

EMILY HILL

Born: 24 March 1836 in Warminster, Wilts, England

Age: 20

Willie Handcart Company



Of my pedigree I will simply say that my parents [Thomas and Elizabeth Slade Hill] were honorable, hard-working people, too independent in spirit to stoop to mean actions, much less to sully their conscience to curry favor. The youngest living of eleven children, I fully enjoyed the privileges often accorded the youngest member of a family, (i.e.) of having things my own way. My parents as well as my brothers and sisters were very kind to me, and I can truly say—slightly reversing a word in the lines of one of our poets, that, “I never knew what trouble was Till I became a Mormon.”

When but a mere child I was much concerned about my eternal salvation and felt that I would make any sacrifice to obtain it. I asked all kinds of questions of my mother and sisters, seeking how to be saved, but could get no satisfaction from them nor from the religious body (Wesleyans) to which they belonged. Hungry and thirsty for truth, I searched the Scriptures, invariably turning to the lives of ancient apostles or to the beautiful writings of the Prophet Isaiah. I was never weary of reading his prophecies, the glory of a Latter-Day Zion that burthened his inspirations possessed for me a charm irresistible. Truly I was waiting for something, I knew not what, came to me sooner than I expected. When I was about twelve years old, my cousin, Miriam Slade, (afterward the wife of Edward Hanham,) came to visit us; she was very merry-hearted and we had anticipated her visit, expecting a good deal of fun; but she was too full of a “new religion” to do anything but preach. “God,” she said, “had spoken from the heavens to a man named Joseph Smith; the Gospel was restored to the earth, the honest in heart were commanded to gather to the land of Zion for safety, for this was the last Dispensation, and the hour of God’s judgment had come!”

Right faithfully she testified to her knowledge of these things, much to the surprise of our family, who were considerably amused at her earnestness as well as at the novelty of her belief, and notwithstanding I listened attentively, I thought her assertions too good to be true. The next Sunday my cousin informed us that the Latter-Day Saints had appointed a meeting for that day at an adjoining village called Chalford, and invited us to go. As it was a distance of five or six miles, making a long walk there and back, none of my brothers cared to go, and my elder sisters considered themselves altogether too respectable to attend an outdoor meeting of such a primitive sect, therefore they declined to go, and no one thought of sending me till I suggested it. Turning to my father, my sisters said (laughingly), “Yes, send Em, she will tell us all about it.”

In five minutes Miriam Slade and myself were on the road, accompanied by Mr. Wm. Bowring, (brother to Henry E. Bowring of Brigham City), and by Edward W. Tullidge, then a youth, but now well-known as a talented writer and also as the proprietor and editor of *Tullidge’s Quarterly Magazine*. Never shall I forget that day, surely it was the turning point of my whole life. A few devoted worshippers of truth met together in a small house, to bear their testimony to one another and to worship God! And He was in their midst and that to bless them. Even as in the Day of Pentecost, they spake in tongues and prophesied, which prophecy I have seen fulfilled. Unlike the Jews who were “pricked in their hearts,” I did not even ask, “What shall I do to be saved?” “The way” was open before me, and simple and young as I was, I instinctively knew that “I could not err therein.” ... It was indeed as though I had been brought “out of darkness into marvelous light,” and I could not shut my eyes against it.

