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The Mormon Prophet

BY

LILY DOUGALL

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The Madonna of a Day, Beggars All, Etc.

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new converts there, and he was now possessed with the desire for money to build the new city, and for a million proselytes to dwell in it. In spite of this, after sending out new relays of missionaries in all directions, he settled down to the most sober routine of study. Hebrew was the new language he wished to acquire, and he felt the call to revise the Old Testament.

CHAPTER II.

Only one unusual incident occurred in Susannah's presently peaceful life. One day in the golden October she set out to walk some distance up the valley of the Chagrin River. The object of the walk was a visit to one of the outlying farmhouses occupied by a family of the Saints; but Susannah, as was her wont, found more joy in the walk than in the visit. When she had passed beyond the meeting of the waters, the valley lay long before her, about a mile in width and quite flat. The stream was scarcely seen; the ground was covered with flowery weeds, white asters with their myriad tiny stars, the pale seed feathers of the golden rod, high grasses, and wild things innumerable which had been turned brown and gray by the autumn sun. Pink clumps of the rice weed, and small groves of the scarlet stalks of the wild buckwheat. This level sea of weeds stood so high that when she threaded the narrow path they reached above her waist. The bees in the white asters were humming as they hum in apple bloom. The blue jays were calling and flying in low horizontal flights. The val-
ley stretched to the south-east, then curved; a little mountain barred the view, upon whose pine-trees the distant air began to tinge with blue. On the curving bluffs on either side the trees stood in stately crowds; hardly a leaf had fallen, except from the golden walnut-trees; the colour of the foliage was for the most part like the plumage of some green southern bird, iridescence of gold and red shot through. To her right, where a part of the long hill had been cleared of trees, the sun shone upon bare gullies in the soap-stone cliffs, making the colour of that particular brown bit of earth very vivid. Everywhere a soft autumn haze was lying, and above white clouds were swinging across the pale blue sky.

After threading the valley path for a mile Susannah was ascending the bluff to get to the level of the upper farms, when, much to her surprise, she came, as once before upon the hill Cumorah, upon Joseph Smith. He was lying under a group of giant walnut-trees, whose boles were sheltered from the road by a natural hedge of red dogwood and brambles. He had apparently been occupied at his devotions, but she only saw him arising hastily. This time there was no peep-stone; it had long since been discarded. The prophet had a Bible in his hand, and it was evident that he had been weeping. It was in those lands the habit of religious men of all sects to make oratories of the woods. Susannah's only desire was to pass and leave him undisturbed, but he spoke.

"He began severely, "Sister Susannah Halsey, it is not meet that a woman should stray so far from home and without companions."

For a moment Susannah stood abashed. Unaccustomed to censure, she supposed that she must have done wrong. "I have walked this way before," she began meekly, "but if—" She stopped here, her own judgment in the matter beginning to assert itself.

The prophet had forgotten his reproof. At all times his conversation was apt to reveal that sudden changes of mental phase took place within him apparently without conscious volition. He now exclaimed with more modest mien, "It is, no doubt, by the will of the Lord that you are come, for I stood in sore need of comfort, for the revelation of the truth is a trial hard to endure, and at times very bitter."

"Is it?" asked Susannah intently. It was impossible but that her long curiosity should find some vent, and yet she shrank inwardly from her own prying.

The prophet leaned against a huge bole. The ground at his feet was covered with yellow walnut leaves and the olive-coloured nuts. The sunlight fell upon him in patches of yellow light. He opened the Bible, turning over the leaves of the Old Testament as if making a rapid survey of its history in his mind.

"Sister Halsey," he began, "when the
favour of the Lord rested chiefly upon the Jewish nation, at the times of the patriarchs and David, and when Solomon, arrayed in all his glory and in the greatness of his wisdom, reigned from Dan to Beersheba, mustn't those have been the times when the people walked most closely with the Lord?"

"I suppose so, Mr. Smith."

"It is not enough to suppose, Sister Halsey, for it is clearly written that when the Jews went contrary to the will of the Lord they were given over into the hands of their enemies."

Susannah endeavoured to give a more unqualified assent.

