

(*The Improvement Era*, December 1948)

### Chapter 3

*In the year 1851, President Brigham Young sent a colony to build a fort and establish a place called Parowan, thus extending the great Mormon expansion to the south, encouraged at first by the Ute Chief Walker. But as the thin line of forts began to reach farther and farther into Chief Walker's territory, he viewed this influx with alarm and incited his people to attack. Among the Mormons were those who genuinely loved the Indians and made constant appeals to them. Foremost in this number were Jacob Hamblin and Thales Haskell. Added to the hostility of the Utes were three other adversaries: the Navajos the renegade whites, and nature, which seemed at times the greatest adversary of all. In cold blood an Indian had shot George A. Smith with his own gun which the Indian had borrowed, and Jacob Hamblin-and his company had been forced to go on and leave his body. The plunderers followed Hamblin's trail homeward and raided the herds of the weary settlers. No treaty with the United States could guarantee settlers from the depredations of the Navajos.*

However profitable the Utah field was proving to be, the beaten trails of the Navajo to the southeast were still too inviting and too rich in yield to forsake because of the undeveloped prospects on the northwest. From these trails to the southeast they brought home crops, livestock, children, women. All the promises they had made to refrain from this practice meant nothing to them. It was a rich industry; nothing but force could ever pry them out of it. But from that plundered southeast arose a bitter cry from bereaved parents, outraged husbands, desolated homes. The call of agony reached to the nation's capital demanding the return of their loved ones, even though the nation was in great distress with the Civil War at the height of its fury. Urged and petitioned, the president of the United States ordered a detachment of troops to the distant Navajo reservation. This time, unlike half a dozen former times, it did not come simply to talk about a scrap of paper. Desperate with its own dangers, the government ordered the situation to be handled with firmness. The command of this force fell to Kit Carson who started with it as guide. The particulars of his arrival on the reservation form a long story, but it is worth while to observe that Carson began with generous moderation and would have made peaceful settlement if he had found it possible. It was not possible. Nothing but a very heavy jolt would jar the false and dangerous notions out of the Navajo philosophy. Carson began rounding up the people of the reservation as if they were cattle, and driving them away in herds to Fort Sumner, known also as Bosque Redondo, in New Mexico. With light cannon mounted on the backs of mules, he compelled them to go or die. He chopped down their orchards, burned 796 their houses, killed or appropriated their livestock, and spoiled their fields. Consternation and terror spread before him as in a flock set upon by wolves. In death races over the sand they spread word of his approach, and all who could get away fled headlong. They crawled into dens or deep gulches, they climbed mountains and crossed

streams, anywhere to dodge Carson's grapeshot and keep out of his roundup. Destitute of food, destitute of blankets, they rushed away with their women and children, preferring starvation to capture. Carson took twelve thousand of their people away, leaving the country stripped and silent. The Piutes came in from their hideouts north of the San Juan and gobbled up all they could find. The few thousand Navajos who escaped "The Big Walk," as they called it, dared not so much as look southeast over their beaten trails where the terrible men in blue uniform guarded their fellow tribesmen as captives. Neither dared they go north among the chesty Piutes, nor south into central Arizona where they had made a host of deadly enemies. For these desperate refugees there remained but one possible escape from starvation—that was to follow the long trail across the Buckskins and brave the exasperated guards and herders who stood armed to fight for the flocks and herds of the Mormon settlements. Hence the desperation with which they descended from the tall timber in 1863, to skulk and await opportunity with the lives of themselves and their loved ones hanging in the balance. The raids of these hunger-crazed people in 1864, became worse in '65. They captured a band of horses from near Kanab, and there was no herd too well guarded to discourage their efforts. In one place they fired a stack of grain in the night to attract the guard while they emptied a corral of its horses. Sixteen of the Indians raided Pipe Springs in broad daylight, and the herders barely escaped with their lives.

