

# Pioneer Business Woman of Nebraska



ELDER MARK WILLIAM FORSCUTT (Born June 19, 1834, at Bath, England; Died October 18, 1903, at Nebraska City, Neb.)

**L**IFE in the west in the pioneer days was an unflinching test of men's characters. The good and the bad in their natures were developed by primitive conditions. Unbridled freedom became license for the vicious; self-defense the inspiration for the strong and manly. Out of rough and rugged environments, amid strife and struggle, grew a race of heroic men whose deeds lend luster to western history and made possible the commonwealths of today.

But what of the unchronicled deeds of pioneer women, greater even than those recorded of men? Men live before the world; they take part in the external struggle of daily life; their deeds do not so often as those of women fall unnoted by their fellows. Because of their greater seclusion, in years gone by, the deeds of women did not receive or attract the attention that is possible nowadays. Around pioneer men romance and time have woven a chaplet, while the women who shared equally the hardships of mountain and plain are comparatively forgotten. Yet in most instances the wives of pioneers were the masterful planners, patient in privation, hopeful, encouraging and courageous, unflinching dispensers of cheerfulness and a check to the turbulence of border camps.

Mrs. Elizabeth Forscutt, who died recently at Nebraska City, typified in her life the courage, patience and pathos of pioneer women. As the wife of a missionary with very limited means of support she was obliged to provide for herself and her children, and to that task she applied herself with the zeal born of necessity. Her business career in Nebraska City began about 1877. Springing from a family of drapers she was skilled in weaving, hairwork and needlework, enabling her to keep the family larder fairly well supplied at first. Demand for the products of her skill soon outgrew her capacity. Help was secured. A small supply of millinery was added to her stock in trade. In that line she also prospered. Friends and patrons multiplied. From her living rooms she moved into a small store, then to a larger one on the main street, and lastly into a store of her own. In a quarter of a century Mrs. Forscutt built up the largest exclusive millinery store in Nebraska, and from the profits of the business provided homes for herself and for her children, besides leaving them a modest fortune.

In this brief chronicle of a business career is embraced the one period of prosperity and contentment which hallowed the autumn and winter of her life. Before it were the hardships, the privations and poverty experienced by many western pioneers.

Mrs. Forscutt was born in England on Christmas eve, 1835. On March 25, 1860, she married Mark H. Forscutt, a missionary elder of the Mormon church, and both im-

mediately joined a large crowd of converts bound for what they believed was "the new Canaan" in the Salt Lake valley. The journey to the end of the railroad at the Mississippi river was without special incident. Then began the long, toilsome journey of 1,400 miles on foot. It is difficult for people nowadays, accustomed to the modern conveniences and comforts and speed of travel, to understand or appreciate the hardships of an overland journey in the '60s. Freightling and emigrant wagons put no such strain on human endurance, and staging was a comparative luxury. No such relief was available for the religious enthusiasts who bravely faced the western sun, pushing before them the hand carts containing supplies of food and clothing.

Omaha was then and for years before the last outfitting point for Mormon immigrants. The neighboring suburb of Florence was the main camp. Early in July the caravan reached Omaha and Florence, and rested for a few weeks. Here, too, Mrs. Forscutt received a revelation of what was coming. Robert Holt, a shoemaker who had a little shop near the present site of the Webster street depot, was a friend of the family in England. Two years before he was one of a similar caravan that marvelously escaped annihilation from cold and went on its way to Salt Lake City. He had seen Brigham Young and his apostles and elders in the zenith of their power, and what he observed of their practices convinced him that the "new Canaan" was a huge confidence game. Mrs. Forscutt and several of her friends were taken to the old shoe shop for rest and refreshment and their wants were abundantly supplied by the shoemaker and his wife. "It was the first homelike rest we had in three months of travel," said Mrs. Forscutt, in relating the incident. "Oh, how much we enjoyed it! Mr. and Mrs. Holt told us their experiences and urged and begged us not to go farther. Their appeals were useless. Our paths were marked to the end of our journey and we followed them cheerfully. Ah, many a time I wished I had minded them!"

The party constituted the last of the pushcart caravans that crossed the plains bound for Salt Lake. The tragic experience of former caravans made the managers of this more careful. Supplies in abundance were provided, the carts were stronger, and though the loads were heavier than usual there was youthful vigor and the enthusiasm of crusaders to pull and push them along. Our heroine often declared that a happier crowd never trudged on the overland trail to the promised land. Discomforts and hardships were cheerfully borne and often when wading streams waist deep or marching over sun-scorched plains and precipitous mountains drooping spirits were refreshed



ELIZABETH FORSCUTT (Born December 24, 1835, at Balton, England; Died October 5, 1903, at Nebraska City, Neb.)

by the stirring song, "Babylon, Oh, Babylon!"

