

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A MORMON CARAVAN.

STILL, as we rode along, the same rich, tranquil days of October; the air always potable gold, and every breath nepenthe.

Early on one of the fairest of afternoons when all were fairest, we reached Port Bridger. Bridger had been an old hunter, trapper, and by and by that forlorn hope of civilization, the holder of an Indian trading-post. The spot is better known now. It was there that that miserable bungle and blunder of an Administration more fool, if that be possible, than knave, — the Mormon Expedition in 1858, --- took refuge, after its disasters on the Sweetwater.

At the moment of our arrival, Bridger's Port had just suffered capture. Its owner was missing. The old fellow had deemed himself the squatter sovereign of that bleak and sere region. He had built an adobe mud fort, with a palisade, on a sweep of plain a degree less desert than the deserts hard by. That oasis was his oasis, so he fondly hoped; that mud fort, his mud fort; those

willows and alders, his thickets; and that trade, his trade.

But Bridger was one man, and he had powerful neighbors. It was a case of "*O si angulus iste!*" --- a Naboth's-vineyard case. The Mormons did not love the rugged mountaineer ; that worthy Gentile, in turn, thought the saints no better than so many of the ungodly. The Mormons coveted oasis, fort, thicket, and trade. They accused the old fellow of selling powder and ball to hostile Indians, — to Walker, chief of the Utes, a scion, no doubt, of the Hookey Walker branch of that family. Very likely he had done so. At all events, it was a good pretext. So, in the name of the Prophet, and Brigham, successor of the Prophet, the Latter-Day Saints had made a raid upon the post. Bridger escaped to the mountains. The captors occupied the Gentile's property, and spoiled his goods.

Jake Shamberlain told us this story, not without some sympathy for the exile.

"It's olluz so," says Jake ; " Paul plants, and Apollyon gets the increase. Not that Bridger's like Paul, any more 'n we 're like Apollyon ; but we 're goan to have all the cider off his apple-trees.'<sup>9</sup>

"I'm sorry old Bridger has come to grief," said Brent to me, as we rode over the plain toward the fort. "He was a rough, but worth all

the Latter-Day Saints this side of Armageddon,, Biddulph and I stayed a week with him last summer, when we came from the mountains about Luggernel Alley."

" How far is Luggernel Alley from this spot ?"

" Fifty miles or so to the south and east. I almost fancy I recognize it in that slight notch in the line of the blue sierra on the horizon. I wonder if I shall ever see it again! If it were not so late, I should insist upon taking you there now. There is no such gorge in the world. And the springs, bold, liberal fountains, gushing out on a glittering greensward! There are several of them, some boiling, some cold as ice ; and one, the Champagne Spring, wastes in the wilderness the most delicate, sparkling, exhilarating tippie that ever reddened a lip or freshened a brain."

" Wait half a century ; then you and I will go there by rail, with our grandchildren, for draughts of the Fountain of Youth."

" I should like to spend a honeymoon there, if I could find a wife plucky enough to cross the plains."

How well I remembered all this conversation afterwards, and not long afterwards !

We rode up to the fort. A dozen or so of somewhat rubbishy soldiers, the garrison, were lounging about.

"Will they expect a countersign," asked I, ---  
"some slogan of their vulgarized Islamism ? "

"Hardly !" replied Brent. " Only one man in the world can care about assailing this dismal den. They need not be as ceremonious with strangers as the Dutchmen are at Ehrenbreitstein and Verona."

Jake and the main party stopped at the fort. We rode on a quarter of a mile farther, and camped near a stream, where the grass was plentiful.

"Fulano and Pumps are in better condition than when we started," said I, while we were staking them out for a long feed. "The mustangs have had all the drudgery; these aristocrats must be set to do their share soon."

"They are in prime racing order. If we had had them in training for three months for a steeple-chase, or a flight, or a Sabine adventure, or a rescue, they could not be in better trim than this moment. I suppose their time to do their duty must be at hand, they seem so ardent for it."\*

We left our little caballada nibbling daintily at the sweetest spires of self-cured hay, and walked back to the fort.

We stood there chatting with the garrison. Presently Brent's quick eye caught some white spots far away on the slope of the prairie, like sails on the edge of a dreamy, sunny sea.

" Look ! " said he, " there comes a Salt Lake emigration train."

" Yes," said a Mormon of the garrison, " that's Elder Sizzum's train. Their forerunner came in this morning to choose the camping-spot. There they be ! two hundred ox-teams, a thousand Saints, bound for the Promised Land."

He walked off to announce the arrival, whistling, " Jordan is a hard road to travel."

I knew of Sizzum as the most seductive orator and foreign propagandist of Mormonism. He had been in England some time, very successful at the good work. The caravans we had already met were of his proselytes. He himself was coming on with the last train, the one now in view, and steering for Fort Bridger.

As we stood watching, the lengthening file of white-hooded wagons crept slowly into sight. They came forward diagonally to our line of view, travelling apart at regular intervals, like the vessels of a well-ordered convoy. Now the whole fleet dipped into a long hollow, and presently the leader rose slowly up over the ridge, and then slid over the slope, like a sail winging down the broad back of a surge. So they made their way along over the rolling sweep of the distance.

" Beautiful! " said Brent. " See how the white canvas goldens in this rich October haze. Such scenes are the poetry of prairie life."

"I am too sorry for the crews, to enjoy the sunlit sails."

