

The Mormons

Thomas L. Kane

[i] Thomas L. Kane (1822-83), a non-Mormon, is revered by the Mormon people for his defense of the Mormon cause. Early and late a friend of the Mormons, he wrote and lectured sympathetically about the Mormon persecutions, as this discourse demonstrates. In 1857, on hearing of the impending march of Johnston's Army to Utah, he secured permission from the President of the United States to travel to Utah in order to help avert the impending strife. He served as a mediator between Brigham Young and Colonel Johnston, who at first accused Kane of being a spy and arrested him. Kane challenged Johnston to a duel with pistols, but the U.S. appointee for territorial governor, Alfred Cumming, prevented the duel. Kane was instrumental in securing a peace between the two factions.

[ii] This material consists of portions of a discourse delivered before the Historical Society of Pennsylvania March 26, 1850.

[1] A few years ago, ascending the upper Mississippi in the Autumn, when its waters were low, I was compelled to travel by land past the region of the Rapids. My road lay through the Half-Breed Tract, a fine section of Iowa, which the unsettled state of its land-titles had appropriated as a sanctuary for coiners, horse thieves, and other outlaws. I had left my steamer at Keokuk, at the foot of the Lower Fall, to hire a carriage, and to contend for some fragments of a dirty meal with the swarming flies, the only scavengers of the locality. From this place to where the deep water of the river returns, my eye wearied to see everywhere sordid, vagabond and idle settlers; and a country marred, without being improved, by their careless hands.

[2] I was descending the last hillside upon my journey, when a landscape in delightful contrast broke upon my view. Half encircled by a bend of the river, a beautiful city lay glittering in the fresh morning sun; its bright new dwellings, set in cool green gardens, ranging up around a stately dome-shaped hill, which was crowned by a noble marble edifice, whose high tapering spire was radiant with white and gold. The city appeared to cover several miles; and beyond it, in the background, there rolled off a fair country, checkered by the careful lines of fruitful husbandry. The unmistakable marks of industry, enterprise and educated wealth, everywhere, made the scene one of singular and most striking beauty.

[3] It was a natural impulse to visit this inviting region. I procured a skiff, and rowing across the river, landed at the chief wharf of the city. No one met me there. I looked, and saw no one. I could hear no one move; though the quiet everywhere was such that I heard the flies buzz and the water-ripples break against the shallow of the beach. I walked through the solitary streets. The town lay as in a dream, under some deadening spell of loneliness, from which I almost feared to wake it. For plainly it had not slept long. There was no grass growing up in the paved ways. Rains had not entirely washed away the prints of dusty footsteps.

[4] Yet I went about unchecked. I went into empty workshops, ropewalks and smithies. The spinner's wheel was idle; the carpenter had gone from his workbench and shavings, his unfinished sash and casing. Fresh bark was in the tanner's vat, and the fresh-chopped

lightwood stood piled against the baker's oven. The blacksmith's shop was cold; but his coal heap and ladling pool and crooked water horn were all there, as if he had just gone off for a holiday. No work people anywhere looked to know my errand. If I went into the gardens, clinking the wicket-latch loudly after me, to pull the marygolds, heartsease and ladyslippers, and draw a drink with the water sodden well-bucket and its noisy chain; or, knocking off with my stick the tall, heavy-headed dahlias and sunflowers, hunted over the beds for cucumbers and love-apples--no one called out to me from any opened window, or dog sprang forward to bark an alarm. I could have supposed the people hidden in the houses, but the doors were unfastened; and when at last I timidly entered them, I found dead ashes white upon the hearths, and had to tread a tiptoe, as if walking down the aisle of a country church, to avoid rousing irreverent echoes from the naked floors.

[5] On the outskirts of the town was the city graveyard. But there was no record of plague there, nor did it in any wise differ much from other Protestant American cemeteries. Some of the mounds were not long sodded; some of the stones were newly set, their dates recent, and their black inscriptions glossy in the mason's hardly dried lettering ink. Beyond the graveyard, out in the fields, I saw, in one spot hard-by where the fruited boughs of a young orchard had been roughly torn down, the still smouldering embers of a barbecue fire, that had been constructed of rails from the fencing round it. It was the latest sign of life there. Fields upon fields of heavy-headed yellow grain lay rotting ungathered upon the ground. No one was at hand to take in their rich harvest. As far as the eye could reach, they stretched away--they, sleeping too in the hazy air of Autumn.

