

CHAPTER IX

MORMONS AND ARGONAUTS

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE MORMON CHURCH—EARLY MORMON COLONIES—OPPOSITION—THE MORMON BATTALION—WINTER QUARTERS—THE EMIGRATION—THE SCARE OF 1857-58—JOHNSON'S EXPEDITION—WESTWARD HO—THE ARGONAUTS—DISCOVERY OF GOLD IN CALIFORNIA—THE EXCITEMENT—THE OVERLAND ROUTE—SUCCESS AND FAILURE—SUTTER AND MARSHALL.

The story of the Mormon emigration westward is intimately interwoven with the history of the State of Wyoming. That event is more closely related to the settlement of the country than was the emigration to Oregon or California for the reason that quite a number of the Mormons stopped at various places on the way westward and became permanent settlers. In connection with the story of this emigration, although not an essential part of Wyoming's history, it may be of interest to the reader to know something in general of this peculiar sect.

The Mormon Church, or, more properly speaking, the "Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints," was founded by Joseph Smith in 1830. Smith was born at Sharon, Vt., in December, 1805. His mother took a deep interest in religious matters, though at times she was somewhat visionary. It is said that she predicted soon after her marriage that a prophet would come out of her family. When Joseph was about ten years of age the family removed to Palmyra, N. Y., where he acquired the merest rudiments of an education—all the schooling he ever received. In the spring of 1820 a series of religious meetings were held in Palmyra. Toward the close of the revival, Joseph, who had inherited from his mother a fondness for all subjects of a supernatural nature, announced that he had seen a vision, in which two personages appeared above him in the air. "They told me," said he, "to join no denomination, for all their creeds are an abomination in the sight of the Lord."

His second vision came to him on September 21, 1823, about three months before he was eighteen years old. In this vision, according to his account, an angel appeared to him and revealed the hiding place of the golden plates upon which was recorded the history of the ancient peoples of America. The next day, guided by the angel, he went to the hill of Cumorrah, near Manchester, N. Y., and saw the plates, but the angel would not let him take them away. Each year thereafter for three years, on the 22d of September, he visited the place and saw the plates, but each time the angel told him that the time for their removal had not yet come. On September 22, 1827, he paid his fourth visit to the place and again saw the golden plates. This time the angel gave him permission to take them away. As they were written in a strange language, he was endowed

with the supernatural power of translating them into English. More than two years were spent in this work, but in the spring of 1830 the "Book of Mormon" was published.

EARLY MORMON COLONIES

Converts to the new faith came in considerable numbers and a colony was founded at Kirtland, Ohio. Opposition to the Mormons soon developed and Smith had a "revelation" to go to Independence, Mo., and build a temple. But the Mormons were no more popular in Independence than they had been in Ohio, and in the fall of 1833 they were driven out of the place. They then took refuge in what is now Caldwell County, Missouri, where they founded the Town of Far West and again began the erection of a temple. Once more they became unpopular with the people living in the vicinity and Governor Boggs issued a proclamation ordering them to leave the state. They were expelled by force in the fall of 1838 and took refuge at Nauvoo, Ill., which city they founded.

Meantime elders of the church had been sent to Europe for the purpose of winning converts, and about the time the main body settled at Nauvoo they were joined by eight shiploads of converts from beyond the sea. The political leaders of Illinois saw that the Mormons were likely to become a power in public affairs and the Legislature granted them a charter for the Town of Nauvoo "which conferred extravagant and dangerous power upon the municipal officials." An Iowa writer says: "Under this charter Nauvoo became a breeding place for outlaws, and probably the true story of all the outrages committed by these outlaws will never be told. Fugitives from justice sought refuge there, and if anyone should be arrested witnesses could always be found to prove an 'alibi.'"

Governor Boggs of Missouri was shot and seriously wounded in 1842, and the attempted assassination was charged against the Mormons because of his proclamation four years before. An opposition was thus started, which was continued until in January, 1845, when the Illinois Legislature revoked the Nauvoo charter. In the meantime Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum had been arrested and confined in the jail at Carthage, Ill., where both were killed by a mob on the night of June 27, 1844. The loss of their prophet and the continued opposition on the part of the people of Illinois determined the Mormons to seek a more congenial climate.

