

## THE PIONEER CHRISTMAS

There's plenty of hardship in pioneer life.  
A hard working stint at the best:  
But with brawn and pluck and courage rife,  
The heart beats with hope in the breast.

"Why, Elizabeth, what brought you outside the fort walls so late in the day; are you not afraid of anything, girl?"

"Afraid," the girl answered, "that something might happen to you on your perilous trip, and you don't know how good it seemed to hear the rolling of the wagon wheels over the frozen ground, the steady tread of the oxen, the crack of your whip, and best of all, the sound of your voice saying 'gee' and 'haw,' urging the oxen along."

"It is very sweet of you," the boy said, "to think of me and come out to meet me. The other boys are not far behind; but come, walk close beside me, sweetheart, and I will tell you of the trip."

So, hand in hand, the two young lovers walked close beside the loaded wagon, exchanging experiences of the last few days and thinking all the time of each other, roughly and not too warmly clad, but hearts warm and true and minds clear and pure as running water.

"Our trip, Elizabeth, was quite successful, though rather hard. We followed the creek as far as the road permitted; but shortly after entering the canyon, it becomes so narrow that we made a camp, where John and I watched the wagon and cattle and gathered small wood, while Charley and Sam explored farther up and found some splendid pines. The first day they took the axes and ropes and felled as many trees as they could, and yesterday John and I took our turn, so we have two fine loads of logs and two of smaller wood for firing. Now your mother can have a floor in her house, and we can all have warm, cheerful fires for Christmas, if nothing more. The other boys are some distance behind, though not far. You know I boast of my good driving, and besides there was a magnet drawing me on, which I knew not of. The Lord bless you, Elizabeth, for thinking of me; few boys in the valley are as lonely as I. Do you know when I saw my mother die on the ocean, and her body lowered in the great, white sea, I could myself have died. All desire for life, all future hope left me, and there on the ship's deck, death would have been welcome. My sisters wept, my little brothers clung to father's hand; but I seemed alone, my heart almost almost ceased to beat. I was like a stone, no tears or sobs relieved the dull pain of that dreadful hour. It seems a marvel that still we live after such suffering; but the old ship steadily tossed along the waters, the waves closed over her body, and the great ocean heaved just the same; and life has rolled along, sometimes throbbing, sometimes sobbing, but still carrying out no doubt my destiny. Can you be patient and wait for me? With your love for my guiding star, I shall never fail. We are nearly home now, you must forgive me if I recall sad scenes, I have never been able to talk of mother to any one but you and sister Anne. Now for a little while we must part. I hope your mother has not worried about you, for really it is hardly safe for you to venture so far, and besides it is against counsel for any of the women folks to leave the fort after sundown. Wise counsel it is too, for there are many dangers in this desert country.

You are a girl of wonderful courage; but as you truly love me, you must take care of yourself."

"You speak of dangers," said Elizabeth, "are there any new ones? I cannot think the Lord will let the Indians or the wolves harm us. We have passed through so many hardships, privations and sorrows since leaving our homes, that surely somewhere in the world we can find a refuge; and besides, those who ought to know have told us this is the chosen spot. I believe we are safe and will be protected here. Yes, I will do all you ask. Life is pretty hard for us; but we are young and strong, and our love will help us through; so now goodnight."

So they parted, having reached the North gateway of the Fort. Elizabeth knew her mother would be anxious, and perhaps a little angry, for she did not altogether approve of her daughter's love affair. So hastening into her rude home, she quickly explained that the boys were all coming and that John would soon be home, though in fact she had neither looked nor listened after meeting her lover to learn whether her brother was near or not. That was only because she had been so sympathetically interested in his story, for she possessed all the best, kind attributes of a sister, and began immediately to prepare something warm and nice for her brother and to think of his comfort.

In the meantime, the young man had unyoked and cared for his oxen, and then reported himself to his uncle, with whom he lived, and who had sent him into the canyon for logs. He hinted in his conversation with Elizabeth about dangers, but to his uncle he had something quite important to report. A large number of Sioux Indians were camped up the canyon, just having come away victorious from a conflict with some Utes, and it was more than likely that they would come down in the settlement and worry and frighten the settlers if nothing more. At any rate, a visit from the Indians always meant a dividing up of provisions for the sake of peace, and the people were not any too well provided for themselves, with a long winter before them and no hope of any more companies coming in with supplies before the spring.