[6] Only two portions of the city seemed to suggest the import of this mysterious solitude. On the southern suburb, the houses looking out upon the country, showed, by their splintered woodwork and walls battered to the foundation, that they had lately been the mark of a destructive cannonade. And in and around the splendid Temple, which has been the chief object of my admiration, armed men were barracked, surrounded by their stacks of musketry and pieces of heavy ordnance. These challenged me to render an account of myself, and why I had the temerity to cross the water without a written permit from a leader of their band.

[7] Though these men were generally more or less under the influence of ardent spirits; after I had explained myself as a passing stranger, they seemed anxious to gain my good opinion. They told me the story of the Dead City: that it had been a notable manufacturing and commercial mart, sheltering over 20,000 persons; that they had waged war with its inhabitants for several years, and had been finally successful only a few days before my visit, in an action fought in front of the ruined suburb; after which, they had driven them forth at the point of the sword. The defense, they said, had been obstinate, but gave way on the third day's bombardment. They boasted greatly of their prowess, especially in this battle, as they called it; but I discovered they were not of one mind as to certain of the exploits that had distinguished it; one of which, as I remember, was, that they had slain a father and his son, a boy of fifteen, not long residents of the fated city, whom they admitted to have borne a character without reproach.

[8] They also conducted me inside the massive sculptured walls of the curious Temple, in which they said the banished inhabitants were accustomed to celebrate the mystic rites of an unhallowed worship. They particularly pointed out to me certain features of the

building, which, having been the peculiar objects of a former superstitious regard, they had as matter of duty sedulously defiled and defaced. The reputed rites of certain shrines they had thus particularly noticed, and various sheltered chambers, in one of which was a deep well, constructed, they believed, with a dreadful design. Beside these, they led me to see a large and deep chiseled marble vase or basin, supported upon twelve oxen, also of marble, and of the size of life, of which they told some romantic stories. They said the deluded persons, most of whom were immigrants from a great distance, believed their Deity countenanced their reception here of a baptism of regeneration, as proxies for whomsoever they held in warm affection in the countries from which they had come; that here parents "went into the water" for their lost children, children for their parents, widows for their spouses, and young persons for their lovers; that thus the Great Vase came to be for them associated with all dear and distant memories, and was therefore the object, of all others in the building, to which they attached the greatest degree of idolatrous affection. On this account, the victors had so diligently desecrated it as to render the apartment in which it was contained too noisome to abide in.

[9] They permitted me also to ascend into the steeple, to see where it had been lightning-struck on the Sabbath before; and to look out, East and South, on wasted farms like those I had seen near the City, extending till they were lost in the distance. Here, in the face of the pure day, close to the scar of the Divine wrath left by the thunderbolt, were fragments of food, cruises of liquor and broken drinking vessels, with a bass drum and a steam-boat signal bell, of which I afterwards learned the use with pain.

[10] It was after nightfall, when I was ready to cross the river on my return. The wind had freshened since the sunset; and the water beating roughly into my little boat, I headed higher up the stream than the point I had left in the morning, and landed where a faint glimmering light invited me to steer.

[11] Here, among the dock and rushes, sheltered only by the darkness, without roof between them and the sky, I came upon a crowd of several hundred human creatures, whom my movements roused from uneasy slumber upon the ground.

[12] Passing these on my way to the light, I found it came from a tallow candle in a paper funnel-shade, such as is used by street venders of apples and pea-nuts, and which, flaring and guttering away in the bleak air off the water, shone flickeringly on the emaciated features of a man in the last stage of a bilious remittent fever. They had done their best for him. Over his head was something like a tent, made of a sheet or two, and he rested on a but partially ripped open old straw mattress, with a hair sofa cushion under his head for a pillow. His gaping jaw and glazing eye told how short a time he would monopolize these luxuries; though a seemingly bewildered and excited person, who might have been his wife, seemed to find hope in occasionally forcing him to swallow awkwardly measured sips of the tepid river water from a burned and battered, bitter-smelling tin coffee-pot. Those who knew better had furnished the apothecary he needed, a toothless old bald-head, whose manner had the repulsive dullness of a man familiar with death scenes. He, so long as I remained, mumbled in his patient's ear a monotonous and melancholy prayer, between the pauses of which I heard the hiccup and sobbing of two little girls, who were sitting up on a piece of drift wood outside.

