

ESTHER BATHSHEBA WRIGHT



With Excerpts From Her Journal, (formerly owned by Effie Mellor of Idaho Falls, Idaho)

A history of the life of Esther Bathsheba Wright, born January 15, 1823, at Groton, Middlesex County, Massachusetts. Her Father's name was Asa Wright, son of Asa and Betsy Patch Wright. Her Mother's name was Bathsheba Dadman, daughter of Joseph and Betsy Pike Dadman. Her ancestors were New England people, coming to this country at an early date.

Father Wright was a good provider, kind and indulgent to his family and gave them all a good education. He was not a member of any church, but his wife belonged to the Baptist Church and was very devoted to her religion. Mr. Wright was a farmer and his children were surrounded by all the busy cares of a farmer's life and were taught in early youth to take care of stock. The girls were taught to spin, weave and cook, take care of the dairy and everything that goes to make up farm life. There were eleven children in this family.

"I thank my Heavenly Father many times that I had such good parents. It seems I was prepared for the emergencies of later life, of traveling west and making a home. I say, I do not know what would have become of my family if I had not been raised to depend on my own hands to spin, weave and make my own clothes out of the raw material"

On July 3rd, 1839, Esther married Francis Fletcher in Westford, Massachusetts, Middlesex County, by Oliver Ayers, Littleton, Massachusetts. They looked down through the meridian of life when they could enjoy the blessings of home with all its comforts, and their children to visit them in their declining years. What a different plan was laid out for them in this life. Truly, "man proposes, but God disposes."

"The Gospel came to us July 1842 and it opened up a new era in our young lives. We felt we had a greater mission on this earth than we had ever anticipated. Duty to our God and our religion called us to another field of action. We had a great sacrifice to make, we must take up our cross and lay aside our plans and follow the teachings and dictates of the Holy Spirit, which was conferred upon us by the Priesthood and made plain to us when we heard the Gospel. The spirit of gathering rested upon us so strongly and some unknown power led us on so strongly we could not resist to gather immediately with the saints."

They received the Gospel together and were baptized by Issac Butterfield in Westford, Massachusetts in July 1842. They united with the Lowell Branch of the Church on the following Sunday after baptism. The two oldest sons Edwin Francis and Charles Eugene were blessed by Aaron York and Joseph Statton in 1843. Their daughter, Esther Jane, was blessed by Leonard Hardy in 1845. They made the decision to emigrate West and so with one hundred fifty dollars sent ahead to purchase a team and wagon, and about the same amount

in cash, together with a few things they needed in trunks and a few goods to dispose of if they had to, Francis Fletcher with his wife and three children left Father Wright's home on the morning of April 8, 1847. They stopped in Boston and formed their company with Elder Forham as president of the company. They arrived in St. Louis, 1 May 1847 and due to Esther's illness remained there until Aug. 8. The members of the Church were in the wilderness, they knew not where, having been driven out of Nauvoo and their prophet slain. The Fletchers then journeyed to Winter Quarters. Esther was expecting her fourth child and traveling was very hard for her. This child was born at Winter Quarters.

"We arrived there in August. We built us a house of logs and stayed that winter, as many of the Saints were camping there, preparing to cross the plains in the spring. This proved to be a very sickly country. We suffered fever and ague."

They left Winter Quarters in May for Harris Grove and stopped there until September 1848. then sold their improvements and went back to Kanessville, Iowa. Here another son, their fifth child, was born. Mr. Fletcher built houses and then sold them to get money with which to continue their journey. The body of the Church having settled in the Great Salt Lake Basin. They started Westward.

"Had a prosperous journey excepting the sickness of our youngest child, but he regained his health after arriving in the valley. After the toilsome and weary journey of three months we were blessed with the sight of the valley of the Saints, the 29th day of September 1851. We found a brother that had come to the valley among the first settlers. He was out in the mountains to meet us. That day will never be forgotten. This brother was the only son of my Father Wright's that embraced the gospel at that early day and preceded us to these valleys. Mr. Fletcher was a carpenter and stone cutter. He and Solomon Angell helped to open the first granite ledge in Cottonwood Canyon where granite was cut with which to build the Salt Lake Temple. When the old home was too small to accommodate his family Mr. Fletcher began to build an adobe house at the side of the log one, but he died before he got the roof on.

Two years after arriving in the valley, they lost their little son John. (September 5, 1853). This was their 6th child, born in Salt Lake City on the 10 Apr. 1853.