In pioneer days in the far west, the settlers had to live close together for protection, and the first Fall of forty-seven, the few families of Mormon emigrants who reached the valley built themselves homes of adobes and logs; all as it were in one enclosure. A high wall of adobes enclosed a large square, thus forming the outer wall of the several homes - mere huts, one would call them now - all facing an inner court. Rude logs sawn in half made the rafters and supporting beams, while loose soil was thrown over the rafters to form a roof. Some of these huts had doors, and some had floors, but others had the bare ground for a floor, and only an open space among the logs for a doorway. There was only the smallest openings in the outer wall for outlooks, for there was no such thing as glass for windows, and the dangers were many. Great herds of white wolves and howling coyotes came down from the mountains night after night and prowled and howled and tore around the walls, and the Indians were not always friendly either. So much care had to be taken to make these homes secure. In these days everybody had much hard work to do, and the women were only too glad to help construct these rude homes. To them, these walls of logs and

mud meant rest and protection, and a king's palace is no more than that.

After George had eaten his supper and sufficiently warmed himself, his uncle sent him to the different houses to ask the men to gather in his home for a little consultation, warning him, however, not to say anything to alarm the women folks. George made the round of the different houses, leaving his message, and last of all knocked at the door of Elizabeth's home hoping with a lover's fondness to have a few words with her that night; but, with her brother John, she had gone to one of the neighbors to help plan some Christmas entertainment for the children. So after giving to her father his uncle's message, he returned to his own home a little disappointed, but still with the memory of her brave words in his mind, full of hope for the future.

The conference lasted about an hour, and by that time every man in the fort was ready to act as guard or soldier, just as occasion should require. All guns were that night inspected, and the powder horns hung dry and near at hand. A detail of young men was appointed to act as sentries on the four sides and also to take information to the families still living in wagons and tents who were not yet inside the enclosure.

While all these precautionary preparations were being made by the men, the women were silently wondering what they could do to make Christmas a little happier, a little different from other days. The mother nature always loves to do something nice for the little folks; but oh, the dearth of everything! How much poorer than ever they seemed at this time.

Elizabeth's brother had brought from the canyon with his logs some young pines, and they had wondered if in some way they might not be utilized to please the children. So together, John and Elizabeth had gone with these young trees over to Mary Dilworth, the little school teacher, to discuss the matter. Other young folks were also gathered there, and the hours passed quickly.

"Oh," said Mary, "how pretty and green they are."

"Yes, if we only had some of our Michigan cranberries to string on them, we might have a real Christmas tree," answered John.

"Well," she replied, "there's no good wishing for things we cannot have, and the sight of the green pine needles will be something for them after all. Come over to the school tomorrow, Elizabeth, and help me tell them a Christmas story and teach them a happy song. The little folks have always such a sober life, we can at least try to brighten it for one day!"

"Aren't you glad, girls," said Sister Riter, "that the Battalion boys are with us again? You young folks can at least have a dance tomorrow night. Jesse Earls' fiddling just makes us older folks want to dance."

This was two nights before Christmas, that in the same enclosure, two

conferences were held - one among the young folks planning amusement and making merry with music, laughter and jests, and one among the elder ones planning means for protection and safety.

As Elizabeth and John crossed the court they noticed the sentry pass the gateway, and immediately the word danger used by her lover came to her mind. Without exchanging a word with her brother about the circumstance, she crossed immediately to the sentry and asked for an explanation. The boy knew she was impetuous and self-willed, but he also knew her to be brave and true, and he felt she was one who would neither alarm nor annoy any one by spreading evil tidings, so he explained about the nearness of the Indians and their warlike appearance. Elizabeth knew not fear, and besides she was full of assurance that she herself could scarcely account for, that their worst dangers were passed, and she gaily replied,

"Keep on the lookout for wolves, Millen, and shoot them if they come too near; never an Indian will you see tonight."

Then rejoining her brother, they entered the house.