[13] Dreadful, indeed, was the suffering of those forsaken beings. Cowed and cramped by cold and sunburn, alternating as each weary day and night dragged on, they were, almost all of them, the crippled victims of disease. They were there because they had no

homes, nor hospital nor poor-house nor friends to offer them any. They could not satisfy the feeble cravings of their sick; they had not bread to quiet the fractious hunger cries of their children. Mothers and babes, daughters and grandparents, all of them alike, were bivouacked in tatters, wanting even covering to comfort those whom the sick shiver of fever was searching to the marrow.

[14] These were Mormons, famishing, in Lee county, Iowa, in the fourth week of the month of September, in the year of our Lord 1846. The City it was Nauvoo, Illinois. The Mormons were the owners of that city, and the smiling country round. And those who had stopped their ploughs, who had silenced their hammers, their axes, their shuttles and their workshop wheels; those who had put out their fires, who had eaten their food, spoiled their orchards, and trampled under foot their thousands of acres of unharvested bread; these were the keepers of their dwellings, the carousers in their Temple--whose drunken riot insulted the ears of their dying.

[15] I think it was as I turned from the wretched nightwatch of which I have spoken, that I first listened to the sounds of revel of a party of the guard within the city. Above the distant hum of the voices of many, occasionally rose distinct the loud oath-tainted exclamation, and the falsely intonated scrap of vulgar song; but lest this requiem should go unheeded, every now and then, when their boisterous orgies strove to attain a sort of ecstatic climax, a cruel spirit of insulting frolic carried some of them up into the high belfry of the Temple steeple, and there, with the wicked childishness of inebriates, they whooped, and shrieked, and beat the drum that I had seen, and rang in charivariic unison their loud-tongued steam-boat bell.

[16] They were, all told, not more than six hundred and forty persons who were thus lying on the river flats. But the Mormons in Nauvoo and its dependencies had been numbered the year before at over twenty thousand. Where were they? They had last been seen, carrying in mournful trains their sick and wounded, halt and blind, to disappear behind the western horizon, pursuing the phantom of another home. Hardly anything else was known of them: and people asked with curiosity, What had been their fate, what their fortunes?

[17] I purpose making these questions the subject of my lecture. Since the expulsion of the Mormons, to the present date, I have been intimately conversant with the details of their history. But I shall invite your attention most particularly to an account of what happened to them during their first year in the Wilderness; because at this time more than any other, being lost to public view, they were the subjects of fable and misconception. Happily, it was during this period I myself moved with them; and earned, at dear price, as some among you are aware, my right to speak with authority of them and their character, their trials, achievements and intentions.

[18] The party encountered by me at the river shore were the last of the Mormons that left the city. They had all of them engaged the year before, that they would vacate their homes, and seek some other place of refuge. It had been the condition of a truce between them and their assailants; and as an earnest of their good faith, the chief elders and some others of obnoxious standing, with their families, were to set out for the West in the spring of 1846. It had been stipulated in return, that the rest of the Mormons might remain behind in the peaceful enjoyment of their Illinois abode, until their leaders, with their exploring party, could with all diligence select for them a new place of settlement

beyond the Rocky Mountains, in California, or elsewhere, and until they had opportunity to dispose to the best advantage of the property which they were then to leave.

[19] Some renewed symptoms of hostile feeling had, however, determined the pioneer party to begin their work before the spring. It was, of course, anticipated that this would be a perilous service; but it was regarded as a matter of self-denying duty. The ardor and emulation of many, particularly the devout and the young, were stimulated by the difficulties it involved; and the ranks of the party were therefore filled up with volunteers from among the most effective and responsible members of the sect.

[20] They began their march in midwinter; and by the beginning of February, nearly all of them were on the road, many of their wagons having crossed the Mississippi on the ice.