"Sister Halsey, there has come to my soul in reading this book in these last days a word, and I know not if it be the word of the Lord or no."

She saw with astonishment that his whole frame was trembling now. She began to realise that he was truly in trouble, whether because of the greatness of the revelation or because of private distress she could not tell. She became more pitiful.

"I hope you are well, Mr. Smith, and that Emma is well. There is nothing to really distress you, is there?"

In hearing the increased gentleness of his tone he seemed to find a more easy expression for his pent-up feeling: "It's come upon me in a very cutting way, truly as the prophets said like a two-edged sword, and at the time too when I was inquiring of the Lord concerning—" He stopped here, and she felt that his manner grew more confidential, but he did not look at her, his eyes sought the ground—"concerning a matter which has given me no little heart searching." He stopped again, she listening with a good deal of interest.

"It's come to me to observe that among the chosen people—there ain't no gainsayin' it, Sister Halsey, though I trust you to be discreet and not mention the matter, but in the days when the divine favour rested on Israel each man had more than one wife; and the Lord Himself says He give them to Solomon, the only objection being to heathen partners."

"Do you mean, Mr. Smith, that I'm not to mention what everybody knows already, that in the Old Testament times polygamy was practised?"

The now entire lack of sympathy in her tone affected him as an intentional act of rudeness would affect an ordinary man. The tissue of his mind, which had relaxed into confidence, grew visibly firmer. He assumed the teaching tone.

"No, Mrs. Halsey, the only thing that I asked you not to mention was that I had any light of revelation on a point on which most of our minds is already made up."

"Mr. Smith, you can't possibly be in the slightest doubt but that it would be very
wicked for any man now to have more than one wife."

"I've heard a great many of the ministers who in times past, in the time of our bond-age we heard and believed, say as it would be very wicked for any one nowadays to take God at His word and expect Him to do a miracle or heal the sick; but I've come to the conclusion, Mrs. Halsey, that it isn't a question of what we in our ignorance and prejudice might think wicked, but it's a question of what's taught in this book, looked at without the eye of prejudice and tradition. What we call civilisation is too often devilisation—devilisation, Mrs. Halsey."

He tapped the book. He was becoming oratorical. "The idea of one wife came in with the Romans. 'Twas no institution of Jehovah, Mrs. Halsey."

Susannah, more accustomed to his oratorical vein than to private conference, became now more frank and at ease.

"You said you didn't know that the idea was from the Lord, Mr. Smith, and I don't think it is. I don't think you'll entertain it very long, and I don't think, if you did, many of the Saints would stay in your church."

She bade him good-day, and went on up the slope. When she was walking along the brink of the bluff in the open beyond the nut-trees she heard him call. He came after her with hastened gait, Bible still in hand. She was surprised to find that what he had to say was very simple, but not the less dignified for that.

"I sometimes think, Sister Halsey, that you look down on us all as if we weren't good enough for you, although you're too kindly to let it be seen. According to the ways of the world, of course, it's so. If I'm as rough and uneducated as most of our folks, at least I can think in my mind what it would be not to be rough, and I can think sometimes how it all seems to you."

His words appealed directly to strong private feeling which had no outlet. While she stood seeking a reply the natural power that he had of working upon the feelings of others, vulgarly called magnetism, so far worked in connection with his words that tears came to her eyes.

"I don't often think about my old life," she said with brief pathos.

Smith was looking at the ground, as a huge, shy boy might stand when anxious to express sympathy of which he was somewhat ashamed. "I know it must be a sort of abiding trial to you." After a moment he added, "I wouldn't like to make it worse by having you think that I was goin' to preach any strange doctrine. I'd sometimes give a good deal if the Lord would raise me up a friend that I could speak to concerning the lights that come to me that I know that it wouldn't do to speak of in the public congregations, because of their upsetting nature, and like-
wise because I doubt concerning their meaning. And of this matter there was no thought in my mind to speak in public, for it is for the future to declare whether it be of the darkness or of the light; but to you I spoke, almost unwittingly, and perhaps in disobedience to the dictates of wisdom."

He looked at her wistfully.