While the famishing Navajos made existence more difficult every month along the southern border, the Utes and kindred tribes with Black Hawk at their head went on the warpath against the scattered settlements. In 1865-67 his cruel braves compelled the Mormons to abandon twenty or more of their fortified beginnings and draw back from the firing line for safety. Fields which had been cleared and planted with great care, ditches completed by hard toil, dearly-loved homes, orchards, and gardens were left for Black Hawk and his braves to loot or destroy. The true colors of death and terror in the remote settlements will never be painted in their fullness of agony. Nor will it ever be told about the braves who fell fighting for what they thought to be their rights, and the sorrow of those who waited in vain for their return. But Black Hawk and his people had to discover again, as in the Walker War, that they were not prepared to fight. When they had battled the steady and growing resistance of an organized people for two years, the chief was ready to put his thumbprint to a treaty of peace, that he and his people might turn their attention to the more profitable problem of gaining by what the Mormons could and would do to help them. The Walker War and the Black Hawk War, with all the other Indian troubles north and south, had been fought out to a victorious finish, and were matters of history. But the Navajo War, begun before the first one of the other two, and now in its seventeenth year, was far from any visible end, and was growing worse every day. They massacred the Berry family in Short Creek, they ventured north among the settlements beyond where anyone had imagined they would dare to go, and they fought to the death for the bands of horses, the herds of cattle, and the flocks of sheen with which they started back towards their homeland. And now something happened again

in the Navajo country, some tremendous thing which echoed all the way over the big river and the high mountain into Utah, as positively and giving as much alarm as that other echo in 1863, when Carson made his big roundup. For now, the thousands who had been held in humiliating captivity at Bosque Redondo, were released to return to their desolated country. With a very limited stock of provisions and half a dozen sheep to the family, they came sadly back to prey on each other or on their neighbors or to perish of starvation. Hemmed off on the north, on the east, and on the south as the refugees had been, there was but one direction in which they could look with any degree of safety and that was towards southern Utah where the settlers were already in a death fight to survive. With no alternative but to brave the dangers in that direction or sit meekly down to hunger, hoards of them set forth with stealthy step to find horses, cattle, sheep, anything that would help to keep their bodies and spirits together. It was for them to steal or die, and some of them were to die for stealing, and then the survivors sought revenge for those who fell in the fight.

In the early winter they came again to Pipe Springs where Dr. Whitmore and his herder, Mackentire, tended a flock of sheep. When the Springs were next visited by men from the settlements, wading out there through the deep snow, they found the cabin empty, its supplies gone, its furniture and utensils scattered or missing, Whitmore, his herder, and the sheep gone. They hunted a long time for some trace, wading back and forth in the snow, and then by the feathered end of an arrow, reaching up like a little flag from the wind-swept surface, they uncovered Dr. Whitmore, bristling with Navajo arrows. Mackentire was found under a drift, but the flock of sheep was gone and all tracks hidden under the snow. Others of these raiding gangs were not fortunate in having their tracks covered with snow, and knowing they would be followed, and goaded to desperation with thought of the hungry loved ones waiting at home, they fled with their haul in all possible haste. The men who followed them also had loved ones to be kept from impending want, and when the pursuers overtook the pursued, they fought, fought with the abandon of men who see no other way to live. Being under the necessity of defending themselves and holding their stolen stock at the same time, the robbers were at a distinct disadvantage in the fight, even more so when they were outnumbered, and it frequently happened that the survivors had to fly empty-handed, leaving their dead scattered about where they fell. However, their big, successful hauls of livestock came so nearly being the rule, and the tragic ending so often exception, that the Navajos took heart to apply themselves with vigor along what appeared to be their highway to financial recovery. In 1867, impelled by want, they hid in all the passes leading northward from their impoverished county. They got away with twelve hundred animals in one herd, crossing them over the river at El Vado de Los Padres, while Jacob Hamblin and forty men followed other Navajos to Lee's Ferry, forty miles below. According to Ammon Tenny, a contemporary writer, the Navajos stole a million dollars worth of livestock from southern Utah in one year – a million dollars worth of horses, cattle, and sheep from impoverished frontier! It was becoming unbearable, yet this exasperated enemy had not yet made its most alarming threat. Tenny