The mother and the other children were all sleeping, but the father was waiting for them, his Bible in his hand and his gun leaning against his knee. The resemblance between the father and daughter was most striking. He, a large, well-built man, whose very attitude denoted firmness and courage, a kindly, open countenance with clear, blue eyes, though heavily shaded, and a mouth with lips close shut; while this sweet maid, Elizabeth, almost a child in years - in those days girls had no youth, they passed from childhood to womanhood, for the hardships and sorrows of pioneer life was a bitter and trying school - was like a tall red rose, graceful, strong and fair to behold. She was full of faith and hope and love. Her mind was rich in thought, and her hands were never idle. Watching her moments in her home, one would instinctively recall the words of Solomon, "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness." As her parting words with her sweetheart implied, "I will do all you ask, we are young and strong and can wait," so she always seemed, full of strength and power and courage to battle with any emergency, and she diffused in her surroundings and among her associates, this great personality, like a rose sends out its perfume.

Some women are full of fears, and full of tears, nervous and sentimental to a great degree, but such women are usually those reared in luxury and refined surroundings. The dangers of the desert and the toil of the pioneer made life's work so incessant that little time was left for fears or idle weeping, but the soul was full of sentiment and the very desert seemed to breathe of hope.

"Why, father," said the girl, "you look quite formidable. Let John take your gun and put it up, and I will read you a verse or two from the good book while you prepare for bed. I know all about your meeting, and there is no need for you to watch, for the boys will give us plenty of

warning, and I must sit up a while to knit, so if there is occasion, I can wake you."

Then turning to her brother, she said, "How very tired you must be, John dear, after your canyon trip! Do get to sleep as soon as possible."

So in her masterful way, she assisted them both, and soon all was quiet, not a sound but the steady clicking of her needles as they worked in and out of the long comforter she was making for her lover's Christmas gift. Swiftly the needles flew, and swifter flew her thoughts.

"If George had not received this missionary call, we might we married next spring and begin to make a home for ourselves; but as it is, it may be years before we really do begin to live. I believe I will get Mary Dilworth to teach me privately this winter, and then when the new settlers come in next year perhaps I can start a school, and so begin to earn a little money and perhaps lay by something towards a home."

So her thoughts ran on until the candle burned down in the socket. She dared not be so extravagant as to light another that night, so carefully folding up her work, was preparing for bed, when on the clear, cold air was heard the report of a gun. Quickly she sprang to the port hole in the outer wall, but could see nothing, so she quietly slipped through the door and ran to the gate. Others were hurrying from the houses, and for a few moments great excitement prevailed, but investigation proved that one of the guards had shot at a prairie dog, thinking he saw a wolf. Darkness enlarges the sight as well as the imagination. After awhile quiet again ensued, but sleep was almost impossible for many that night, when it became generally known that danger was so near.

The morning dawned clear and cold. The earth was covered with a heavy frost that glistened like jewels in the sun. The housewives were astir early for there was much to do that day. Elizabeth had determined to help Miss Dilworth entertain the children, and early in the morning was baking doughnuts in all sorts of fancy designs - rings, hearts, balls and baby shapes; grotesque enough some of them were, but pleasing to the eye and certainly sweet to the taste. With colored yarns and fancy doughnuts they decorated the tree, and the little ones were happy, for they had not expected anything. The pioneer mothers dared not tell their children fancy stories of Sants Claus and Christmas cheer, for well they knew no such visions could be realized, so the little folks received a pleasant surprise with this simple offering.

Mary Dilworth - a girl of great intelligence and wholly unselfish - had opened, as soon as the room could be built, a school for the children of the settlement, and had given her time and thought freely for their benefit. The little folks loved her, and were eager to learn, and on this day before Christmas, she seemed particularly happy among them; and with Elizabeth's help, they sang songs and played merry games for some time. Then standing before them, she told them the story of Christmas - not the merry making of today, but the true, sacred story of Jesus' birth. Ah, many Christmas tales are told and written, but after all what

can equal that beautiful story of Mary with her babe in the manger, when the wise men came to worship and brought beautiful gifts, and the glory of the Lord shone over all!

Elizabeth listened as intently as the children, and felt more than ever the desire to help and to do good to someone, more than ever anxious to sing praises and to cease all complaining. And as the children rose to receive their little cakes from her hands, she said, "Let us all repeat the Lord's prayer, and then say together, 'Peace on earth, good will to men.'" After this little ceremony with the children, a perfect calm seemed to rest upon them all, and a heavenly glow filled their hearts to such an extent that to their sights the room was all rosy-hued; and never a happier, more contented little assembly ever dispersed than that.