"Yes, the safer their voyage, the surer their wreck in that gulf of superstition beyond the mountains."

"Perhaps we waste sympathy. A man who has no more wit than to believe the trash they teach, has no business with anything but stupid drudgery. He will never suffer with discovering his faith to be a delusion."

"You may say that of a grown man ; but think of the children, — to grow up in desecrated homes, and never know the close and tender influence of family nurture."

"The state owes them an interference and an education."

"So it does; and the women protection from polygamy, whether they will or no."

"Certainly. Polygamy makes woman a slave, either by force, or influence stronger than force. The state exists only to secure the blessings of liberty to every soul within its borders, and so must free her."

"Good logic, but not likely, quite yet, to guide legislation in our country."

"This is Sizzum's last train; if the women here are no more fascinating than their shabby sisters of its forerunners, we shall carry our hearts safe home."

"I cannot laugh about that," said Brent. "My old dread revives, whenever I see one of these caravans, that there may be in it some innocent girl too young to choose, carried off by a fanatic father or guardian. Think of the misery to a woman of any refinement!"

"But we have not seen any such."

Larrap and Murker here joined us, and, overhearing the last remarks, began to speak in a very disgusting tone of the women we had seen in previous trains.

"I don't wish to hear that kind of stuff," said Brent, turning sternly upon Larrap.

"It 's a free country, and I shall say what I blame please," the fellow said, with a grin.

"Then say it by yourself, and away from me."

"You 're blame squimmidge," said Larrap, and added a beastly remark.

Brent caught him by the collar, and gave him a shake.

Murker put his hand to a pistol and looked "Murder, if I dared!"

"None of that," said I, stepping before him.

Jake Chamberlain, seeing the quarrel, came running up. "Now, Brother Brent," said Jake, "no shindies in this here Garden of Paradise. If the gent has made a remark what teches you, apologies is in order, an he 'll make all far and squar."

Brent gave the greasy man a fling.

He went down. Then he got up, with a trace of Bridger's claim on his red shirt.

"Yer need n't be so blame hash with a feller," said he. "I did n't mean no offence."

"Very well. Learn to talk like a man, and not like a brute!" said Brent.

The two men walked off together, with black looks.

"You look disappointed, Shamberlain," said I. "Did you expect a battle?"

"Ther 's no fight in them fellers," said Jake; "but ef they can serve you a mean trick they 'll do it; and they 're ambushin' now to look in the dixonary and see what it is. You 'd better keep the lariats of that black and that gray tied round your legs to-night, and every good horse-thief night while they 're along. They may be jolly dogs, and let their chances slide at cards, but my notion is they 're layin' low for bigger hauls."

"Good advice, Jake; and so we will."

By this time the head wagons of Elder Sizum's train had crept down upon the level near us. For the length of a long mile behind, the serpentine line held its way. On the yellow rim of the world, with softened outlines against the hazy horizon, the rear wagons were still climbing up into view. The caravan lay like a

slowly writhing hydra over the land. Along its snaky bends, where dragon-wings should be, were herds of cattle, plodding beside the " trailing-footed " teams, and little companies of Saints lounging leisurely toward their evening's goal, their unbuilt hostelry on the plain.

Presently the hydra became a two-headed monster. The foremost wagon bent to the right, the second led off to the left. Each successor, as it came to the point of divergence, filed to the right or left alternately. The split creature expanded itself. The two wings moved on over a broad grassy level north of the fort, describing in regular curve a great ellipse, a third of a mile long, half as much across.

On either flank the march was timed and ordered with the precision of practice. This same manoeuvre had been repeated every day of the long journey. Precisely as the foremost teams met at the upper end of the curve, the two hindmost were parting at the lower. The ellipse was complete. It locked itself top and bottom. The train came to a halt. Every wagon of the two hundred stopped close upon the heels of its file leader.

A tall man, half pioneer, half deacon, in dress and mien, galloped up and down the ring. This was Sizzum, so the by-standers informed us. At a signal from him, the oxen, two and three yoke

to a wagon, were unyoked, herded, and driven off to wash the dust from their protestant nostrils, and graze over the russet prairie. They huddled along, a great army, a thousand strong. Their brown flanks grew ruddy with the low sunshine. A cloud of golden dust rose and hung over them. The air was loud with their lowing. Relieved from their drags, the herd frisked away with unwieldy gambolling. We turned to the camp, that improvised city in the wilderness.

Nothing could be more systematic than its arrangement. Order is welcome in the world. Order is only second to beauty. It is, indeed, the skeleton of beauty. Beauty seeks order, and becomes its raiment. Every great white-hooded, picturesque wagon of the Mormon caravan was in its place. The tongue of each rested on the axle of its forerunner, or was ranged upon the grass beneath. The ellipse became a fort and a corral. Within, the cattle could be safely herded. Marauding Redskins would gallop about in vain. Nothing stampedeable there. Scalping Redskins, too, would be baffled. They could not make a dash through the camp, whisk off a scalp, and vanish untouched. March and encampment both had been marshalled with masterly skill.

"Sizzum," Brent avowed to me, *sotto voce*, "may be a blind guide with ditchward tendencies in faith. He certainly knows how to handle

his heretics in the field. I have seen old tacticians, Marechales and Feldzeugmeisters, in Europe,, with El Dorado on each shoulder, and Golconda on the left breast, who would have-tied up that train into knots that none of them would he Alexander enough to cut."