[21] Under the most favoring circumstances, an expedition of this sort, undertaken at such a season of the year, could scarcely fail to be disastrous.* But the pioneer company had to set out in haste, and were very imperfectly supplied with necessaries. The cold was intense. They moved in the teeth of keen-edged northwest winds, such as sweep down the Iowa peninsula from the ice-bound regions of the timber-shaded Slave Lake and Lake of the Woods: on the Bald Prairie there, nothing above the dead grass breaks their free course over the hard rolled hills. Even along the scattered water courses, where they broke the thick ice to give their cattle drink, the annual autumn fires had left little wood of value. The party, therefore, often wanted for good camp fires, the first luxury of all travelers; but to men insufficiently furnished with tents and other appliances of shelter, almost an essential to life after days of fatigue, their nights were often passed in restless efforts to save themselves from freezing. Their stock of food also proved inadequate; and as their systems became impoverished, their suffering from cold increased.

[22] Sickened with catarrhal affections, manacled by the fetters of dreadfully acute rheumatisms, some contrived for a while to get over the shortening day's march, and drag along some others. But the sign of an impaired circulation soon began to show itself in the liability of all to be dreadfully frost-bitten. The hardiest and strongest became helplessly crippled. About the same time, the strength of their beasts of draught began to fail. The small supply of provender they could carry with them had given out. The winter-bleached prairie straw proved devoid of nourishment; and they could only keep them from starving by seeking for the browse, as it is called, or green bark and tender buds and branches, of the cotton-wood and other stunted growths of the hollows.

[23] To return to Nauvoo was apparently the only escape; but this would have been to give occasion for fresh mistrust, and so to bring new trouble to those they had left there behind them. They resolved at least to hold their ground, and to advance as they might, were it only by limping through the deep snows a few slow miles a day. They found a sort of comfort in comparing themselves to the exiles of Siberia, and sought cheerfulness in earnest praying for the spring--longed for as morning by the tossing sick.

[24] The spring came at last. It overtook them in the Sac and Fox country, still on the naked prairie, not yet half way over the trail they were following between the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. But it brought its own share of troubles with it. The months with which it opened proved nearly as trying as the worst of winter.

[25] The snow and sleet and rain, which fell as it appeared to them without intermission, made the road over the rich prairie soil as impassable as one vast bog of heavy black mud. Sometimes they would fasten the horses and oxen of four or five wagons to one,

and attempt to get ahead in this way, taking turns; but at the close of a day of hard toil for themselves and their cattle, they would find themselves a quarter or half a mile from the place they left in the morning. The heavy rains raised all the watercourses: the most trifling streams were impassable. Wood for bridging was often not to be had, and in such cases the only resource was to halt for the freshets to subside--a matter in the case of the headwaters of the Charitan, for instance, of over three weeks' delay.

[26] These were dreary waitings upon Providence. The most spirited and sturdy murmured most at their forced inactivity. And even the women, whose heroic spirits had been proof against the lowest thermometric fall, confessed their tempers fluctuated with the ceaseless variations of the barometer. They complained, too, that the health of their children suffered more. It was the fact, that the open winds of March and April brought with them more mortal sickness than the sharpest freezing weather.

[27] The frequent burials made the hardiest sicken. On the soldier's march, it is matter of discipline, that after the rattle of musketry over his comrade's grave, he shall tramp it to the music of some careless tune in a lively quickstep. But, in the Mormon camp, the companion who lay ill and gave up the ghost within view of all, all saw as he lay stretched a corpse, and all attended to his last resting-place. It was a sorrow then, too, of itself to simple-hearted people, the deficient pomps of their imperfect style of funeral. The general hopefulness of human--including Mormon--nature, was well illustrated by the fact that the most provident were found unfurnished with undertaker's articles; so that bereaved affection was driven to the most melancholy makeshifts.