declared they were the only tribe of Indians who fought the Mormons persistently and implacably, scorning all offers of peace for twenty years. Like wolves sniffing for their prey they waited eagerly to pounce on anything they could devour. Not in the summertime only, but driven by necessity, they came in the dead of winter, toiling through or contriving to walk on the snow in hopes of finding something which had been entrusted for safekeeping to the barriers of frost and storm. The Mormon sentinels had to counter all these movements, maintaining their vigil whatever the weather, whatever the cost, mounting in desperation to meet the desperation of the enemy, for they too had loved ones waiting and praying for their success. After some of these bloody clashes on the wild border the Navajos sickened at sight of their dead, and to bolster their courage they brought with them some of their invincible Piute neighbors from the uncharted region north of the San Juan. Seven of these Piutes lay dead on the Trail after one of the flights, and their entrance into the conflict marked a most serious angle to its future development.

Time was to prove that this deeply-straited corner of Utah, with its impassable gulches and reefs and rims was sheltering a breed of Indians destined to defy the orders of the United States forty-three years, when all other tribes had accepted its standards. In a severe winter of the latter "sixties," with the people of the southern border fighting to hold their own against the Navajos, and both Mormons and Navajos taxing their wits to hold their own against the frost, Hamblin and his men wallowed through snow up to their stirrups in no man's land, suffering hardships untold. He matched the Navajo use of Piutes from San Juan with friendly Utes from nearer home, and along the wide front they fought battles to the death even when he was not with them. Some of these fights were never reported, for the men to report them fell in the conflict, and when Hamblin saw crows and buzzards circling over some distant place, he went there to count the dead. These scenes cut deeply into Hamblin's generous sympathies. He loved the Indians; he could see the situation from their angle. No matter that the Navajos had mocked at this offer of peace, murdered his beloved companion, and driven him from their country, his big heart swelled with sorrow when he looked at their dead faces there on the hills. He longed to win their confidence of the Utes, and established peace between them and the settlers. But hunger never sleeps – the war went on. In spite of the vigil of Hamblin and his scouts, including his faithful Ute recruits, the Navajos made a big haul of livestock from Utah in '68. These men of the desert had spent centuries mastering the art of stripping wary Mexicans and Pueblos of their possessions, and they were not to be balked by such improvised defenses as the Mormons, so lately from the eastern states, had learned to employ against them. The winter of 1869-70 brought hardships on a big scale to the southern frontier, with Hamblin and his invincibles battling bravely to save their much-needed livestock. In the wretched days and nights of his vigil in desert and mountain he contemplated the extreme suffering of his men, the losses his people had endured and must yet endure. He considered also the privations and injustice heaped upon the Navajos for, robbers though they were, they had rights, and their rights had not been

respected. Most of all he dreaded to find those circles of crows and the bodies of men who died while hunting food for themselves and their children. Hamblin discerned that conditions were growing steadily worse, that if something were not done to turn the tide, the frontier would be laid waste, towns would be burned, and the enemy would entrench themselves in all the gulches and mountains. Hoping to forestall these probabilities he appealed to President Brigham Young for permission to go again as peace envoy to the Navajos, trusting that now, after they had been so greatly humiliated, they would deign to consider his message. The President approved heartily, told Hamblin to go, and pronounced his blessing on him in this effort for peace. Again Hamblin took with him Era Hatch, Thales Haskell, and other stalwart frontiersmen and missionaries of unfaltering intrepidity, and they went pleading for peace where they had been received with contempt before. They found the Navajos smarting with the memory of what Carson and his troops had done to them, and the years of their anguish at Bosques Redondo. That of itself might have tended to soften their hearts towards the men from the north, but they had other memories, memories of sons or brothers or fathers who became food for crows somewhere north of the Buckskins. Besides the difficult matter of forgiving, as this peace plan required, it would bar them from the chief field of their very profitable industry as robbers. To make things worse, the government agents, thinking thereby to curry the favor of the natives, treated the peace messengers as intruders and swindlers. It began to look as if the sanest and safest thing for Hamblin and his company would be to get back to the river while they could, and return home in safety or hazard a repetition of the tragedy they had suffered there twelve years before. The feeling everywhere present was so bitter against them it seemed unthinkable that they could overcome it, even if they could remain on the reservation.

