

MY SUMMER IN A MORMON VILLAGE

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My Summer in a Mormon Village by Florence A. Merriam

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MY SUMMER IN A MORMON VILLAGE.

I.

A HAVEN OF REST.

WHEN I tell people that I went from New York to spend the summer in Utah, they look at me with such polite amazement that I hurriedly explain my errand. My friend, an enthusiastic student of birds, after her summer of study in Ohio and Colorado, was looking for new worlds to conquer. I went with her for the birds and the climate, — the too little known climate of the dry elevated region between the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada, known to geographers as the "Great Basin" of America. Utah and Arizona have this basin climate and are the natural sanitariums of our continent, far surpassing the Adirondacks,

Florida, and California in elevation, dryness, and recuperative effect, — especially in pulmonary difficulties.

We had been advised to begin the summer on an island in the Great Salt Lake, because of the rare opportunities it was supposed to afford for the study of desert birds. But one of the owners whom we consulted said that, while we might like to see the herds of elk and buffalo planted there, really there was no place for ladies ; and the trip to the island involved an all-night's sail on a sail-boat. We remembered in discomfiture that Salt Lake was large, and meekly accepted his substitution of a neighboring Mormon village.

Our interest in the Mormon problem began on the train. The occupants of the car divided themselves into the observed and the observers. My friend and I whispered to each other about an unconscious group of women traveling under the leadership of one dogged-looking man, only to find ourselves under the speculative scrutiny of another Eastern tourist.

Even on the train we began to feel the grateful influence of restful country life. From the windows we watched the quiet lake, the wayside flowers, and the sea-gulls, engaged in the surprising occupation of following the plow. At our station, a Western meadow-lark sang his sweet strain from a telegraph pole; we could hear blackbirds calling from the marshes.

We took the only wagon that met the train, and drove through the village. It was a typical Mormon village, one of a line of closely connected settlements running along the valley between the Wasatch and the great lake. The settlements, — with their elaborate system of irrigation, — when contrasted with isolated farms of the East, afford examples of Brigham Young's shrewd policy of centralization.

But we were more interested in village life than in Brigham Young, just then. Many of the streets were lined with locust-trees, whose white blossoms in June filled the air with their delicious fragrance. Under the trees ran mountain brooks, falling

in white cascades down the hilly streets. Picturesque low stone houses were set back in bushy yards, each house with its orchard beside it,—delightful old overgrown orchards, in which the children played and calves grazed in the dappling sunlight.

Long houses with two or more front doors excited our whispered comment, though we learned afterward that a new front door did not always mean a new wife. Children were everywhere. Almost every house had its baby. The most attractive were the little maidens whose flaxen curls and blue eyes were half hidden within demure pink or blue Mormon sunbonnets.

We drove to the only boarding house in the town, and felt at home in Utah the moment we looked into the honest, motherly face of our landlady. She could board us, and took us next door to engage rooms. She called her neighbor "aunt," though they were of an age, and it soon came over us that we were to live in a Mormon family. As we shrank from every-day contact with the painful life of polygamy, we were re-

lieved to find that our family numbered only mother and daughters.

"Our house" was one of the most attractive of the village. It was partly hidden from the street by its lilacs, blooming against the fence; its trees and rosebushes set in its well-kept lawn, — almost the only lawn in the village, — and the glimpse of its vine-covered piazza, bay-window, and one-story sloping roof brought cosy, homelike suggestions.

While we rested on the piazza after our long journey, enjoying the peaceful village atmosphere, a pair of chickadees came flitting about our trees, with as familiar manners and homelike tones as if they were the same little friends we had known in the East, and had come to welcome us. Two boys in blue jeans came riding a bay horse down the street, — bareback, and one behind the other, as we soon learned was the fashion in Utah. They had their hands full of flowers, gathered on the mountain for their mother. I asked them for a few to send East, and when I gave them five