[28] The best expedient generally was to cut down a log of some eight or nine feet long, and slitting it longitudinally, strip off its dark bark in two half cylinders. These, placed around the body of the deceased, and bound firmly together with withes made of the alburnum, formed a rough sort of tubular coffin, which surviving relatives and friends, with a little show of black crape, could follow with its enclosure to the hole, or bit of ditch, dug to receive it in the wet ground of the prairie. They grieved to lower it down so poorly clad, and in such an unheeded grave. It was hard--was it right?--thus hurriedly to plunge it in one of the undistinguishable waves of the great land sea, and leave it behind them there, under the cold north rain, abandoned, to be forgotten? They had no tombstones, nor could they find rock to pile the monumental cairn. So, when they had filled up the grave, and over it prayed a Miserere prayer, and tried to sing a hopeful psalm, their last office was to seek out landmarks, or call in the surveyor to help them determine the bearings of valley bends, heads, headlands, or forks and angles of constant streams, by which its position should in the future be remembered and recognized. The name of the beloved person, his age, the date of his death, and these marks were all registered with care. His party was then ready to move on. Such graves mark all the line of the first years of Mormon travel--dispiriting milestones to failing stragglers in the rear.

[29] It is an error to estimate largely the number of Mormons dead of starvation, strictly speaking. Want developed disease, and made them sink under fatigue, and maladies that would otherwise have proved trifling. But only those died of it outright, who fell in out-of-the-way places that the hand of brotherhood could not reach. Among the rest no such thing as plenty was known, while any went an hungered. If but a part of a group was supplied with provision, the only result was that the whole went on the half or quarter ration, according to the sufficiency that there was among them: and this so ungrudgingly

and contentedly, that till some crisis of trial to their strength, they were themselves unaware that their health was sinking, and their vital force impaired.

[30] Hale young men gave up their own provided food and shelter to the old and helpless, and walked their way back to parts of the frontier states, chiefly Missouri and Iowa, where they were not recognized, and hired themselves out for wages, to purchase more. Others were sent there, to exchange for meal and flour, or wheat and corn, the table and bed furniture, and other last resources of personal property which a few had still retained.

[31] In a kindred spirit of fraternal forecast, others laid out great farms in the wilds, and planted in them the grain saved for their bread; that there might be harvest for those who should follow them. Two of these, in the Sac and Fox country and beyond it, Garden Grove and Mount Pisgah, included within their fences about two miles of land a-piece, carefully planted in grain, with a hamlet of comfortable log cabins in the neighborhood of each.

[32] Through all this the pioneers found redeeming comfort in the thought, that their own suffering was the price of immunity to their friends at home. But the arrival of spring proved this a delusion. Before the warm weather had made the earth dry enough for easy travel, messengers came in from Nauvoo to overtake the party with fear-exaggerated tales of outrage, and to urge the chief men to hurry back to the city that they might give counsel and assistance there. The enemy had only waited till the emigrants were supposed to be gone on their road too far to return to interfere with them, and then, renewed their aggressions.

[33] The Mormons outside Nauvoo were indeed hard pressed; but inside the city they maintained themselves very well for two or three months longer.

[34] Strange to say, the chief part of this respite was devoted to completing the structure of their quaintly devised but beautiful Temple. Since the dispersion of Jewry, probably, history affords us no parallel to the attachment of the Mormons for this edifice. Every architectural element, every most fantastic emblem it embodied, was associated, for them, with some cherished feature of their religion. Its erection had been enjoined upon them as a most sacred duty: they were proud of the honor it conferred upon their city, when it grew up in its splendor to become the chief object of the admiration of strangers upon the Upper Mississippi. Besides, they had built it as a labor of love; they could count up to half a million the value of their tithings and free-will offerings laid upon it. Hardly a Mormon woman had not given up to it some trinket or pin-money: the poorest Mormon man had at least served the tenth part of his year on its walls; and the coarsest artisan could turn to it with something of the ennobling attachment of an artist for his fair creation. Therefore, though their enemies drove on them ruthlessly, they succeeded in parrying the last sword-thrust, till they had completed even the gilding of the angel and trumpet on its lofty spire. As a closing work, they placed on the entablature of the front, like a baptismal mark on the forehead:

THE HOUSE OF THE LORD:

BUILT BY THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST

OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS.

HOLINESS TO THE LORD.

[35] Then, at high noon, under the bright sunshine of May, the next only after its completion, they consecrated it to divine service. There was a carefully studied ceremonial for the occasion. It was said the high elders of the sect traveled furtively from the camp of Israel in the wilderness; and throwing off ingenious disguises, appeared in their own robes of holy office, to give it splendor.