It would have taken a very bold prophet to predict that within eighteen years these Mormons would have found a place in the Navajo confidence which no white men as a group had ever found before. The Navajos had spit their venom for centuries at the conquering forces of Spain, and they had bowed to the United States only to save their lives when they were outgeneraled and outnumbered, not at all because they had been won as men have to be won before they surrender with their hearts. Hamblin and his brethren had something most potent to offer, and they wanted only a hearing. They knew that love and kindness are the most potent, the most enduring of all forces which change the lives of men for the better; that the methods of conquest which had reduced or exterminated Indian tribes from the Atlantic seaboard to the Rocky Mountains, is the very kind against which the human heart will revolt with its very last failing pulsation. In their travels from one camp to another, the missionaries met only with individuals or with families, finding no representative gathering to hear their plea, or to make any official answer for the nation. Even though they made a friend here and another there, it would still be the work of years to get the Navajos as a people committed to the offer of good will, and in those years the conflict would go on and perhaps develop dreadful proportions. They heard that a great national council had been appointed for a certain day at Fort Defiance, and taking some

of his companions with him, Hamblin headed for the fort, resolved by all means to be heard. He arrived to learn that the program had already been arranged, no place left for him to worm his way in, and the combined sentiment of the eight thousand Navajos assembled was just eight thousand times more against him than he had encountered from individuals on the trails and in the hogans. A certain Major Powell was there, a man of great influence and superior authority, and to him Hamblin poured forth his story with all his splendid power of appeal. Powell was charmed. He called to the big gathering for attention, gave Hamblin a most favorable introduction, and ordered the Navajos to hear his message. Hamblin appreciated that now, after twenty years of futile endeavor and conflict, the great moment of opportunity had come, and with it came the assurance and the composure of the "love which casteth out all fear." Slowly and very impressively he began to speak while the great copper-colored audience gave him the reluctant, momentary attention which the major's order compelled. But the moment was prolonged into a great silence of awe while Hamblin brought all his powers of soul to bear on his plea for peace. He told them the Mormon men and boys wanted to fight, but their leader, Brigham Young, wanted peace. He related the Mormon belief that the Indians are destined to become a great people, that the Mormon scriptures say wonderful things about them, and he invited them to come over into Utah without fear, to work for and trade with the people there and be their friends. His soulful appeal reached their hearts. At least it reached the hearts of the leading men of the nation, and the big chief, Barbecenta, put his arms around Hamblin, declaring that what he had said was good, very good. Then the chief made a strong and impassioned speech to his people, declaring uncompromisingly in favor of the plan which had been offered them. Turning to the Mormons he said he could not speak for all his people, but he would see the missionaries later and tell them more. At the Hopi villages on their way home, the peace messengers were overtaken by Barbecenta and other chiefs, their hearts overflowing with kindness. "We want to eat with your people at one table," declared the chief. "We want to warm with them at one fire, and to be friends." The great danger seemed suddenly to be past, the whole perilous situation transformed in an hour. But wait -the sweet lure of peace and brotherhood had moved some of the big souls of the nation, and they in their zeal had pacified some of the ignorant masses; that was all-their dominant passion of the bloody ages had by no means been purged from the tribe. The hearts of the big chiefs had been moved as never before, and in due time three of these twelve national leaders, with others appointed to go along, journeyed all the way over mountain and desert to Salt Lake City and visited with the Mormon leaders. They ate as special guests at banquets, enjoyed other demonstrations of welcome, and heard assurances of good will from Brigham Young and his immediate associates, to which they responded in pledges of hearty appreciation. Returning home they spread the glad tidings of good will, and told their people to go without fear to work and trade among the settlements. It was really too good to be true, too good to last-a great prevailing tide of ages reversed in a few short weeks. All the same, the people on both sides of the long conflict, weary and disgusted, had the simple faith to accept it for what it seemed

to be: the long-sought day of peace. Up over the trails where they had sneaked in caution before, the Navajos came now in glad companies to trade, to work, to engage in any legitimate enterprise for the things of which they stood in need. They peddled their blankets and their silverware without fear in strange towns faraway to the north, giving and receiving friendly greetings, and everything just seemed supremely wonderful. What a glorious and unexpected transformation for these enemies of twenty years from each side of the big river who had been hating and dreading and fighting each other to the death! Among the thousands who rejoiced, no one suspected that the new accord was resting on a slippery foundation from which it might fall headlong in an hour. Without a word of warning the whole hard-earned arrangement, in an evil moment, was to be upset and go tumbling to the earth; the report of it to send a shudder into every Mormon home from Kanab northward.