Brigham Young was chosen as Smith's successor. He divided the "forces of Israel," as the members of the church were called, into companies of hundreds, fifties and tens, and in the spring of 1846 they began their emigration westward. In their march across Iowa they moved with as perfect a precision as an army of well trained soldiers. By the middle of May, 2,000 wagons and 15,000 Mormons were on their way to the Missouri River. It was a wet, backward spring, the roads in many places were almost impassable and they made slow progress. Several hundred stopped at Garden Grove and Mount Pisgah, in Iowa, for the purpose of raising a crop. On the 14th of June the advance guard, under the leadership of Brigham Young, reached the Missouri River opposite where the City of Omaha now stands and there established a "camp of Israel" until a ferry-boat could be built.

THE MORMON BATTALION

The war with Mexico was then in progress and the United States Government sent Capt. James Allen to the Mormon camp with instructions to raise a battalion of five companies among the emigrants. The Mormons readily answered the call and the volunteers were organized by Col. Thomas L. Kane, a brother of the Arctic explorer. At Fort Leavenworth each Mormon volunteer received a bounty of forty dollars, which was sent back to his family, Colonel Kane taking it upon himself to see that the money reached its destination. The battalion was assigned to the command of Col. Stephen W. Kearney and marched to Santa Fé, thence to California, where it arrived after the war was over. Some of the Mormons then worked in the construction of Sutter's millrace and were there when the first gold was discovered. Others returned to their families which had been left in the camp on the Missouri River.

WINTER QUARTERS

After the departure of the battalion, those who remained behind, feeling the loss of so many of their best men, decided to establish suitable quarters for the approaching winter. The first step was to insure the friendship of the Pottawatomie and Omaha Indians—the former tribe occupying the lands on the east side of the Missouri and the latter the lands on the west side. A council was held with the Omaha, at which Brigham Young made known the wants of his people. At the close of his remarks, the chief, Big Elk, replied as follows:

"My son, thou hast spoken well. All you have said I have in my heart. I have much to say. We are poor. When we go to hunt game in one place we meet with an enemy, and so in another place our enemies kill us. We do not kill them. I hope we shall be friends. You may stay on these lands two years or more. I hope we shall be friends. Our young men shall watch your cattle. We should be glad to have you trade with us. We will warn you of danger from other Indians."

Young applauded the old chief's speech, but he was not willing to accept a mere verbal promise for the possession of the land. He drew up a formal lease for five years, which was signed by Big Elk and other leading Omaha chiefs. After the council was over the Mormons gave a banquet to the Indians. A ferry was then established across the Missouri and the "Winter Quarters" were located where the Town of Florence, Neb., now stands, about six miles up the river from Omaha. Here the Mormons built several hundred log cabins, nearly one hundred sod houses, and an octagon council house. Mills and workshops were also built and operated. In the fall of 1846 it was estimated that there were fifteen thousand Mormons encamped in the Missouri Valley on the Omaha and Pottawatomie lands. They had raised a crop and, although they divided the products of their gardens and fields with their Indian friends, their industrial activity destroyed so much timber and drove away the game that the Omaha chiefs complained to their agents. An investigation showed that the Indians had good grounds for their complaints and the Mormons were ordered to vacate the Omaha country.

THE EMIGRATION

On January 14, 1847, Brigham Young had a revelation to seek a new location farther to the west. It is possible that the order of the Indian agent to vacate the Omaha lands had something to do with the "revelation," but at any rate Oliver P. Gleason, George Chatelaine, Miles Bragg, J. P. Johnson, Solomon Silver and William Hall were appointed a committee by Brigham Young to go on in advance and select a site for the new settlement. This committee reached Fort Laramie in the spring, where they learned something of the Great Salt Lake Valley and employed O. P. Wiggins and Jim Beckwourth to guide them to the place.