[36] For that one day the Temple stood resplendent in all its typical glories of sun, moon and stars, and other abounding figured and lettered signs, heiroglyphics and symbols: but that day only. The sacred rites of consecration ended, the work of removing the sacrosancta proceeded with the rapidity of magic. It went on through the night; and when the morning of the next day dawned, all the ornaments and furniture, everything [that] could provoke a sneer, had been carried off; and except some fixtures that would not bear remove, the building was dismantled to the bare walls.

[37] It was this day saw the departure of the last elders, and the largest band that moved in one company together. The people of Iowa have told me, that from morning to night they passed westward like an endless procession. They did not seem greatly out of heart, they said; but, at the top of every hill before they disappeared, like banished Moors, [they turned and gazed] on their abandoned homes, and the far-seen Temple and its glittering spire.

[38] After this consecration, which was construed to indicate an insincerity on the part of the Mormons as to their stipulated departure, or at least a hope of return, their foes sat upon them with renewed bitterness. As many fled as were at all prepared; but by the very fact of their so decreasing the already diminished forces of the city's defenders, they encouraged the enemy to greater boldness. It soon became apparent that nothing short of an immediate emigration could save the remnant.

[39] From this time onward the energies of those already on the road were engrossed by the duty of providing for the fugitives who came crowding in after them. At a last general meeting of the sect in Nauvoo, there had been passed an unanimous resolve that they would sustain one another, whatever their circumstances, upon the march; and this, though made in view of no such appalling exigency, they now with one accord set themselves together to carry out.

[40] Here begins the touching period of Mormon history; on which but that it is for me a hackneyed subject, I should be glad to dwell, were it only for the proof it has afforded of the strictly material value to communities of an active common faith, and its happy illustrations of the power of the spirit of Christian fraternity to relieve the deepest of human suffering. I may assume that it has already fully claimed the public sympathy.

[41] Delayed thus by their own wants, and by their exertions to provide for the wants of others, it was not till the month of June that the advance of the emigrant companies arrived at the Missouri.

[42] This body I remember I had to join there, ascending the river for the purpose from Fort Leavenworth, which was at that time our frontier post. The fort was the interesting rendezvous of the army of the West, and the headquarters of its gallant chief, Stephen F. Kearney, whose guest and friend I account it my honor to have been. Many as were the reports daily received at the garrison from all portions of the Indian territory, it was a significant fact, how little authentic intelligence was to be obtained concerning the Mormons. Even the region in which they were to be sought after, was a question not

attempted to be designated with accuracy, except by what are very well called in the West Mormon stories; none of these bore any sifting. One of these averted, that a party of Mormons in spangled crimson robes of office, headed by one in black velvet and silver, had been teaching a Jewish pow-wow to the medicine men of the Sauks and Foxes. Another averted that they were going about in buffalo robe short frocks, imitative of the costume of Saint John, preaching baptism and the instance of the kingdom of heaven among the Ioways. To believe one report, ammunition and whiskey had been received by Indian braves at the hands of an elder with a flowing white beard, who spoke Indian, he alleged, because he had the gift of tongues: this, as far north as the country of the Yanketon Sioux. According to another yet, which professed to be derived officially from at least one Indian sub-agent, the Mormons had distributed the scarlet uniforms of H. B. M.'s servants among the Pottawatamies, and had carried into their country twelve pieces of brass cannon, which were counted by a traveler as they were rafted across the East Fork of Grand River, one of the northern tributaries of the Missouri. The narrators of these pleasant stories were at variance as to the position of the Mormons, by a couple of hundred leagues; but they harmonized in the warning, that to seek certain of the leading camps would be to meet the treatment of a spy.

[43] Almost at the outset of my journey from Fort Leavenworth, while yet upon the edge of the Indian border, I had the good fortune to fall in with a couple of thin-necked sallow persons, in patchwork pantaloons, conducting northward wagon-loads of Indian corn, which they had obtained, according to their own account, in barter from a squatter from some silver spoons and a feather bed. Their character was disclosed by their eager request of a bite from my wallet; in default of which, after a somewhat superfluous scriptural grace, they made an imperfect lunch before me off the softer of their corn ears, eating the grains as horses do, from the cob. I took their advice to follow up the Missouri; somewhat not far from which, in the Pottawatamie country, they were sure I would encounter one of their advancing companies.

