PEIVATION and hardships were the common lot of pioneers who braved a home in the Great Basin. These conditions repeat themselves with such universality in early Utah life that they may be taken for granted.

But here is a story unlike any other and surpassing most of them in the qualities of sheer heroism. It is the story of a woman who, in spite of crushing handicaps, carried on the highest mission of womanhood. Her name was Ellen Pusell Unthank, but she was called "Nellie" by her friends and kinsfolk.

Nature did not bestow uncommon beauty of form or feature upon her and circumstances denied her the advantages of education and culture, but the master sculptor, time, chiseled deep, strong lines of courage, strength, patience and kindness upon her face.

Year in and year out she scarcely moved outside the limits of her own dooryard. Pain was the price of every step she took, and her physical world was bounded by the vision from her own humble doorstep.

Nellie, when nine years of age, left her home in England to come with her parents to Utah where they could worship with others of their faith and assist in building a new Zion. She was youngest in a family of 13. The father worked hard in the factory, but there was never enough income from his labor to supply the family with more than the barest necessities. The circumstances of the family in England were such that the children were often put to bed without supper so the missionaries who chanced to call might be given food to eat.

Nellie’s mother, Margaret Perren Pusell, attended the first meeting of the Mormon Church in England. It was held in the Rev. James Fielding’s church, Vauxhall Chapel, in Preston. July 30, 1837, only eight days after that first meeting, nine converts were baptized by Heber C. Kimball in the River Ribble. Two days later another baptismal service was held and Margaret Perren Pusell was one who accepted the ordinance on that occasion. She was probably the second woman in England to be confirmed a member of the Church, the first being Miss Jeannetta Richards with whom Margaret raced to the water’s edge.

Great prejudice developed at once against the Church because of its claims to new revelation and a restored Priesthood, and some who joined were afraid to let the fact be known. Three months after Margaret Pusell was baptized, her husband Samuel Pusell, much troubled in mind about what might happen made the humble confession to his wife that he had secretly joined the Mormons. The joy of both was beyond expression when she confessed to him that she, too, had joined the Church a month earlier than he and had prayed every day that he would see the light and accept it.

May 25, 1856, the father and mother with five children, sailed from Liverpool on the ship Horizon for America. On the vessel were 856 Saints bound for their Zion.

Unable for financial reasons to purchase wagon outfits to cross the plains, many of this company of emigrants under Captain Edward Martin stopped three weeks at Iowa Hill to build handcarts. It was July 28 before they were ready to start.

Because they were to pull their own provisions and supplies in hand, the weight of their load was cut to the last possible pound. No extra clothing or bedding or food or cooking utensils could be taken. If the nights grew cold in the mountains, they could double up or build...
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from starvation and cold and nearly
The company was in a truly pitiful
Lake almost buried in snow 16 miles
above the
Pusell had her tenth birthday there.

Teams were started before nightfall.
Ere the Opening of the
Nellie and Maggie came with
handcart friends to Cedar City and
both of them married here. Maggie
became the wife of Jack Walker and
reared a large family. Nellie became
the plural wife of William Unthank
and she, too, raised a goodly family.
William Unthank's first wife,
Mary Ann, was a cultivated English
lady but she bore him no children.
She encouraged William to take
another wife and he took two. Ellen
Pusell and Margaret Smith were
sealed to him on the same day and
in the same ceremony.

Nellie Lived in a Log House
Margaret was a widow and had
a little home. William built a little
house for Nellie just across the
dooryard from Mary Ann. Mary Ann
was kind to Nellie. She waited upon
her in sickness and helped her raise
her children. She took one little
girl and reared her as her own.

While William was building that
little adobe house in Mary Ann's
backyard, Nellie lived in a one room
log house in the lower end of town.
It had one door and two windows,
a dirt floor and a fireplace with a
smooth rock hearth before it. Nellie
kept damping and scraping that
dirt floor until she had it so hard and
smooth as pavement. That floor was
never swept. It was mopped up
every day with a damp rag and no
spot of dust or stain was ever left
upon it.

Every Saturday the hearth was
whitened, clean muslin curtains were
hung at the windows and around
the goods boxes which served as
cupboards. Old timers who remem-
ber say Nellie's little log home was
neat and cozy, and there was a frag-
rance in its very cleanliness.

Those stumps were festering, run-
ningsores as long as she lived. She
never knew a moment of freedom
from pain. To her, pain and suffer-
ing was the normal condition and
freedom from it was the rare mo-
ment of forgetfulness. Dr. George
W. Middleton offered to fix her legs
by cutting the bones off farther up
and bringing the flesh down over the
ends so they would heal and enable
her to wear artificial limbs, but the
horrors of that first amputation
were so vivid in her memory that she
could never consent to another
operation.

Reared Six Children
And so Nellie Unthank waddled
through life on her knees. In pov-
erty and pain she reared a family of
six children but never asked for
favors of pity or charity because of
her tragic handicap. William was
a poor man and unable to provide
fully for his family; so Nellie did all
she could for herself. She took in
washings. Kneeling by a tub on
the floor she scrubbed the clothes
whiteness on the washboard. She
knit stockings to sell, carded wool
and crocheted table pieces. She
seldom accepted gifts or charity
from friends or neighbors unless she
could do a bundle of darning or
mending to repay the kindness.

The bishop and the Relief
Society sometimes gave a little assistance
which Nellie gratefully accepted,
but once a year, to even the score,
she took her children and cleaned
the meetinghouse. The boy carried
water, the girls washed the windows
and Nellie, on her knees, scrubbed
the floor.

This heroic woman gave to Wil-
liam Unthank a posterity to perpetu-
ate his name in the earth and he
gave her a home and a family to
give comfort and care in her old
age. In memory I recall her wrinkled
forehead, her soft dark eyes that
told of toil and pain and suffering,
and the deep grooves that encircled
the corners of her strong mouth. But
in that face there was no trace of
bitterness or railings at her fate.
There was patience and serenity for
in spite of her handicap she had
earned her keep and justified her
existence. She had given more to
family, friends and to the world
than she had received.