Meantime the main body of Mormons did not wait for the return of the committee, but hurried forward their preparations to obey the order of the Indian agent. On April 14, 1847, just three months after Young's "revelation," the first company of 143 persons, three of whom were women, with 73 wagons loaded with provisions and supplies, left the winter quarters for an unknown "Land of Promise." This company was under the leadership of Heber C. Kimball and was accompanied by Brigham Young as far as the Elkhorn River—a distance of about twenty-five miles. A few days later a company of 1,553 persons, with 560 wagons and a number of domestic animals left, under the guidance of John Taylor and Parley P. Pratt. Early in May a third company, numbering 1,220 people, with 397 wagons, under the personal direction of Brigham Young, followed those who had gone before. Heber C. Kimball turned over the command of the first company to Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow and returned to lead another company, which left the winter quarters in July. It consisted of 226 wagons and 662 persons. A week or so later Willis Richards led 526 persons, with 169 wagons, up the Platte Valley, and with the departure of this company the Omaha lands were vacated. Those who did not go west recrossed the Missouri and settled on the Pottawatomi lands in Western Iowa.

As the first company went up the north side of the Platte River, guide posts were set up at intervals for the benefit of those in the rear. On Buffalo skulls along the route were painted the dates when such places were reached, and inside the skulls were placed written communications conveying information as to the route it was intended to follow. Aided by these instructions and the guide posts, Young's company overtook the second detachment near the present boundary line between Nebraska and Wyoming, where both encamped on May 29, 1847. Here an incident occurred that demonstrated Brigham Young's qualifications as a leader. The morning of the 30th was cold and damp and some of the men wanted to wait until the weather conditions were improved before continuing the journey. About half past ten Young, who had assumed command, gave the order to harness up. The response was slow and Young ordered a council to be called. When all were assembled he told the delinquents plainly that he intended to be obeyed, and if they were unwilling to accept his authority they might remain where they were or return east. This little speech had the effect of bringing the recalcitrants into line and by hard traveling Fort Laramie was reached on the 1st of June. James Bordeau, the agent of the American Fur Company, gave the Mormons a cordial welcome and furnished them with some much needed supplies.

On June 12, 1847, the caravan arrived at the Platte River, two miles above the

present City of Casper, where it was intended to cross the stream. Boats and rafts were constructed, but the river was running bank full and a whole week was spent in effecting a crossing. On the 19th the entire party was across the river and ready to proceed. The 20th was Sunday, but so much time had been lost that the emigrants traveled all day. On the 26th they went through the South Pass, where they met a party of trappers led by Moses Harris, who gave them information regarding the course they were to pursue. Two days later they met Jim Bridger, from whom they obtained additional information. This was the first meeting of Bridger and Brigham Young, and both their parties encamped while the leaders held a conference.

Upon reaching Green River on the last day of June, the company was met by Elder Brennan of California, who urged Brigham Young to go to Yerba Buena (now San Francisco) but the committee sent out early in the year had reported in favor of the Salt Lake Valley and Young would not alter his course. Green River was crossed on the 3d of July and a rest of two days followed. From this point five men were sent back to pilot the other trains. On the 6th the company encamped on the site of the present Town of Granger, Wyo., and on the 7th arrived at Fort Bridger.

Jim Bridger was exceedingly skeptical about the Salt Lake Valley being a place to establish a farming community and it is said he offered Brigham Young \$1,000 for the first bushel of grain grown in the valley. To this Young merely replied "Wait and see."

