratt had constructed an odometer which would actually measure the distance. Orson Pratt, says Jules Remy, had considerable scientific attainment. He could calculate latitude and longitude, measure elevation by the barometer, and make analyses of mineral springs and ores.

Brigham Young himself took charge of and led this expedition. At the Elkhorn River they were obliged to leave the bridge unfinished, with "its seven great piers and abutments." They continued on the north side of the Platte, even after reaching Grand Island. For at this point the Oregon trail touched the river and went along the south side. But the Mormons wished to escape Gentile annoyance, and they also wished to make a road of their own. It is their oft-repeated saying that "they made the road, bridged the streams, and killed the snakes." Every ten miles Brigham himself set up a stake to mark the way. Two days before reaching Fort Laramie they came to an old post, probably Fort Platte. On June 1 they came to the north side of the Platte, opposite Fort Laramie.

Here they were 522 miles from winter quarters. Owing to a drought, they had found feed very scarce, and had been compelled to use feed they had brought. Brigham took the boat and crossed over to the fort, which was a small, rude trading post. Here, after consultation, they decided to transfer to the south side of the Platte. At Laramie they were joined by a company of Mormons from Pueblo, consisting of sick members of the battalion who had been left there, with others who had joined them there.

From Fort Laramie to the crossing of the North Platte, 124 miles, their route was, in general, along the Oregon trail. But Bancroft, quoting from manuscript, says: "There was no trail after leaving Laramie, going over the Black Hills, except very rarely. For a short distance before reaching the Sweetwater we saw a wagon track. It was a great surprise and a great curiosity." At the crossing of the Platte they built a ferry-boat, and left ten men to maintain the ferry and assist subsequent emigrants. While here they were able to cross over a party bound for Oregon, by which they added considerably to their store of provisions. Passing up the Sweetwater, they came to Independence Rock and Devil's Gate, and on June 26 reached South Pass. So far their route had been over an open country, and they had found no very great difficulties. The incline to South Pass was so gradual that they scarcely knew the watershed when they reached it.

Here they met T. L. Smith, commonly known as Pegleg Smith, who

had been a companion of Jedediah Smith, a famous explorer. He so presented the charms of the Boise country to the Mormon party that they agreed to turn north with him to that region, which was prevented by Smith's failure to keep the appointment which he made. From here they followed Fremont's trail to Green River, where they met Elder Brannon and 140 of his party. The elder had sailed from New York in January of the previous year with 600 Mormons for California. There they had found a very inviting country, had begun settlements, and now had come on to meet Brigham Young and bring him on the way. A few days farther on they met, on the Black Fork, a portion of the Battalion. This Battalion had been disbanded in Upper California. A portion of them had re-enlisted, forming the Mormon company. The rest had sought work, and some of these were working for Captain Sutter when gold was first discovered. The Mormons claim they discovered gold in California. They certainly obtained considerable gold, some of which was used in the purchase of land at Salt Lake.

Sixty miles west of South Pass was the important meeting with Colonel Bridger, Miles Goodyear and five others, which evidently had much influence in determining the future course of the Mormons, for we find that in the spring of the following year they bought of Miles Goodyear, who held it by a Spanish grant, the whole of the Ogden River valley from the mountains to the shore of the great lake, which includes the site of the present City of Ogden. From there they went south to Bridger's Fort, and from there west to the Bear River.

Colonel Fremont gives a delightful description of this beautiful and fertile valley: "The valley is from three to four miles wide, and perfectly level. The extensive bottoms are covered with rich grass—the water is excellent, and the timber sufficient, affording a natural resting and recruiting station."

The difficulties, which had been increasing ever since they left South Pass, became very much greater from this place on. Here Brigham Young was taken sick, and had to be carried in Elder Wilford Woodruff's carriage. Elder Orson Pratt was sent ahead with twenty-three wagons and forty-three men to make the road. At Bear River they left the Oregon trail, and seem to have taken the Donner trail, which was made the year before, and which was plainer. This led down Echo Canon to a junction with the Webber, then up the Webber southerly twelve miles, then westerly into Parley's Park, then across the hills northerly to the head of Emigration Canon, and thence to the valley.

Portions of the way here were exceedingly difficult. They passed through narrow canons whose overhanging walls were from 800 to 1,200 feet high. They were compelled to follow the beds of streams filled

with boulders and logs. At times the timber was so dense that they could scarcely crawl through on their knees. Once, in the face of a steep, rocky hill, Elder Pratt turned back, but after much search he could find no better way. They could only make four and a half, six and six and a half miles on three successive days. They came out suddenly on an open plateau overlooking the valley. Says the church historian: "On the morning of the 24th of July, when Brigham Young and the body of the pioneers first got a glimpse of the Great Basin, there was a universal exclamation, 'The Land of promise, the Land of Promise—held in reserve by the hand of God for the resting place of his saints!'"

They had made a wagon road for 1,100 miles through the trackless wilderness. Colonel Thomas Kane, in his address in Philadelphia in 1852, said: "The Mormons have laid out for themselves a road through the Indian territory over 400 leagues in length, with substantial, well-built bridges, fit for the passage of heavy artillery, over all the streams, except a few great rivers where they have established permanent ferries." In the fall of that same year (1847) 566 wagons came over it, and in June of the following year 623 wagons, 175 horses and mules, and 1,529 oxen and cattle. And within the next three years over 20,000 people came over it to the Salt Lake Valley.

It is impossible to estimate how much the making of that Mormon road contributed to the settling of the West. It is a significant fact that, for a good part of its way, from Omaha to Salt Lake, the Union Pacific Railway runs over the route of the old Mormon road. It aided vastly the great rush to the gold mines of California that immediately followed its completion. It was a great aid to the emigrations to Oregon and Washington of subsequent years. It transformed the dry and barren waste of the Salt Lake Basin into one of the most fertile and beautiful regions of the whole country, and formed a much needed and convenient resting place for every one of the weary travelers who subsequently went to the Pacific Coast.

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