Elizabeth was full of the spirit of this occasion, and could not immediately bring herself to the homely tasks of the house; so after leaving the school room, she started out for a walk. The sharp snap of the frost under her feet, and the crisp air but tended to increase the elation of her spirits as with long steady strides she wandered on, neither noting nor caring whither, when suddenly she realized she had wandered into danger, for not far ahead she saw an Indian crouching along. But between herself and him was a settler's cabin, and she hastily made for the door, where she found the poor frightened worman almost in hysterics as she slung to her little babe.

"Why, Aunt Harriet, are you hurt?" she asked.

"Oh no, but somewhat frightened, I admit, and a little unstrung in my nerves, now that the danger is over," replied the woman.

"Tell me what has happened, and shall I go for help?" said Elizabeth.

"No," Aunt Harriet replied. "When I gave the Indian all the bread I had, he threatened me because he wanted more, and for a moment I felt as though my last hour and my baby's too had come, then I remembered our great mastiff, chained in the other room, and pretending to get him more bread, I went in and loosened the dog and urged him on. Of course, I couldn't be cruel enough to let him quite kill the Indian, but I let the dog stay long enough to make him pretty much afraid and quite willing to give in to me too. Then I called the dog off and dressed his wounds and sent him off. I think that Indian won't come round here much more,"

"I should think not," said Elizabeth; "but oh, Aunt Harriet, I wish you were not so far away from the rest of us."

"I'm not afraid, and when Spring comes, you'll all be moving out of the Fort and making homes, and you see we are just a little ahead of you," Aunt Harriet answered. "But what brings you out this afternoon, Elizabeth?"

"I have been in the school-room today with Mary Dilworth, and the exercises and sweet stories she told the children so impressed me that I thought I would rather walk awhile and think of this holy theme than go

back to my cooking, and I only chanced this way by accident; but now, I believe the Lord directed my steps, for surely you need company after such a fright."

Elizabeth immediately began to help her friend with her work and remained until nearly sunset, when Aunt Harriet's oldest son, who had been away for wood, came in. He also had seen a few Indians, but said they seemed friendly, and he did not anticipate any trouble from them; but he was more alarmed when he heard of his mother's experience with one of them. Concealing his fear, however, he began to praise his mother for her bravery and quick wit.

"Yes," the mother answered, "there was no time to lose - scarcely time to think - and oh, the thought of a death from the Indians! I would a thousand times rather have died on the plains than to be killed by these savages!"

"Yes, indeed," answered Elizabeth, "but God is merciful, and I cannot think this people will ever suffer from the Indians. Of course, we have all the time the dread and fear and many perilous incidents like this to alarm and worry us, but we are home at last, and do you know, Aunt Harriet, I believe we are going to be very happy here."

"You talk like a good, brave girl, Elizabeth, and I am sure you are right. We have much to be thankful for after all, and the greatest of all is the wonderful love of our people for each other. Tell your mother and the rest of the folks down at the Fort I wish them a Merry Christmas."

Elizabeth now bade her friends good-bye, refusing the company of the young man, for his mother needed him more than she, until others of the family should return, and with long rapid steps she turned homeward.

The day had been full of interest for her, and her mind was full of rich, bright thoughts - the thought of the wonderful bravery and heroism of Aunt Harriet, more than surpassed by her tenderness and mercy, when she bathed and dressed the wounds of the savage; of her great contentment in her humble, almost destitute surroundings. And she knew that all around her were numbers of just such true, brave, lonely women, enduring almost with pleasure, the greatest hardships and sacrificing every selfish thought on an altar of faith. Then she thought of Mary Dilworth, and her intellect and talents, and wished in her heart that she but possessed the same, for she felt the great good she could do for others, and how perhaps she might aid her lover too.

At this thought, a rush of color suffused her whole being. Dear George, how manly, and yet how gentle he is. "I wonder why," she said aloud, "he should have been selected for that new mission. It hardly seems fair, for as yet he has no means or property or prospects. Well, he said if I love him I must not complain, for he will ever bring his own feelings into submission to the opinions of those above him in authority. The experience of our westward journey ought to be sufficient evidence that obedience is our surest road to success."