On July 21, 1847, the first company, led by Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow, saw from the top of an elevation the panorama of the Great Salt Lake Valley and sent a messenger back with the information that they had reached the place recommended by the committee of investigation. Young had made such headway with his company that he arrived on the 24th, only three days behind the leaders, though the latter had a start of nearly a month from the Missouri River. The day before his arrival some of the first company plowed the first ground ever broken between the Platte River and the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

An August 16, 1847, Brigham Young started back to the Missouri River to inform those left behind of the character of the country and the prospects for the future. A history of the Mormons entitled "Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley," was published in 1853, edited by one James Linforth. It gives the following account of the emigration to Utah:

"The next consecutive event of importance in President Young's career after his arrival at Kanesville or Council Bluffs, was his starting in the spring of 1847, at the head of 143 picked men, embracing eight of the Twelve Apostles, across the unexplored country in search of a new home for the Saints beyond the Rocky Mountains. (Young really accompanied this company only as far as the Elkhorn River.) The pioneer band pursued their way over sage and saleratus plains, across unbridged rivers and through mountain defiles, until their toilsome and weary journey was terminated by the discovery of Great Salt Lake Valley and the choice of it for the gathering place of the Saints. They then returned to Council Bluffs, where they arrived on the 31st of October, and an epistle was issued on the 23d of December by the Twelve Apostles, noticing the principal events since the expulsion from Nauvoo and the discovery of the Great Salt Lake Valley."

While the above statement is correct in the main, it is not true that the entire

143 "picked men" returned to the Missouri. Those who returned were Brigham Young and the committee which had been sent out to select a location.

In the march across the plains every man among the Mormons carried a rifle or a musket, and such discipline was maintained that it is said the Indians would frequently allow a small party of Mormons to pass unmolested and attack a much larger body of other emigrants, who were not so well organized for defense. The route the emigrants followed from the Mississippi River near Keokuk, Iowa, became known as the "Mormon Trail." In after years the Mormon Trail westward from the Missouri River became the route of the great Union Pacific Railway.

The number of Mormons who passed up the Platte Valley and through Wyoming in 1847 was 3,113. In 1848 Brigham Young personally conducted 1,200 men, women and children to the new home of the Saints and a number of smaller parties came in under other leaders, so that in the fall of that year the Salt Lake Valley had a population of about five thousand. During the next five years it is estimated that one hundred thousand Mormons crossed the plains on their way to Salt Lake. They opened and developed farms, built irrigation systems, and transformed the desert into a veritable garden spot.

THE SCARE OF 1857-58

At the time the first Mormons settled in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, the territory was outside of the boundaries of the United States. By the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in 1848, which concluded the Mexican war, Utah, with other territory in the Southwest, was ceded to the United States by Mexico. The Mormons then organized the "State of Deseret," adopted a constitution and sent a delegate to Washington to urge the admission of the state into the Union. Congress refused to admit the state, or to recognize the delegate, but in 1850 the Territory of Utah was organized and Brigham Young was appointed governor.

In the latter '50s a number of outrages were committed upon emigrant trains and some of these outrages were attributed to the Mormon organizations known as the "Danites" and the "Avengeing Angels." In 1857 trouble arose between Brigham Young and the other territorial officials appointed by President Buchanan. Perhaps the officials may have been incompetent to a certain degree, as claimed by Young, but the Territorial Legislature of Utah had already adopted the laws of the State of Deseret and it was apparent that the Mormon Church was determined to rule the territory. Instructions from Washington were disregarded and in some cases Young openly defied the United States authorities. It was finally decided by the administration to send a military expedition to Utah, to preserve order in the territory and prevent further depredations against peaceful emigrants.

When the announcement was made public in the fall of 1857, that the Government was about to send an expedition into Utah, considerable anxiety was felt among the settlers of the West, for fear that the Mormons would retaliate by sending companies of the "Danites" and "Angels" against the frontier settlements. Gen. William S. Harney was first selected as the leader of the expedition, but he was succeeded by Col. Albert Sidney Johnston, who was afterward killed at the Battle of Shiloh, in April, 1862, while commanding the Confederate forces.

The expedition left Fort Leavenworth in the fall of 1857, and, although there was little actual fighting, the Mormons harassed Johnston's movements to such an extent by burning supply trains, etc., that the troops did not occupy Salt Lake City until in June, 1858.