Her husband, Francis Fletcher died one year later, 26 Dec. 1854, of consumption caused by stone dust, after an illness of four months, at 37 years of age. She was left alone in that desolate, barren, strange country to raise five children and was expecting another child. Her life was very sad from this time on. She had new buried her little boy and her husband. The next month and a half were very hard for her. On February 17, 1855 she gave birth to her seventh child. This son only lived a short time, and died March 8, 1856. (two verses of a poem she wrote)

A husband and two lovely babes
I've laid beneath the sod,
But still I will not murmur
But acknowledge the hand of God.

The Lord has ever promised
To be the widow's friend
To the orphan and the fatherless
His mercies He'll extend.

Francis Fletcher had been one of the guards at the laying of the Corner Stone of the Salt Lake Temple. He had cut several runs of Millstone from the granite ledge in Cottonwood Canyon, the granite table around Brigham Young's Bee Hive House and the door steps at Brother Orson Hyde's residence in the Seventeenth Ward and Samuel Ensign's steps in the Eighth Ward--all from the Cottonwood Granite. Later, Esther, his wife, opened a private school and taught in her log house until she had money to finish the adobe house Mr. Fletcher had begun to build for her.

Year 1856 proved to be a very hard time for all the Saints as crops that year were a failure and as she said in her journal, "nothing could be obtained to sustain the people and before next harvest many suffered very much indeed." She gathered sego-lily bulbs to sustain life. What food she could get she fed to her children. This lack of food caused part of her stomach to grow together. She was never very well after that hard winter. "In due time the Lord blessed the people with an abundant harvest. When the grain was cut the fields were filled with gleaners. I took my children and went two miles and gathered seven bushels of wheat and carried it home. We had an abundant harvest of everything. My children being small I had to pass through many privations to raise them, but the Lord did not forsake me in my trouble.

The struggle seemed almost more than she could stand. At Winter Quarters she had met the Barney family, who were on their way to Utah. In 1857 she became the fourth plural wife of Royal Barney. He helped her all he could, but having other wives and families he could not give her all that she needed. She gave birth to two more children, a girl Sarah Augusta and Royal. She now had seven children to care for and raise. "There was some trouble with the United States officers (1858-1859) and there was much influence used by them at Washington to bring this people into troubles and difficulties. They sent an army out as they said to bring the Mormons into subjection to the laws of the land. The result was that the army wintered on the other side of the mountains and in the spring of 1859 the Saints left this home from the extreme north of this city and in a mass journeyed to the South. The Governor and his array entered this territory as chief magistrate with none to rule or govern. At length a compromise was made and in July we returned to our old homes. Since that time we have been abundantly blessed as a people, and built many towns and cities.

On the 26th anniversary of the entrance of the pioneers into Salt Lake Valley, she writes, "Today I went to the depot to witness the arrival of one thousand Saints from the old country, about fifteen passenger cars besides baggage. What a change in 26 years!"

By January 1879, she writes, "My health is so poor that I have given up teaching." she taught intermittently for many years, as her health would permit.

Her brother, Jefferson Wright, who had met them as they entered the valley, had been called on a mission and sent to Massachusetts where he preached the gospel to his kinsman. Esther wrote:

To my brother, peace attend thee
While in distant lands you roam
May the God of peace attend thee.
Far from Saints and far from home.

Go and gather up our kindred
Bring them up to Zion's Hill
Let not one be left behind you.
Bring them all if it's God's will.

Sound the Gospel to the people--
Those we knew in early youth.
Teach to them the words of wisdom
Show to them the ways of truth

May the power of God attend thee
On the journey o'er the plains.
May His spirit e'er be with you
Wherever you may remain.

When you meet our friends and brethren
Greet them all in love for me.

Tell them I have ne'er forgotten
Those I loved so tenderly.

Tell my Father and my Mother,
Come amongst the Saints to dwell.
Tell my brother and my sisters
To gather up to Zion' Hill.

In February 1875, her brother, who now resided in Virgin City, Kane County paid her a visit after an absence of 10 or 12 years. "It gave me much joy, as he is the only relative I have in this Church." she goes on, "There has been considerable said, this year about the United Order. Some settlements have organized and are trying to establish some method that will make the Saints more united. I was rebaptized into the Church to show a determination to try and keep the covenants I have made.

"Another year has passed and brings the Great Centennial year so long talked of (1776). Times are hard, business dull, men running to and fro in the earth. There has been considerable done on the Temple this season. The Temple at St George has been finished and dedicated."