On reaching home, Elizabeth saw the young folks already making preparations for the evening dance. She did not join them just then, however, but sought her father to inform him of Sister Young's adventure, knowing that though the merriment might go on, the vigilant watch must still be kept.

All this day George had been busy helping his uncle work on their little home, and later engaged in some writing and copying for him, so he had not been aware of Elizabeth's walk or visit to the school. There was always much work to do, and he was never idle, for when his uncle had no employment for him, he delighted in study. Opportunities were few, and books were very scarce, but George's uncle was a scholarly man and had succeeded in bringing into the desert some few very choice and rare books, and he was also more than willing to help his nephew in his search for knowledge.

The temperature was somewhat lower, as the evening advanced, and a slight wind began to blow, which the settlers thought meant snow. There had been no snow in the valley up to that time, and they had wished all along for a white Christmas, for that would seem more natural. The time for the dance arrived, and young and old assembled in the little school-room. What a queer sight! Rough boards, on which to dance, and tallow candles for the lights. At the end where the band sat were two lanterns and a row of half a dozen candles; then around the room in different places were candles in tin holders, stuck in the wall.

The company came to have a good time and be merry. The music was good, and the room was warm and their hearts were warm, so the hours flew swiftly by.

George had danced only once with Elizabeth, and that in a Tucker quadrille, so had scarcely had time to speak to her since the night before, but towards midnight he came near and whispered, "Should a waltz be called, Elizabeth, will you give it to me? I have to leave shortly to take the watch at the East gate."

Elizabeth was a great favorite, and had been dancing quite gaily all the evening; but at these words from her lover, she stood up quickly, and in her usual impulsive manner, said, "I won't dance again tonight, only with you; and if you have to go, I shall go too."

"No," said George, "stay and enjoy yourself. I am sure you are having a good time."

"Yes," she answered, "but you are here, even though you haven't been very attentive this evening; and when you go, the good time will go too."

George was greatly pleased with the girl's frank confession, and as the strains of a waltz began, the two young people clasped in each other's arms joined in the dance.

The rhythmic motion of the body to the music of the waltz is poetry to



the soul, and all the harsh, hard things of life are forgotten and only the beautiful remain. There are moments when all the senses are awake in their intensity, and one sees the glorious colors of the rainbow, hears the tender notes of the song birds, scents the delicate perfume of the flowers and feels the exquisite harmony of life; and to these young people, this was such a moment.

They had seldom been alone, but from their first acquaintance, they had felt drawn towards each other, and a mutual confidence and affection had arisen in their breasts. Tonight, the affection had become deeper, and both felt to enjoy the happy moments to the utmost. But suddenly the music ceased - then things became real again; and once more there mingled with the laughter and the merry-making, the thought of fear and danger and parting. 'Twas ever so in the old, old time of long ago. Joy and fear, gay delight and sorrow's dread found equal place.

The hour had come for George to take the place at the gate, and Elizabeth, true to her word, went with him. As had been expected, the wind had blown over, and a gentle snow had set in. The ground was already white with the soft downy flakes, and the snow was still falling. George took Elizabeth to her home, then turned immediately towards his own to get warmer clothing and his gun. His watch began at midnight, and he was anxious to keep his promise, and not delay the relief of his friend, who already had to miss the first part of the party. As he was walking back and forth, thinking of his happiness - for tonight he felt especially happy - Elizabeth joined him, and in a shy, though gentle manner said, "I brought you, George, your Christmas gift. You know it is already Christmas morning, and I thought this would help to keep you warm."

So saying, she unfolded the long comforter she had been knitting, and wound it around his neck. At the touch of her hand, and the knowledge of her tender thoughtfulness, his heart was filled with gratefulness for her love, and his whole being thrilled with delight. Holding her in his arms, he gazed for one moment into the depths of her clear blue eyes, and whispered, "Oh, my love! my love! Heaven keep you safe for me, and I will conquer every obstacle and make you the proudest and happiest of women."

There then, outside the old gray walls, in the stillness of the night, with light feathery snow falling over them, these young lovers plighted their faith and devotion to each other, pure and simple, but full of hope and love divine. They lingered only a few moments in the bliss of this sweet exchange of promises, and then bade each other good-bye for the present.