In the evening I attended an out door “Mormon Meeting,” and though naturally sensitive to ridicule, I did not care the least for the sneers of the crowd but joined in the songs of the Saints as well as I could, for in my childish way I wanted it understood that I was not ashamed to be counted one with the peculiar people called Latter-Day Saints. Many a time since, when “offences” have come in my way, over which with mortal weakness I have almost stumbled, the testimony of that eventful day has been to me a precious recollection which nothing could obliterate. I was so overjoyed at finding what I had so long desired, and so eager to convince my friends that I could hardly wait to get home. As soon as I was inside the house and almost before anyone else could speak, I astounded them all by the empathetic declaration that I knew the Latter-Day Saints were the right people; and I would join them as soon as I was big enough. [She was only 12 at this time.] I was never sent to “take notes” of the “Mormons” again, but on the contrary was closely watched lest I should be led away by a “sect that was everywhere spoken against.” My early study of the Scriptures now stood me in good stead, and I searched the Bible more diligently than ever, so that I might give a good reason for my faith to the hosts that assailed me, (right reverends among the number,) who, finding it easier to cry “delusion” than to prove it, generally wound up by informing me that I wasn’t old enough to know my own mind, and was altogether too young to judge of so grave matter. Meantime my persistent faith invoked such a tempest of wrath over my head, that I could not even get an opportunity to be baptized, and the elders did not think it wisdom (because of my tender years) to perform the ceremony without my parents’ consent. I well remember looking forward to a period when I should be old enough to act for myself, and it seemed a lifetime.

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About this time one of the elders brought Brother John Halliday (brother to Bishop Halliday of Santaquin) to our house, who bore such a powerful testimony to the divine mission of Joseph Smith, that my sister, Julia, (now Mrs. Ivins of St. George) exclaimed, "If ever there was a man of God I'm sure he is one, and I'll be a Latter-Day Saint, too!" From that time I had a friend in the family, and we were both determined that cost what it might we would be true to the light within us. Only once in a great while could we steal away and meet with the Saints, but although we were not yet baptized we partook of the sacrament and paid out our pocket money to the Church funds like actual members.

On one of these occasions Brother Halliday blessed me and confirmed upon me the promise that I should write in prose and in verse and thereby comfort the hearts of thousands. After this I was baptized March 25, 1852, I was then sixteen, but had virtually been a Latter-day Saint for four years.

Denied the privilege of freely meeting with the Saints, I all the more earnestly desired to gather to Zion; but fearing I might be forcibly detained if I attempted to leave home directly for America, I obtained my parents' consent to visit my sister, Julia—who had already gone to Northampton (quite a long distance from home) hoping that the way would open up, so we might earn enough to emigrate. Therefore the first time I had enjoyed religious freedom and there also took my lessons of hard times; preparing me for greater hardships in store.

In the month of May 1856, we sailed for America on the ship *Thornton*, Captain Collins, commander; Brother James G. Willie had charge of the Saints, ... and a good captain he was. We had a pleasant trip with the exception of one heavy storm, which I would not have missed for a great deal. From New York we traveled by rail and by way of Lake Erie to the camping ground in the neighborhood of Iowa City; there we were obliged to wait till the companies were ready to start, and surely if we had been natural or unnatural curiosities we could not have been commented on or stared at any more by the people surrounding us. "Mormons, men, women, and children, and worse, a lot of young girls, bound for Salt Lake and going to pull 'hand carts!' Shocking!" Yet, for the potent reason that no other way seemed open, and on the principal "descending below all things," I made up my mind to pull a hand cart. "All the way to Zion," a foot journey from Iowa to Utah, and pull our luggage, think of it!

Anonymous letters and warnings from sympathizing outsiders were mysteriously conveyed to us, setting forth the hardships and impossibilities of such a journey, and offering us inducements to stay. Many who started out with us backed out in a few days; my sister broke down and was unable to walk and I remember asking myself (footsore and weary with the first week of walking and working) if it was possible for me, faith or no faith, to walk twelve hundred miles further. The flesh certainly was weak but the spirit was willing, I set down my foot that I would try, and by the blessing of God I pulled a handcart a thousand miles and never rode one step. Some thrilling scenes I could relate incident to that journey, and must forbear for want of space. Suffice it to say that after a long and wearisome journey, being entirely out of provisions, we halted for want of strength to proceed,¹ and never should I have beheld (with mortal eyes) "the city of the Saints" had not the compassionate people of Utah sent out a number of brave-hearted brethren with food and clothing to our relief. May they all be everlastingly blessed.