While the expedition was en route the "scare" reached its greatest height. In April, 1858, a communication signed "Fair Warning" was published in the Omaha Times, in which the writer said: "When our army shall enter the Valley of the Salt Lake the Mormons en masse will rise in hostile array, for they are sworn to resist. At that moment let the good people west of us look well to their safety. We hesitate not to say that those 1,000 Mormons near Loup Fork, armed and equipped as they are, can and will sweep from existence every Gentile village and soul west of the Elkhorn. As to Omaha City, the nursling of a government hostile to Mormon rule, the rival of Mormon towns and the victim of sworn Mormon vengeance, how shall she share in this strife? In the space of one night the 100 Saints now here could lay in ashes every house in the city, whilst the armed bands in our vicinity should pillage and revel in our blood. The Deseret News proclaims to the wide world from the great leader of the hosts of the anointed thus: 'Winter quarters is mine, saith the Lord. Nebraska will I lay waste. With fear and with sword shall my people blot out from the face of the earth all those who kill the prophets and stone the Lord's anointed.'"

The Deseret News, from which the writer quoted, was a Mormon newspaper published at Salt Lake City. Truly this "Fair Warning" was a pessimistic prophet—a veritable "calamity howler"—but events failed to justify his doleful prediction. When Johnston's army arrived at Salt Lake, Brigham Young was removed as governor of the territory and the worst of the trouble was over. A garrison was maintained there for several years, however, as a precautionary measure against further insubordination on the part of the Mormon leaders.

"WESTWARD HO"

Some five years before the departure of the Mormons from their winter quarters on the Missouri, the tide of emigration westward had commenced. As early as 1841 a party of fifteen, a few of whom were women, passed the fur companies' posts in Wyoming on their way to the country west of the Rocky Mountains. Later in the same year Bidwell's California company crossed the plains. In 1842 Elijah White led 112 men, women and children through Wyoming on the way to Oregon. These emigrants were equipped with eighteen Conestoga wagons, a number of cattle, and several pack mules and horses. In crossing the plains the emigrants found resting places at Fort Laramie and other trading posts, where they could purchase supplies, though they sometimes grumbled at the prices charged by the post traders.

In 1843 the number of emigrants who crossed the plains was estimated at one thousand. By that time the western coast was no longer an unknown land. Those who went west in 1843 carried with them oxen and horses, herds of cattle, farm implements, household goods, etc., which indicated that they had "come to stay." By that time, too, the beaver had been almost exterminated in the valleys along the Wyoming streams and many of the trappers employed by the fur companies

were diverting their attention to occupations that promised greater profits, or leaving for other fields where the beaver were more plentiful.

THE ARGONAUTS

Among those who settled in California prior to the Mexican war was John Sutter, who was born of Swiss parents in Baden, Germany, in 1803. He came to California in July, 1839, and the next year became a Mexican citizen. Alvarado, the revolutionist, was then in power as the governor of the province. He took a liking to Mr. Sutter and made him an official of the government. The same year Mr. Sutter bought out some Russian settlers on the Sacramento River and built a small fort. It was at this fort that Fremont's second expedition arrived on March 8, 1844.

Late in the year 1847 Mr. Sutter employed James W. Marshall to build a saw-mill near the fort. As the mill was to be run by water power it was necessary to excavate a mill-race, and it was in this race that gold was discovered. Mr. Marshall, who made the discovery, afterward gave the following account of how it occurred: "One morning in January (it was the morning of January 24, 1848), as I was taking my usual walk along the race, after shutting off the water, my eye was caught with the glimpse of something shining in the bottom of the ditch. There was about a foot of water running then. I reached my hand down and picked it up; it made my heart thump, for I was certain that it was gold. The piece was about half the size and shape of a pea."

Mr. Marshall showed the nugget to Mr. Sutter and a few of the men whom he thought he could trust, and all kept a lookout for more. Within a few days they had collected about three ounces of the metal, which was subjected to tests and proved to be gold. They tried to keep the matter a secret, for fear their workmen would desert in the hope of getting rich quickly by searching for gold, but it happened that some ex-soldiers at the fort learned of the discovery and the news spread rapidly. There was no trans-continental telegraph in those days, but it was not long until every hamlet in the Union knew that gold had been found on the western coast.