The girl returned to her home across the court. She could not speak to anyone that night. Such a spell of happiness held her, that she desired to be alone with her thoughts. On the hearth glowed the coals of a fragrant pine knot, and by that faint light, she prepared for bed, not wishing to disturb anyone by lighting a candle. Kneeling in the glow of the firelight, by the side of her father's old arm chair, she praised the Lord for her happiness, and thanked Him for her great love; and George, through the silent watch of that still night, also in his heart sang songs

of praise and thanksgiving. What matter that the night was cold; what matter that the snow fell thick and fast; what matter that the wolves cried out in the night air; or that not far off in the hills the Indians were camped! These young hearts beat warm and happy, and knew not cold nor fear. A Christmas never dawned on happier, brighter hearts than theirs.

Christmas morning in the Fort was very busy. Plans had been made to have the families outside the enclosure come in and share the good cheer with those inside, and so quite a number of house parties were arranged. Meat and provisions had been distributed liberally and equally for the occasion, so all fared alike; and though the dinners were somewhat plain, they were feasts that day. Roast beef, dried corn, and puddings with dried peaches or plums are not exactly the Christmas dinners of today; but these Pioneer women had learned an art of making toothsome and appetizing relishes out of the simplest materials, and such a variety as this was a feast indeed. In after years, many times boiled segoes and swamp-roots had to serve for a meal.

While the housewives were preparing the dinner, the men had assembled to plan some means of treating with the Indians, that the watch need not be kept, and to remove the fear from their hearts. It was decided that five young men go out to the Indian camp with some meat and flour - though it could not well be spared - and make some terms, if possible, with these savages. Young George asked to be permitted to be one of this number; and so earnestly did he desire to go, that he was allowed, though he was extremely young for a mission requiring so much caution, diplomacy and perhaps fighting. He had no fear, and felt called to go on this errand to the red men. The Indians were pleased with the gifts and begged the men to smoke the pipe of peace with them, which, of course, the white men readily consented to do. The savages then expressed themselves as having no hostile feelings towards the settlers and said they were on the way to their homes on the blue water to the South, and were just about to take up their journey. The men, of course, were pleased with the success of their visit; but George seemed unwilling yet to depart, and finally succeeded in persuading his companions to ask the Indians to pray with them. After some explanation from the white men, and wonder from the savages, they all consented and stood in a circle; then George passed in among them, and in the Indian tongue plead for mercy for this wild band of men and their race, and told them of the Master and His mercy and love for all mankind, and that this day was the great day of peace and praise throughout the world.

A great silence fell all around. The savages stood like stone images, and the white men almost held their breath, for they knew a divine power had spoken through their friend and comrade. He was the first to move, and with a gladness of heart reflected in his face, he passed among them, shaking hands and bidding them farewell. The Indians felt the spirit of the occasion, and were so overcome with what they had heard, that they began to offer their blankets and robes and armlets to their white visitors; but they had received already more than they had expected, and all they wanted, in the promise of peace, and so

refused to take these offerings, and as soon as possible, returned to their friends with the glad tidings.

The day was too cold to call the people out to the public place of worship, the Bowery; but when the boys returned to the Fort, the people were summoned into the courtyard, and the good news was told and the word given out for all families, when assembling for dinner, to speak their praise unto the Lord.

When Elizabeth heard of the great power given her lover as he stood among the Indians, she felt very proud indeed, and more than anxious to tell her parents of her great happiness; but with the shyness of youth, kept putting it off, though many times through the day, while helping her mother with the cooking and work, she had nearly told her. Her happiness, however, was quite apparent, and she sang first one love tune and then another, as an accompaniment to her work. She joked with her brother and teased her sisters unmercifully about their beaux; in fact, the great elation of her spirits became contagious, and that was indeed a happy household that afternoon. After dinner, however, she sobered down somewhat, and while her father was reading in his usual place by the fire, she knelt down by his side and told him the story of her love. She was sure of his sympathy, and knew he would do all in his power to help her. And he did. Stroking her soft brown hair with his hand, he talked to her for some time, praising her choice, for he had watched and noticed young George for many months, and he felt him to be superior both intellectually and spiritually to many of his companions, who seemed to have greater advantages and better prospects than he. And the father promised her his help and good will in their future preparations. This was very comforting to Elizabeth; for while there was great sympathy always between her father and herself, she feared he might be influenced by her mother who she knew had other plans for her. Her mother was just as good and kindhearted as her father; but she also like most mothers, was a little ambitious for her daughters and even among the early settlers there sometimes seemed a little caste. Some families could scarcely forget that formerly they boasted noble ancestry and fine homes, had been able to keep servants and carriages, though now a common cause and a humble faith had made a common condition among the Saints. No rich, no poor- all fared alike. All enjoyed equal privileges, as all enjoyed equal favors from our Heavenly Father. Oh, the joy of such a condition! God's children all - breathing the same air, the same sky over all! When ever before or since, has such a condition prevailed among a people? It was like paradise set in the mountains.