Susannah leaned her arm upon the topmost log of the snake fence and looked down the slope. His insight into her own trials caused her to sympathise with him in spite of his absurdity. She made an honest effort to assist him to self-analysis. She said, "A great many things come into our minds at times, Mr. Smith, that seem important, but, as you say, if we do not speak about them, afterwards we see that they are silly. Of course with you, if you think some of your thoughts are revelations, it must make you often fancy that the others may be very important too, but it does not follow that they are, and, as you say, time will weed them out if you are trying to do right." She wondered if he would resent her ifs. She stood looking down the bank in the short silence that followed, feeling somewhat timorous. The steep ground was covered with the feathery sprays of asters, seen through a velvety host of gray teasles which grew to greater height. Through the teasles the white and purple flowers showed as colours reflected in rippled water—rich, soft, vague in outline. At one side, by an old stump, there was a splendid feather, yellow and green, of fading golden rod; yellow butterflies, that looked as if they had dyed their wings in the light reflected from this flower, repeated its gold in glint and gleam over all the gray hillside, shot with the white and the blue. At the foot of the bank lay the flat valley, and from this vantage ground the river could be seen. The soft musical chat of its waters ascended to her ears, and among the huge bronze-leaved nut-trees, whose shelter she had just left, the woodpeckers were tapping and whistling to one another.

At length Smith sighed deeply, but without affectation. "Yes, I reckon that's a good deal how it is. It ain't easy, Mrs. Halsey—I hope in your thoughts when judgin' of me you'll always remember that it ain't easy to be a prophet."

When he had gone, Susannah found herself laughing, but for Halsey's sake the laughter was akin to tears.
Then the sea of faces around her, the powerful voice of the preacher resounding above, passed away like a dream, and were exchanged for a small room and a dim light, where two or three people were gathered round the form of the insensible man. She escaped unnoticed through a private door into the fields, where the March wind eddied in the black night.

CHAPTER IV.

The house in which the Smiths lived was small. Susannah crossed a field-path, led by a light in their window. In the living room a truckle bed had already been made up. By the fire Joseph and Emma were both occupied with two sick children. These children, twins of about a year, had been taken out of pity at their mother’s death, and Susannah was told as she entered that they had been attacked by measles.

Susannah found that the fact that she had been to the meeting had not irritated the Smiths, although Mrs. Rigdon had called to make the most of the story. Emma, absorbed in manifold cares for the children, was only solicitous on Susannah’s account lest a night’s rest in that house should be impossible. Smith, pacing with a child in his arms, seemed to be head and shoulders above the level whose surface could be ruffled by life’s minor affairs. With the eye of his inner mind he was gazing either at some lofty scheme of his own imagining, or at heaven or at vacancy. All of him that was looking at the smaller beings about him was composed and kind.

One of the twins, less ill than the other,
had fallen asleep in Emma's arms. The other
was wailing pitifully upon the prophet's
breast.

"Do you and Mrs. Halsey go in and lie
down with that young un, Emmar, and rest
now for a bit while ye can."

"I can't leave ye, Joseph, with the child
setting out to cry all night like that."

But he had his way. Long after they had
lain down in the inner room Susannah heard
him rocking the wailing babe, or trying to
feed it, or pacing the floor. Emma, worn
out, slept beside her. Upstairs the owners
of the house, an old couple named Johnson, and
Emma's own child, were at rest.

Susannah lay rigidly still in the small por-
tion of the bed which fell to her share. Her
mind was up, wandering through waste
places, seeking rest in vain. The wail of
the child in the next room at last had ceased. The
prophet had lain down with it on the trundle
bed. Long after midnight Susannah began
to hear a low sound as of creeping footsteps
in the field. Some people were passing very
near, surely they would go past in a moment?
She heard them brushing against the outer
wall, and gleams of a light carried fell upon
the window.

In a minute more the outer door of the
house was broken open. Emma woke with a
cry; instinct, even in sleep, made her spring
toward the door that separated her from her
husband.

