

## Emily Hill Woodmansee

Emily Hill Woodmansee, daughter of Thomas and Elizabeth Slade Hill, was born in the south-west of England, near Warminster, Wilts, March 24, 1836. Quoting her own words:

“Of my pedigree I will simply say that my parents 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.’

The Eternal! Spake, and honest hearts discerning  
The voice and message of the holiest One!  
Hail it as though their souls had e’en been yearning  
For light and truth, e’en since their lives begun

“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.

“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 Conllins, commander; Brother James G. Willie had charge of the Saints, (a company of eight hundred) 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, 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.

“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 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 could not accept the fact till President Young, (speaking to me of my husband), empathically said, 'Don't you know he asked for his mission? If he hadn't I wouldn't have sent him till the day of his death!' That was enough for me, I comprehended all that it meant, and independent of Brigham Young's word was forced to believe it.

"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 war and many circumstances combined) provisions and other necessities 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. Instantly I arose and composed the following lines:

A priceless boon! Is a friend indeed  
Greet him such when his face you see;  
But those who fail thee in time of need—  
Shun them, as false friends should shunned be.  
They proffer this, and they promise that,  
But promise, alas, is doubtful elf. [p. 87]  
So would'st thou weather the storms of life—  
Trust thou in God! And thyself.

Keep a brave heart, though the waves roll high,  
Let thine aim be true as the magnet's steel;  
Look unto God! With a steadfast eye,  
And trust Him always, in woe or weal.  
Man may deceive, but God! Is true;  
Mortals may pander to love of pelf,  
Like "Angel's visits" firm friends are few,  
Trust thou in God! And thyself,

Should friends, nor fortune, nor home be thine—  
Cringe not for this, nor beg for that;  
The earnest seekers will surely find  
Something to thoroughly labor at.  
'Tis a cheering maxim to keep in view—  
That diligence leads to plenty's shelf;  
And whatsoever thy hands pursue—  
Trust thou in God! And thyself.

What! Though thy flesh and thy strength should fail?  
Surely 'were better to wear than rust;  
Than never to try, 'twere better to die,  
In striving bravely to fill our trust,  
But fear not thou, for God! Is good—  
He is the giver of strength and wealth.  
When faithless feelings or friends intrude—  
Trust thou 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.

“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 my 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.

“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 that thankful for my standing in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

And wherefore should I cease to sing  
Of Zion and the Latter Day?  
I could not find a nobler theme,  
Nor choose a lovelier, loftier lay.  
Too insignificant is my praise—  
Too feeble is my lyre and tounge,  
For of these longed for, Latter Days  
Have royal bards and prophets sung.

Ne'er shall our hearts ungrateful be  
Ne'er shall our songs be void of praise,  
For God has suffered us to see  
“The Zion” of the Latter Days.  
Though all the world in scorn deride—  
Our numbers shall not cease to flow;  
Our soul's sincerest, purest love  
Thrills unto Zion's weal or woe.

When she is sad, then I am sad;  
When she is bound I am not free;  
When she is glad I am glad

And all things prosper well with me.  
I love to see her power extend,  
Her influence and her reign increase—  
Then wonder not, “for Zion’s sake—  
Will I not hold my peace.”

“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.’”

The faith of the Saints shall astonish the world  
And puzzle the wise to explain it;  
Hosannah! Hosannah! Truth’s flag is unfurled,  
And the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Source:

Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archives,  
Utah State University, Special Collections  
Item #3—Augusta Joyce Crocheron, *Representative Women of Deseret*, SLC, 1884 pp. 82-90

Re-typed by Jolene Allphin