

UNTIL WE REACH THE

Elder B. H. Roberts was 9 and his sister Mary was 19 when they traveled from England to join their mother and two other children who were already with the Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City. The brother and sister made the hard voyage by ship across the Atlantic Ocean, traveled by train to Nebraska, and then walked alongside covered wagons, with B. H. going barefoot most of the way. Once he tried to get a break by hiding in a barrel attached to one of the wagons—only to find it still had some molasses inside, and he got covered in the sticky stuff!

Later on, after serving as a missionary, a mission president, and for 45 years in the First Council of the Seventy, he wrote about arriving in the Salt Lake Valley. He explained that the wagon train camped on the bench at the mouth of a canyon the night before. People in Salt Lake City could see the campfires and knew that another wagon train had arrived. The next day they lined the street and cheered as the pioneers entered their new lives in Zion. Here is what he wrote about that event.



VALLEY-O



ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL MANN

By Elder B. H. Roberts (1857–1933)

Of the Seventy

In the morning everybody seemed to be up with the first streaks of the light of day over the eastern mountains and in great haste in preparations to take up the journey. Breakfast seemed to be neglected, and there was not much to eat anyway. Before the sun rose, the train, falling into its old line, swung down the low foothills until they struck a well-defined road leading into the city.

The entrance proved to be via Third South. . . . I found myself at the head of the lead yoke . . . , walking up the principle street of the city, the rest of the train following. Here the people had turned out to welcome the plains-worn emigrants and were standing on the street sides to greet them. . . .

Along the road, perhaps nearly half way from the mouth of Parley's Canyon to the city, I . . . saw a bright-colored, dainty, charming little girl approaching me in the middle of the street. It was a strange meeting, we two. My hair had grown out somewhat. But three months' journey over the plains and through the mountains without hat or coat or shoes for most of the way had wrought havoc with my appearance. My hair stuck out in all directions; the freckles seemed deeper and more plentiful and the features less attractive than when the journey began. Shirt and trousers barely clung to my sturdy form, and my feet were black and cracked. . . .

But try as I would, the shock of hair was unmanageable, and so no wonder the dainty



Self-educated and admired for his writings, Elder B. H. Roberts served the Church in various callings all his life. He died in 1933.

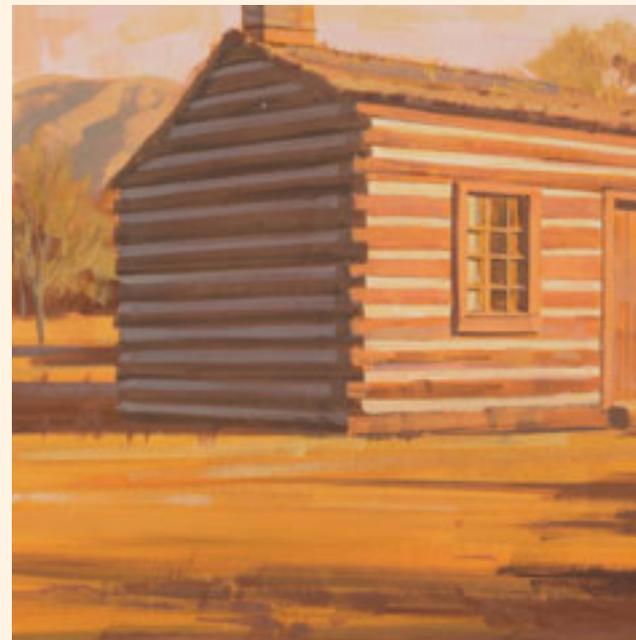
little lady was somewhat timid in approaching me. She had on her arm a basket of luscious fruit, peaches, plums, and grapes. These she extended to me, the “ugly duckling” of a boy from the plains, and asked me if I would have some peaches. The answer was to gather up several which I strung along in the crook of my arm, and as soon as I had obtained what I supposed a reasonable portion, I wondered how I could get this fruit so wonderful back to Polly [his sister, Mary] and . . . turned back as best I could to the wagon where Polly was concealed under the wagon cover because of her being a little ashamed of her appearance. Running behind the wheel ox and climbing up on the tongue of the wagon, I called to my sister, handed to her the fruit . . .