The two women stood in the inner door-
way, but the coarse arm of a masked man was
already stretched across it, an impassable
barrier. The prophet lay on the child's bed, so
heavy with sleep tardily sought that he did
not awake until four men had laid hold of
him. All the light upon the scene came from
a smoking torch which one of the house-
breakers held. Some twenty men might have
been there inside the room and out. The
women could barely see that Smith was borne
out in the midst of the band. He struggled
fiercely when aroused, but was overpowered
by numbers.

The owners of the house came down from
above, huddling together and holding Emma,
who would have thrown herself in the midst
of the mob.

Susannah had not undressed. She threw
her cloak over her head and ran out, deter-
moved to go to the village and demand help
in the name of law and a common humanity.
She was in a mood to be reckless in aiding
the cause she had espoused.

By the glow of the torch which the felons
held she saw the group close about the one
struggling man as they carried him away.
She fled in a different direction.

She had gone perhaps sixty rods in the
darkness out of sight of Smith and his tor-
mentors when she was stopped by three men
and her name and purpose demanded. When
she declared it in breathless voice they laughed
aloud. In the darkness she was deprived of that weapon, her beauty, by which she habitually, although unconsciously, held men in awe.

"Now, see here, sister, you jest sit quietly on the fence here, and see which of them's going to get the best of it. Your man's a prophet, you know; let him call out his miracles now, and give us a good show of them for once. He's jest got a few ordinary men to deal with; if he and his miracles can't git the best of them he ain't no prophet. Here's a flattish log now on top. Git up and sit on the fence, sister."

While she struggled in custody another group of dark figures came suddenly at a swinging trot round the dark outline of one of the nearer houses. They brought with them the same kind of lurid torch and a smoking kettle or cauldron carried between two. The foremost among them were also carrying the body of a man, whether dead or alive she could not see. When he was thrown upon the ground he moved and spoke. It was Rigdon's voice. She perceived that he was helpless with terror. The prophet had certainly struggled more lustily.

"Now you jest keep still, sister," said the loudest of her three companions. "Kill him? not if ye don't make a mess of it by interter-in'. It's only boilin' tar they've got in the pot."

Susannah covered her face with her hands; then, too frightened to abstract her mind, she gazed again, as if her watchfulness might hinder some outrage. The group was not near enough, the light was too uncertain, for her to see clearly. The shadows of the men were cast about upon field and wall as if horrible goblins surrounded and overshadowed the more material goblins who were at work. They were taking Rigdon's clothes from him. Their language did not come to her clearly, but it was of the vilest sort, and she heard enough to make her heart shiver and sicken. They held over him the constant threat that if he resisted they would kill him outright. If Smith, too, were exposed to such treatment she did not believe that he would submit, and perhaps he was now being done to death not far off.

When they began to beat Rigdon with rods and his screams rang out, Susannah could endure no longer. She broke madly away from her keepers, running back along the road towards Emma's house. They essayed to follow; then with a laugh and a shrug let her go, calling to her to run quick and see if the prophet had fetched down angels to protect him.

Susannah ran a long way, then, breathless and exhausted, found that she had missed a turning and gone much too far. Afraid lest she should lose herself by mistaking even the main direction in which she wanted to go, and that while out of reach of any respectable
house she might again be assailed by members of the mob, she came back, walking with more caution. She had no hope now of being the means of bringing help. She had come farther from the village instead of nearing it, and what few neighbours there were, having failed to interfere, were evidently inimical.

When she found the right turning she again heard the shouts of some assaulting party, and, creeping within the shadow of trees, she waited.

At length they passed her, straggling along the road, shouting and singing, carrying with them some garments which, in rough horse-play, they were tearing into fragments. When the last had turned his back to where she stood she crept out, running again like a hunted thing, fearing what she might find as the result of their work. To increase her distress the thought came that it was more than possible that like work had been going on at Kirtland that night. Tears of utterable indignation and pitiful love came to her eyes at the thought that Angel, too, might be suffering this shameful treatment. Across some acres of open ground she saw the Smiths' house, doors and windows lit by candles. Thither she was hastening when, in the black space of the nearer field, she almost fell upon a whitish form, grotesque and horrible, which was rising from the ground.

"Who is it?" asked Joseph Smith.

He stood up now, but not steadily; his voice was weak, as if he had been stunned, and his utterance indistinct because his mouth had apparently received some injury. She thought of nothing now but that he was Angel's master, and that Angel might be in like plight.