Emily and Julia survived their ordeal, but a few short years later experienced heartache that she said made her previous trials seem like "child's play." She wrote:

In the month of June, 1857, firmly believing in the principle of plural marriage I entered into it. The result of this marriage was one child only, for a little more than three years after said marriage, my husband, William G. Mills, went on a mission to England, and after I had worked for upwards of four years to maintain myself and little one, my husband himself sent me word that he never intended to set foot in Utah again. And here I must be allowed to say in behalf of myself and other true women who have who have endured such separations, and to whom, perhaps, it is counted as nothing, no one can realize what such an ordeal it, unless they have passed through it. All that I had hitherto suffered seemed like child's play compared to being deserted by the one in whom I had chosen to place the utmost confidence, who himself had fixed in impassable gulf between us by ignoring the very principles by which he had obtained me, leaving myself and my little one (for all he knew) to sorrow and destitution. Harder still, was it for me to believe that this abandonment had been deliberately planned. ...

I had striven hard to keep out of debt—determined to do my part as a missionary's wife, that when my husband came back he might not be hampered on my account. Nevertheless "hard times" stared me in the face, and I was almost overwhelmed by circumstances beyond my control. During the winter season of 1863-64 (owing to the [Civil] war and many circumstances combined) provisions and other necessaries commanded almost fabulous prices, and I could not see how I should ever be able to keep "the wolf from the door." To add to my trouble, the house I occupied (and to which I had been led to believe I had some claim,) was sold over my head and thus I had the prospect of being homeless, at a time when rents were going up double and treble. One night when I was so weary with overwork and anxiety, pondering what to do, these words impressed me as if audibly spoken, TRUST IN GOD AND THYSELF. ... Immediately after this my way opened up before me, almost within the week I secured another home, which if not very commodious had for me the satisfying charm of being my own.

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On May 7, 1864, I again entered into plural marriage and was sealed by Heber C. Kimball to Joseph Woodmansee, to whom I have borne four sons and four daughters. Two of these died in infancy, leaving me a family of seven, including my first-born. Nearly twenty years have rolled by since my second marriage, during which time I have seen many changes of fortune which I cannot now relate, but I will say this much of my children's father. Misfortunes have befallen him but have never affected his faith, he has proven his allegiance to the principles and priesthood of God at considerable sacrifice to himself and family, enduring reverses uncomplainingly.²

Of my children I need say but little, but I fervently hope that each and all of them may seek and obtain for themselves a knowledge of the truth, (called Mormonism) for I know it can make them wise unto salvation, and may they be willing if needs be to endure reproach and privation for principle's sake. I doubt not that all my troubles have been for my good, and to-day I am more than thankful for my standing in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. ... I desire to live to make up for past short-comings by future diligence, that I may help (in my humble way) to build up "the kingdom whose dominion, power and greatness shall be given to the Saints of the most High! Who shall possess it forever and ever."

Church Historian, Orson F. Whitney, wrote that Emily was the "possessor of a poetic as well as a practical mind. ... Her busy pen has brought forth many meritorious productions." Emily wrote the words to the hymn, "As Sisters in Zion" and the Primary song, "Let the Little Children Come." Emily also championed Women's Rights and was active in the Women's suffrage movement of the 19th century. Emily lived to be 70 years old.

Sources: "Autobiography of Emily Hill Woodmansee," Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archives, Utah State University, Special Collections, Item #3—Augusta Joyce Crocheron, *Representative Women of Deseret*, Salt Lake City, 1884, 82-90; Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah*, 1904, vol IV, 593-95; "Sweet Singers of Zion: Life Sketches of Emily Hill Woodmansee and Julia Hill Ivins," by Edith Ivins Lamoreaux, *The Relief Society Magazine*, vol. VIII, October 1921, no. 10, p. 562-570; "Mrs. Woodmansee gone to her rest," *Deseret News*, October 20, 1906. See Hill sisters' history and artwork in *Follow Me To Zion* by Andrew Olsen and Jolene Allphin, Deseret Book, 2013.