On August 9, 1878, she started to work in the Temple at St. George. "Had a good journey and arrived there the first of September and worked in the Temple two weeks mostly for the dead. It was a great blessing and was a season of joy and comfort, which will never be forgotten by me. Blessings which had been promised twenty-six years ago were literally fulfilled to me by parties that did not know one word that had been said to me in my endowments in the Council House where we received our first endowments."

At Christmas time in 1880 she wrote, "I have spent my Christmas at home today. It is always a gloomy day to me. It brings back to my mind old times and especially the time of Francis' death when I lost the nearest and dearest friend I ever knew. I shall never forget my early life. But why dwell upon these sad memories. They are in the past and vain regrets will not bring back our lost ones." In greeting the new year she reflects: "The acts of our lives through the past have been registered never to be changed whether the time has been spent in doing good or evil. We cannot recall the past, but we can live better year after year and resolve to shun all evil and do each day whatever presents itself and try to live better and spend our time in searching for wisdom and those things which will fit us for life and prepare us for a better world when our work is done on earth."

During all these years she was very active in the church. In May 1882, when she was made president of the Relief Society, she wrote: "The Relief Society was reorganized as we had lost our President and 1st counselor, which left the 2nd counselor alone. I had to fill that place for over one year. I was then appointed President. When the Relief Society was first organized I was appointed teacher then secretary, then counselor so I have had quite an experience amongst the sick, the poor and needy. May my Father in Heaven give me wisdom and bless me with health and strength that I may be able to do my duty in my several callings, is my daily prayer. I still hold the office of President of Primary Association and teacher in Sunday School. Have a class."

On January 1, 1885, Esther Wright wrote in her Journal: "Ten years ago today I attended a party in honor of Sister Eliza R. Snow's seventieth birthday. Brother Brigham Young was under guards and it was asked, "Will Brother Brigham be here?" Some said he would, others thought not, as his guards would have to accompany him. But to our surprise, Brother Brigham walked up to the stand unattended; stayed until dinner, was announced and then after saying a few words and blessing those assembled, he joined his guards at the door. He really did seem more like a free man than like one under arrest."

"March the 6th (1886), attended the mass meeting at the theater. It was a meeting to protest against the present crusade against the Mormons by the United States officers."

Then July 4, "Had the privilege of visiting the penitentiary with the Eighth Ward Choir. Saw about 150 prisoners. They were not all Elders in prison for their religion. Some were very bad men, but they all enjoyed the day, or seemed to. I could hardly realize that so many of this people were deprived of their liberty in this land of equal rights, but it is so. We had the privilege of speaking and shaking hands with Brother McMurrin, Royal Young, Brother Snell J. Smith and others that have done no wrong except to respect and defend their families were also among those who dared to stand by all the principles of our faith."

On July 24th, "There was a Jubilee held in the Tabernacle. The stand was draped in black to signify that people were in mourning because our leaders were in exile and prison."

In August she resigned as President of the Primary, and then at Christmas time helped prepare 33 baskets for the needy. "I always overdo and spend Christmas day with a bad nervous headache."

Finally in 1889 (January 1) "Today our bishop was liberated from the penitentiary and the ward gave him a hearty welcome home. All were glad to see his face again. He has been three years in exile and prison. We are still having persecutions and trials, but the Spirit of God is with the faithful saints to support and sustain in every trial and He has promised to establish his priesthood in the earth and He will do it."

"The 6th of April (1892) will long be remembered as a great day. Our temple that has been in course of erection for thirty-nine years has received the cap-stone. It is hoped that it will be finished so it can be dedicated next April conference. I went to the top of the temple and got up on a plank but could not reach to the Angel Moroni...what hopes and fears filled the hearts of those that have watch its slow growth, hoping to be worthy to behold the glory and receive the Holy Spirit that will be given to those that are. I cannot help but say with Paul that after trying so many years I myself may be a cast-away.

The twentieth of December Oh! (1892) What trials, what scenes of trouble and sorrow have been met and overcome, yet I have had my happy days and now rejoice to know that my children have all settled down, honest men and women, trying to raise their numerous families respectably and to set an example before them that they will yet raise up and call me blessed."

Esther Bathsheba Wright maintained, "There is always something we can do to aid to the happiness of someone."

"May none of my family be left alone so helpless and so poor in a wild country to raise a family alone is my prayer."

Note: All quotations used in this history are taken from the Journal of Esther Bathsheba Wright.