. . . Across the way on Temple Square block, the foundations of the temple rose above the general level of the surrounding ground and seemed to be an object of interest to nearly all the emigrants, many of whom were permitted to go within the wall, and view it. By and by there were numerous meetings in various groups of people, friends of the emigrants, parents and sweethearts, and perhaps in some instances wives of the teamsters that had returned. There seemed to be an air of cheerfulness in all this meeting of people on the arrival of this large emigrant train of Saints.

Mary and I seemed to be so little part of this excitement and joy, because nobody seemed to come for us. Mary remained concealed under the wagon cover, and I lonesome and heartsick sat upon the tongue of [the] wagon, my chin in my hands and elbows upon my knees, thinking “Zion” was not so much after all, if this was all of it. . .

Presently, however, approaching from the west gate, I saw a woman in a red and white plaid shawl. . . . She seemed to be daintily picking her way, and there was something in the movement of her head as she looked to the right and to the left that seemed familiar to me. The woman was moving in my direction, and the closer she came the stronger the conviction grew upon me that there was my mother. . . .

I stood until she came nearly parallel to where I sat; then sliding from the tongue of the wagon, I took a few steps, which brought me near to her and, plucking her gown, I said: “Hey Mother,” and she looked down upon my upturned face. Without moving she gazed upon me for some time and at last said, “Is this you, Harry? Where is Polly?” Of course Polly was in the wagon, and I led my mother to where she was hiding, and when mother and daughter met, there was a flood of tears on both sides. At last I joined them, making the trio of the united family. It



seemed difficult for our mother to realize that we at last were her children after more than four years of separation, but once in a while, a smile would break through the tears and she seemed to be extremely happy. A neighbor of hers . . . had driven her from Bountiful to the city to get us children, and it took but a short time to leave the remaining emigrant teams and people to find this wagon and make the start for home, Bountiful.

There was one thing remembered in this reunion, and that was on my part. I felt that I had arrived, that I belonged to somebody, that somebody had an interest in me, and these were the thoughts that were in my mind as I sat in the wagon on the drive home to Bountiful. I had heard incidentally that my mother owned her house, and that, of course, for English people, who among the poorer classes were all renters, meant a great deal to me. Now I was going to my mother's home—her own house.

As the wagon drew near to Bountiful, . . .



we came to the site of a log house with a dirt roof on one part of it and another part adjoining on the south that had been built up to the square with logs unchinked without a roof, and this, my mother turned to explain to me, was her home. But soon mother and children climbed out of the wagon and went into the house. . . .

No one was at home when the little group entered, much to the disappointment of the mother as to the children, for, of course, we were anxious to meet our other sister, “Annie,” who was remembered lovingly by us. Our mother seemed annoyed, for she had expected her other daughter at home, perhaps with supper ready. It was only a short time, however, until “Sister Annie” came in and what a charming thing she was—bright, blue-eyed, fine long hair combed back from her face. Everything about her seemed so perfectly clean and wholesome, and to my eyes she was beautiful too, and spritely. She seemed to be everywhere about the house at once, and the meal that our mother had expected was soon under way. . . .

. . . What was left of the day was the wonderful meal prepared by Annie. Not much variety of food, for our mother was desperately poor, but what there was, was fit for princes—just white light buttermilk biscuits with butter, clear water from the creek, and dark, sweet, sticky fluid called “Molasses.” It was heartily enjoyed, Mary and me furnishing the principle appetites. How long the talk of the reunion lasted is not remembered, but it must have been far into the night. With the awakening of the next day, my life in Utah had begun. **NE**

Excerpted from The Autobiography of B. H. Roberts (1990), 40–43.

An older sister, Annie, arrived at the cabin after Sister Roberts and her other children were already inside. The reunion was sweet, with simple food to eat and talking that lasted far into the night.