¹While the Willie Company was halted on October 19, express riders came with the good news that rescue wagons were close at hand. One of these men was Joseph A. Young, with whom Emily had been acquainted in England. Upon seeing her, he burst into tears. "Why do you cry, Brother Young?" she asked. "Oh, because you look so starved," he replied, "and the provision wagons are [miles] away." Then, feeling in his pocket, he produced a small onion. "Eat this," he said. Emily didn't eat the onion right then but carried it in her hand. Near the fire lay a man who was apparently dying. Emily handed him the onion, and he declared afterward that it had saved his life.

²From "Sweet Singers of Zion," *The Relief Society Magazine*, Oct. 1921, 566-67: "Her life was full of trial, the support and rearing of her family devolving largely upon her mother-wit, but she was always hopeful, her cheery smile impressing all her associates and friends. Her fearlessness and undaunted faith in God's goodness are manifested in all her poems and songs. Sister Woodmansee developed through her years of poverty a strong tendency toward business ability attained by but few women in Utah. President Heber J. Grant, who has always been one of her ardent admirers, tells a story of her thrift. To quote his own words:

'While sitting in the bank one day the Spirit whispered to me that Sister Emily H. Woodmansee was in financial need. I accordingly drew from my account at the bank \$50 and proceeded with it to her home. On the way I debated whether I should present this to her as a gift, or offer it to her as a loan. Fearing I might offend her, as I remembered her high spirit, I decided upon the latter course. As I shook hands with her I offered her the money as a loan, without interest, with promise never to accept it until she was in comfortable enough circumstances to return it of her own choice.

'With tears in her eyes Sister Emily confessed that she and her family were almost destitute. Twenty-five dollars of it was immediately spent for provisions and coal. With the remaining twenty-five dollars she took an option on a piece of property. In thirty days she sold the property for \$700. With this she bought and sold many other parcels of real estate, showing the keenest sagacity and wisdom in the business world. It is needless to say the \$50 was returned with thanks to me, and praises to God, for a true friend in her hour of need.'

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Song of the Sisters of the Female Relief Society.

BY EMILY H. WOODMANSEE

TUNE--Hail to the Brightness of Zion's Glad Morning.

As sisters in Zion, we'll all pull together;
The blessing of God on our labors we'll seek;
We'll build up his Kingdom with earnest endeavor;
We'll comfort the weary and strengthen the weak.

We'll turn from our follies, our pride and our weakness,
The vain, foolish fashions of Babel despise;
We'll seek for the garments of truth and of meekness,
And learn to be useful and happy and wise.

We'll wear what is sensible, neat and becoming
The daughters of Zion – the children of light;
We'll work with a will, while the angels are scanning
Our aims and our actions from morning till night.

We'll bring up our children to be self-sustaining;
To love and to do what is noble and right;
When we rest from our labors, these dear ones
remaining,
Will bear off the kingdom and "fight the good fight."

Nor shall our attention be wholly restricted
To training our children or shaping our dress;
The aged, the feeble, the poor and afflicted,
Our labors shall comfort, our efforts shall bless.

"The Lord hath established the cities of Zion,
The poor of His people are trusting in Him,"
He makes us a source for His poor to rely on;
Oh! shall we not brighten the eyes that are dim.

Oh! Shall we not hasten to soothe the condition
Of the humble, the needy, the honest and pure?
Oh! Let us remember, whate'er our ambition--
'Tis our duty, our mission, to comfort the poor.

'Tis the office of angels, conferred upon woman;
And this is a Right that, as women, we claim:
To do whatsoever is gentle and human,
To cheer and to bless in humanity's name.

How vast are our labors; how broad is our mission,
If we only fulfill it in spirit and deed;
Oh! naught but the Spirit's divinest tuition--
Can give us the wisdom to truly succeed.

Then, as sisters in Zion, we'll all pull together;
The blessing of God on our labors we'll seek;
We'll build up his kingdom with earnest endeavor;
We'll comfort the weary and strengthen the weak.

S. L. City, May 25th, 1869.



Emily and Julia Hill