All day George had been almost over-powered by the thought of the great gift that had been given him and had felt to humble himself before the Lord. The tears came to his eyes many times during the night at the thought of what had happened; and he was quite silent on the subject, only telling his uncle in answer to some questions how it had happened. He himself could not account for this wonderful manifestation, only that he had prayed in his heart to feel satisfied before leaving the Indian camp that their promises were made in good faith, and he believed that this was an answer to his prayer. His sister Anne, a tall fair girl, stood near

during this conversation between her uncle and brother; and throwing her arms around her brother she said, "Dear George, this is but the fulfilling of mother's word to you: 'Go on and continue to live pure and true, and your destiny will be great.'" Oh, how I wish she could have lived until this moment! How well would she feel repaid for her sorrows."

"My sweet sister," he answered, "many sufferings have been ours, and that is why we appreciate every little token of mercy or power from our Heavenly Father so much."

Oh, the simple faith of these poor people! What a source of happiness and joy it brought! How much better would the world be now if only faith could be the anchor.

George's aunt had been unusually silent during this conversation; but after her dinner was over, and her housework done for the day, she took the youth aside and talked to him long and earnestly of his mother and his early home. Then taking from her pocket an old fashioned leather purse, she took therefrom a crooked guinea and a ring. The coin had been her father's, and grandfather's also, and the ring had been her mother's.

"Take these, George," she said, "and keep the coin always. The ring give to your wife when you have one, for it was to have been your mother's had I ever seen her again. Our mother gave it to me to keep for her."

The ring was of very soft, yellow gold, with pretty, open carving around the setting, and a clear oval sapphire, with a small pearl on each side, formed the setting.

"It seems almost too much happiness for one day, dear Aunt," said George; and then he told her of his engagement to Elizabeth, and asked if she were willing for him to give this ring to her as a pledge of their love. His aunt gladly consented, for she knew and admired the girl exceedingly and felt sure it would find a worthy place on Elizabeth's finger.

When evening came, George called at Elizabeth's home, where there were other young men of the Fort visiting. Elizabeth and her two sisters were very popular young ladies, so their home was frequently a gathering place for young people. Elizabeth's father gave George a very warm welcome this Christmas evening, which the company attributed to his wonderful experience in the morning with the Indians; but George knew by the warm pressure of the hand and the merry twinkle in his eye that her father knew of their love and approved of him; and so the evening hours glided on. Parching corn in the long-handled frying pan was one amusement, while reciting pieces and singing songs made pleasure, too. Then someone proposed a story.

"Now, who can tell a story like mother?" said John. "Come, mother, bring something out of the Michigan forests, if it's only a ghost."

"Oh yes, do," said the young folks in a chorus, "we just love ghost stories, if they do make us creep."

"That's just John's nonsense," said his mother, "but I will tell you of something that happened when I was a young girl, that I had almost forgotten until I heard today of George's prayer with the Indians and that recalled it, for it was almost, if not quite, as strange. 'Twas Christmas morning, and the snow had been falling all the day before and all night, and lay around the house at least a foot deep and in the doorways and by the fences were great drifts a yard or more deep. Not a soul had left the house, and mother had just started to prepare breakfast when there was a knock at the kitchen door. The children were not dressed, and we hesitated for a moment about opening the door, for we expected a great rush of cold and a fall of snow into the room; but sending the children out of the draft, mother opened the door, and in walked a tall elderly man. No cold seemed to come into the room, nor any snow; but we did not notice that then, we only looked at the man, who quietly entered and closed the door behind him, then walked over by the stove and sat down before speaking. We were all quite taken back by his manner - still no one spoke. Then he held out his hands to the fire, and they were white and soft as snow, and we began to note how tall and straight and handsome he looked, when suddenly he asked mother if he might have breakfast with us.