Late in the fall of 1874, four Navajo brothers, returning from a long trading trip into the northern settlements, followed the east fork of the Sevier River back towards their reservation. When they camped for the night in Grass Valley, winter seemed suddenly to set in, and snow fell heavily, piling up to alarming depths. Feeling secure in the thought that they were in a land of good will for their people, the boys entertained no alarm at the prospect of their trail homeward becoming impassable. They had stopped in a cow-cabin, affording them ample shelter from the storm which, according to appearances, might continue for days. When it did continue with indications that they might be compelled to spend at least part of the winter right there, they had to meet the problems of getting food or going hungry. Doting still on the belief that they need have no fear of people in the nearby towns and ranches, they planned to butcher a fat calf from the cattle under the trees around them. They would hang it from a limb in plain sight, and when the owners came, which would no doubt be soon, to drift to the winter range, they would understand, and would accept pay for their emergency trespass. Trustful and easy by their warm fire as the storm raged, they ate the juicy beef, and watched for someone with whom to make settlement, for they had the cash ready after their long trading trip in the north. But, alas, their nearest neighbors were deadly enemies. That cabin and the cattle around it belonged to some brothers, who afterwards became notorious as highwaymen and had to be shot on sight. They had no sympathy for the Mormons, no love for the Navajos, and no regard for the long toil and sacrifice by which this blessed peace had been brought about. When these men rode out in the storm to get their cattle and found the boys in their cabin and the beef hanging in a tree, they waited for no explanation but began to shoot. They killed three of the brothers, and the other one crawled away, badly wounded in the snow. O how extreme necessity does drive men over the formidable barrier which they thought was impossible to climb! When that Navajo boy afoot, wounded and without food or bedding, had to be killed by these murderers, or face the long journey in this condition, the journey he had hesitated about undertaking with a horse and in good health, he simply did the impossible. He would report to his anxious father and mother; his resolution would allow him to stop at nothing short of it. He would warn his

people away from this land of treachery, even though he had to crawl the last end of the journey and whisper it to them with his last breath. How he ever fought his way through trackless wilderness and winter, mountains, gulches, and deserts more than a hundred miles and got to the Colorado River alive is difficult for anyone to imagine who knows the country he had to cover. And how, wounded, half frozen, and famishing with hunger, he ever struggled through the strong icy current to the east side of the river is quite beyond comprehension. It is said that he crossed somewhere near the mouth of the Trachyte, and he toiled through a more terrible region still, before he reached the San Juan. The Navajos declared he was thirteen days without food or blankets, thirteen days nursing desperate wounds, fighting frost, and making record hikes while he chose his own way mile after mile and broke his path through the snow. When he dragged himself out on the south side of the San Juan, the land of his people, his story and his appearance were like a blaze in dry shavings. The Navajos repeated his words with foam on their lips, and they gathered heat with each relay. The frenzied impulse all over the reservation was to mount in haste, cross the big river and the Buckskin Mountains in a resistless horde, and make Mormondom a blotch of blood and ashes from Kanab to the lakes. It was the hot passion for revenge which, once started on its mad course, demanded a thousand prices for its loss. Furious echoes from the reservation reached into Utah. Even through the winter and over the deep snow came the sound of grim war gathering power to strike. It came to the ears of Brigham Young, but instead of ordering his people to arm for the conflict, he relied on the greater force which had done more for them than arms could do. He called for Jacob Hamblin. He wanted Hamblin, by the use of his superior power, to go at once and turn the surging tide back from its mistaken course - one man to meet and overcome singlehanded and without arms, a furious nation of fifteen thousand or more hot for revenge.