Gold had been found in placers near Los Angeles in 1841, and it is said that Jedediah S. Smith found gold near Mono Lake on his first trip to the coast in 1827. Neither of these discoveries created the least ripple of excitement when compared with the discovery at Sutter's mill. Within one year nearly one hundred thousand people from the older states went to California with the expectation of accumulating a fortune in a few months. There were three ways of getting to the El Dorado: 1. By going by sea around Cape Horn; 2. By the land and water route via the Isthmus of Panama; and 3. Overland via the Oregon, California and Salt Lake trails. Each of the three routes was soon crowded to its utmost capacity.

THE OVERLAND ROUTE

The principal starting points for the journey across the plains were at Independence and St. Joseph, Mo., though a little later many crossed the Missouri River where the City of Omaha is now located. California Street in that city takes

its name from the fact that it marks the course followed by the gold seekers of the early '50s. In April, 1849, some twenty thousand people left the Missouri River bound for the new gold fields. The plains were dotted with the vehicle known as the "prairie schooner," some rode on horseback, and many undertook the long, wearisome journey on foot. One argonaut, who afterward returned to his home east of the Mississippi, said he counted 459 wagons in going a distance of nine miles. In outfitting at the starting place, many of the wagons were laden with tools, provisions, etc., but as the journey proceeded and the teams began to show signs of weariness, many of the heaviest articles were thrown away, especially as the driver saw others passing him on the road. The main object was to get to the diggings before all the paying claims were "staked off." Capt. Howard Stansbury, who was then engaged in making some explorations in the West for the Government, says in his reports:

"The road was literally strewn with articles that had been thrown away. Bar iron, steel, large blacksmith anvils, bellows, crowbars, drills, augers, gold washers, chisels, axes, lead, trunks, spades, plows, grindstones, baking ovens, cooking stoves without number, kegs, barrels, harness, clothing, bacon and beans were found along the road in pretty much the order enumerated."

Some clung to everything with which they started and in the end found it had paid them to do so. Prices in California soared. Flour sold as high as seventy-five dollars per barrel, bacon fifty cents to one dollar per pound, and other things in proportion. Those who came too late to secure a paying claim, but brought with them a supply of provisions, made about as much money as, perhaps more than, the average gold hunter. San Francisco grew from a straggling hamlet to a thriving city almost over night and was the chief source of supply for the gold diggings. "The days of '49" have been celebrated in song and story. A few acquired fortunes, but a large majority of the argonauts were glad to get back to the homes they had left, many of them poorer than when they started for the land of gold.

The first gold found in California was what is called "free gold," being easily taken from the places where it had been deposited in the sands of the streams. No costly machinery, such as stamp mills and smelters, was needed to extract the precious metal. By 1856, eight years after the first gold was found by Mr. Marshall, \$450,000,000 had been taken from the California placers.

While the excitement was at its height, Fort Laramie, Fort Bridger and the other posts in Wyoming did a thriving business in furnishing supplies to the argonauts. Those who acquired wealth in the diggings usually returned east by the water route, while those who had failed and returned overland had little money with which to purchase supplies. All they wanted was a "bite to eat and a place to sleep." They carried information, however, concerning the West that had its influence upon many who, a few years later sought homes beyond the great "Father of Waters." In this way the argonauts of '49 paved the way for the settlement of Wyoming and some of the adjoining states.

Neither Marshall nor Sutter, who made the first discovery of gold, derived any substantial profit from it. They expected to make money from their saw-mill, and did make money for a time, but as the timber was cut off near the mill and logs had to be brought from a distance, their profits were reduced. Added to this, the gold fever subsided and the demand for lumber correspond-

ingly decreased. Both were granted pensions in their old age. Marshall died at the age of seventy-three at Coloma, and was buried in sight of the spot where he found the first nugget of gold in January, 1848. Over his grave stands a statue of himself in bronze, of heroic size—a poor reward for a man who gave to the world a gold field that has produced millions of dollars.