"What have they done? What is the matter?" she whispered tenderly, tears in her voice.

"Is it you?" he asked curiously. He said nothing for a minute and then, "They've covered me with the tar and emptied a featherbed on me. If ye'd have the goodness to tell Brother Johnson to come out to me, Mrs. Halsey——"

"They have hurt you other ways," she said tremulously, "you are bruised."

"A man don't like to own up to having been flogged, ye see; but Peter and Paul and all of them had to stand it in their time, so I don't know why a fellow like me need be shamefaced over it. But if you'd be good enough, Mrs. Halsey, to go and tell Emmett that I ain't much hurt, and send Brother Johnson out with some clothes or a blanket——"

He stopped without adding that he would feel obliged. As she went she heard him say with another sort of unsteadiness in his tone, "It's real kind of you to care for me that much."

In her excitement she did not know that she was weeping bitterly until she found herself surrounded by other shuddering and
weeping women in Emma's room; for other of the converts in Hiram, hearing of the violence abroad, had crept to this house for mutual safety and aid.

It is the low, small details of physical discomfort that make the bitterest part of the bread of sorrow. Now and afterwards, through all the persecutions in which she shared, Susannah often felt this. If she could have stood off and looked at the main issues of the battle she might have felt, even on the mere earthly plane, exaltation. Yet one truth her experience confirmed—that no human being who in his time and way has been hunted as the outcast of the world—no, not the noblest—has ever had his martyrdom presented in a form that seemed to him majestic. It is only those who bear persecution, not in its reality but in imagination, who can conceive of it thus.

All night the women were crowded together in the small inner room with the two sick babes, while Emma and two of the brethren performed the painful operation of taking the tar from Smith's lacerated skin. The prophet bore himself well. Now and then through the thin partition the watchers heard an involuntary groan, but he was firm in his determination to be clean of the pitch, and to preach as he had appointed the next day.

At dawn Susannah went to get her horse at Rigdon's house. The animal was safe. When she had saddled it she inquired after the welfare of those within the house. Rigdon was raving in delirium. He had, it seemed, been dragged for some distance by his heels, his head trailing over stony ground. They had not been able to remove the tar and feathers. He lay upon a small bed in horrible condition. His wife, with swollen eyes and pallid face, was sitting helpless upon the foot of the bed, worn out with vain efforts to soothe him. His mother, a thin and dark old woman, vibrating with anathemas against his tormentors, led Susannah in and out of the room silently, as though to say, "This is the work of those whose virtue you extolled."

The village, the low rolling hills about it, lay still in the glimmer of dawn. The men of violence were sleeping as soundly, it seemed, as innocence may sleep. The famous preacher, and all those souls that he had thrilled through and through for good and evil, were now wrapped in silence. Susannah rode fast, guiding her horse on the grass by the roadside lest the sound of his hoofs should arouse some vicious mind to renewed wrath. Her imagination, possessed by the scenes of the past night, presented to her lively fear for Halsey's safety. She gave her horse no peace; she thought nothing of her own fatigue until she had reached the Chagrin valley, and the walls of the Mormon temple which was being reared upon Kirtland Bluff were seen glistening in the sunlight, with the familiar outline of the wooden town sur-
rounded by gray wreaths of the leafless nut woods. It was high day, and the people were gathering for morning service when Susannah rode her jaded horse through the street of the lower village and up the hill of the Bluff.

As she lifted the latch of her own door Angel was about to come out to preach. His face was very white and sad. Susannah's glad relief, fatigue, and excitement found vent in tears.

"You are safe!" she cried. "Oh, my dear, I will never leave you again while danger is near—never, never again!"

In the evening of that day further news came from Hiram. The prophet had preached long and gloriously in the open air. New converts had been made, and he himself, scarified and bruised as he was, had gone down into the icy river and baptized them in sight of all. The mob had shrieked and jeered, but had been withheld by God, as the messenger said, from further violence.

Susannah made no further effort to find new life in the old doctrines. All her sentiments of justice and mercy combined to make her espouse her husband's cause with renewed ardour.