The revelation Mrs. Forscutt received from the Omaha shoemaker became a crucial reality shortly after the family reached Salt Lake City. This time it came direct from the prophet. Brigham Young intimated that there must be more than one wife in the family. He was informed that one was all the house could hold and that if any more came the neighborhood would be too warm for them. Nothing more was heard of the suggestion. Brigham had other and better means than words to enforce his will, and they were not long in coming. The family was ostracized by the church, practically denied the usual means of earning a livelihood, and, as a consequence, poverty often knocked at the door.

The only avenue of escape from increasing distress was to join the army at Fort Ruby, Nev., where the Fifth California Volunteer cavalry, commanded by General Connor, was stationed. Mr. Forscutt enlisted the following year, and became private secretary to General Connor. Mrs. Forscutt was installed as hospital stewardess. In due time the news of being a soldier's wife and living in a soldiers' camp reached her parents in England. Knowing a soldiers' camp only as it was at home they supposed an American army camp was equally disreputable and immediately started for "the states" to rescue their daughter. Mrs. Forscutt heard of their arrival in the Salt Lake valley and decided to find them. With as much supplies as she could conveniently carry she started for Salt Lake City, distant over 200 miles, with returning freighters. There she learned that her parents were at Ogden. Alone and afoot she trudged to Ogden only to meet disappointment. Her parents were two days' journey ahead, bound for Logan. Once more she struck out on the lonely and dangerous wagon road. When almost exhausted from toil and hunger, a teamster with an empty lumber wagon providentially drove up. The teamster cheerfully granted her request for a ride, and on the reach between the rear wheels she rode into Logan and to the arms of father and mother.

In her simple and unaffected way Mrs. Forscutt often referred to the groundless fears of her parents about her life in the army. "Why, the boys were always kind to me," she used to say. "In all the time I was with them, at Fort Ruby and Camp Douglas, I never heard a disrespectful word from a soldier."

Late in the fall of 1862 Mrs. Forscutt accompanied General Connor's command to Salt Lake City and had the satisfaction of witnessing the authority of Brigham Young humbled by United States troops. The three succeeding years of national supremacy under General Connor is known as the golden era in Utah. After it came Mormon anarchy and chaos. "The Gentiles must go," was the cry. They went—some to the grave, others fed beyond reach of Mormon power. The Forscutts were among the latter.

Out of the struggle, the toil and the hardships of these years came the patient courage and self-reliance that illumined the

prosperous years of this pioneer woman. Success did not change the simplicity of her character. Beyond the pleasure which abundance brings, to her the greater joy was the ability to repay the kindnesses bestowed when sorely needed, and to help those whom misfortune touched. Such lives make the world better for having lived in it, and leave to family and friends a tender and gracious memory.

## Why She Was Anxious

During the debate on the statehood bill, pending in the last congress, there came to members of both houses from time to time many anxious inquiries from points in the interested territories asking information as to the prospect of the bill becoming a law. These inquiries came in the form of both letters and telegrams, and the services of many clerks were required to answer them, in view of the exceedingly large number received.

One case was particularly noticeable as well as amusing. The anxious inquirer was a woman living in Oklahoma. She would write or telegraph nearly every day. Apparently the stereotyped reply she received from the delegate from her territory did not satisfy her, for pretty soon she appeared in person and began to haunt the capitol. The degree of anxiety that this woman evinced in the question whether Oklahoma would be granted admission as a state finally aroused the curiosity of the delegate.

"May I ask, madam," he inquired, "the degree of interest you have in this measure?"

The woman hesitated. "Must I tell?" she asked.

"Not necessarily, of course," replied the delegate, "but it would gratify my curiosity if you did."

"Well," was the reply, "if you'll not let it go any farther, I'll tell you, I went to Oklahoma to establish a residence so that I might get a divorce from my husband, who, I may incidentally remark, is certainly a brute. My attorney tells me that territorial divorces may not stand, but that if the territory is granted admission the divorce will surely stand. So I should be so grateful if you were to hurry this bill through, because I want to marry a friend whom I have known since childhood. I think that Mr. Beveridge, who is opposing this bill, ought to be ashamed of himself."

Unfortunately for this woman, the bill was talked to death.—Saturday Evening Post.

## War on Wigs

Dr. E. B. Randle, pastor of a Methodist church in Muncie, Ind., has begun war on wigs, which he denounces as "cunning devices resorted to by some people to conceal the fact that they are growing old." The reverend gentleman is good enough to say that he finds no fault with the young bald-headed man who wears a wig, but declares that "in case of old men it is altogether unbecoming." "Old age," he says, "is glorious when it comes naturally, for the best things in the world are old." The doctor is no chicken himself.