[44] I had bad weather on the road. Excessive heats, varied only by repeated drenching thunder squalls, knocked up my horse, my only traveling companion: and otherwise added to the ordinary hardships of a kind of life to which I was as yet little accustomed. I suffered a sense of discomfort, therefore, amounting to physical nostalgia, and was, in fact, wearied to death of the staring silence of the prairie, before I came upon the object of my search.

[45] They were collected a little distance above the Pottawatamie Agency. The hills of the "High Prairie" crowding in upon the river at this point, and overhanging it, appear of an unusual and commanding elevation. They are called the Council Bluffs; a name given them with another meaning, but well illustrated by the picturesque Congress of their high and mighty summits. To the south of them, a rich alluvial flat of considerable width follows down the Missouri, some eight miles, to where it is lost from view at a turn, which forms the site of the Indian town of Point aux Poules. Across the river from this spot the hills recur again, but are skirted at their base by as much low ground as suffices for a landing.

[46] This landing, and the large flat or bottom on the east side of the river, were crowded with covered carts and wagons; and each one of the Council Bluff hills opposite was crowned with its own great camp, gay with bright white canvas, and alive with the busy stir of swarming occupants. In the clear blue morning air, the smoke streamed up from

more than a thousand cooking fires. Countless roads and bypaths checkered all manner of geometric figures on the hillside. Herd boys were dozing upon the slopes; sheep and horses, cows, and oxen, were feeding around them, and other herds in the luxuriant meadow of the then swollen river. From a single point I counted four thousand head of cattle in view at one time. As I approached the camps, it seemed to me the children there were to prove still more numerous. Along a little creek I had to cross were women in greater force than blanchisseuses upon the Seine, washing and rinsing all manner of white muslins, red flannels and parti-colored calicoes, and hanging them to bleach upon a greater area of grass and bushes than we can display in all our Washington Square.

[47] Hastening by these, I saluted a group of noisy boys, whose purely vernacular cries had for me an invincible home-savoring attraction. It was one of them, a bright faced lad, who, hurrying on his jacket and trowsers, fresh from bathing in the creek, first assured me I was at my right destination. He was a mere child; but he told me of his own accord where I had best go seek my welcome, and took my horse's bridle to help me pass a morass, the bridge over which he alleged to be unsafe.

[48] There was something joyous for me in my free rambles about this vast body of pilgrims. I could range the wild country wherever I listed, under safeguard of their moving host. Not only in the main camps was all stir and life, but in every direction, it seemed to me, I could follow "Mormon Roads," and find them beaten hard and even dusty by the tread and wear of the cattle and vehicles of emigrants laboring over them. By day, I would overtake and pass, one after another, what amounted to an army train of them; and at night, if I encamped at the places where the timber and running water were found together, I was almost sure to be within call of some camp or other, or at least within sight of its watch-fires. Wherever I was compelled to tarry, I was certain to find shelter and hospitality, scant, indeed, but never stinted, and always honest and kind. After a recent unavoidable association with the border inhabitants of Western Missouri and Iowa, the vile scum which our own society, to apply the words of an admirable gentleman and eminent divine, "like the great ocean washes upon its frontier shoes," I can scarcely describe the gratification I felt in associating again with persons who were almost all of Eastern American origin,--persons of refined and cleanly habits and decent language,--and in observing their peculiar and interesting mode of life;--while every day seemed to bring with its own especial incident, fruitful in the illustration of habits and character....

*Nine children were born the first night the women camped out. -- Sugar Creek, Feb. 5. (Editor's note: No evidence exists to substantiate this claim other than the written word of Eliza R. Snow.)

**One of the company having a copy of Mme. Cottin's Elizabeth, it was so sought after that some read it from the wagons, from moonlight. They were materially sustained too, by the practice of psalmody, "keeping up the Songs of Zion, and passing along doxologies from front to rear, when the breath froze on their eyelashes."