"Just an ordinary tramp," put in John.

"Wait," said his mother, "until you hear the rest of the story, and then see if you think him a tramp." Then she continued.

"We ate our breakfast almost in silence, but such wonderful peace seemed around us, and we all felt something like one feels in a Quaker meeting, such a pure holy spirit in the silence. You know we were Quakers before we joined the Church, and so this silence didn't cause us much astonishment like it would now. Well, when breakfast was over, the stranger got up and said, 'The Lord bless this house.' Then out he walked, and mother felt so strange she went to the window to see which way he went, but she couldn't see anything of him at all, so father said that he would go out and look around a bit; and would you believe it, when he opened the door, the drift of snow fell in, and there was not a footprint in the snow anywhere around. Now what do you think that was?"

"Maybe it was the wandering Jew," said John. "He has lived so long he can walk on air by this time."

"Well, without laughing, we thought perhaps it was him," answered his mother, "but since I joined the Church, sometimes I have thought it might have been one of the Three Nephites. At any rate, I know it is a true story, improbable as it seems."

After this story the company were rather quiet and subdued. It seemed to speak so much of the supernatural, but soon a song was proposed, and one of the young men in a clear rich voice sang the sweet old-fashioned song, "Mary of Argyle."

I have heard the mavis singing  
His love song to the morn.  
I have seen the dewdrop clinging  
To the rose just newly born;  
But a sweeter song has cheered me  
At the evening's gentle close,  
I have seen an eye still brighter,  
Than the dewdrop on the rose,  
'Tis thy voice, my gentle Mary,  
And thine artless winning smile,  
That has made this earth an Eden  
Darling Mary of Argyle.

This set the company in a happy humor again, and they all joined in singing one or two favorite hymns, and then the company prepared to depart.

George had enjoyed the evening, still he had wished it were possible to have a few moments with Elizabeth alone. There seemed so much to say, and young love is ever impatient. He could think of no good excuse, however, to keep him after the others, and also started to go; but Elizabeth's father called him back and asked him to remain awhile.

The family seated themselves around the fire, and the father took Elizabeth over by her lover and placed their hands together, saying, "She told me, George, last night, and I welcome you as a dear son and mean to help you in your endeavors. Go on as you have begun, and I will have no fear for you." Then turning to his wife and the other children, he further said, "Elizabeth and George are engaged, mother, and I want you to feel that it is all right, for I feel so, and they could not be happy without your consent."

The mother was a little overcome, but she knew that love matches were the only happy ones, and that no amount of coercion would have any effect upon Elizabeth when once her mind was made up, so she decided to try and think it was for the best, and she kissed her daughter very tenderly and spoke sweetly to them both. George then showed them the ring his aunt had that day given him, and told them its history. Even if he had been able to buy a ring, he could not have bought it for at least six months, when some of the men would be going back East to help more of the settlers into the valley, but he was a poor boy and this was a very great treasure to him - beautiful for itself, and for its history as well, and he knew no place so fitting for it as the hand of his sweetheart; so he placed it there in the presence of her father and mother, vowing his eternal devotion; and she, sweet girl, was full of emotion. She had never possessed a jewel in her life, and this seemed a glorious one - besides, it meant so much to her. She was not gifted with any particularly fine language, but spoke always from the heart, sincere and plain, and tonight she said, "You will never regret this gift to me. I will wear it as a token of our love and cherish it above all my possessions."

"Before you leave us, George, we will have our family prayer," said

the father; and then they knelt and praised the Lord for the peace and happiness of their lives. So ended the first Christmas in the Valley; and that night at least, two lives were happy and full of bright anticipation.

No home is so lowly or humble, but what love's fairy wand can render it beautiful; no life so lonely or despondent, but when love enters all the shadows flee. Love alone is enticing and entrancing; but love combined with faith is glorious and divine.

Annie Wells Cannon

Woman's Exponent  
Volume 32 No. 7  
December 1903