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MORMON COUNTRY

by

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further. The back country, except for the Wonsits and Gunnison Valleys, is high, arid, forbidding, inaccessible mountains and barren plateaus and waterless desert. Every little rain channel is a gulch hundreds of feet deep, and in the rock plateau country only a few yards wide. Start across the country in southeastern Utah almost anywhere and you are confronted by a chasm too steep and too deep to climb down through, and just too wide to jump. It will take you ten miles upcountry before you head it, and after a half mile you will probably meet another just like it. It is a country that calls for wings. In some places there is not even sand to blow, and the rock is so bare it is actually polished. It is no wonder that although white men first saw the country along the Colorado in 1540, less than a half century after Columbus found landfall in the Indies, it was more than three hundred years before any white men made an effort to settle it, and still another generation before the Green and the Grand and their tributaries could be called explored.

Much of the first scientific study of that back country was also Powell's work. As head of the Geological Survey he kept men in the Plateau Province for years, mapping and triangulating and sketching, studying the rocks and the faulting and the volcanic extravasations. Almost to a man, the people he selected to do that work were of exceptional caliber. Their names are more than a roll of honor of early American geology, because they were more than geologists. The lure of the unknown that had pulled Jed Smith into the wilderness pulled on Powell and his assistants too, but in a different way. Theirs was a lust for knowledge, their frontiers the frontiers of science. Because they existed before the age of specialization and brute fact, they felt obliged to try to see the whole instead of merely

the part. It seems rather curious now to read geological reports that are as charming as much of the literature of the time, to come upon geological sketches of rock strata that exhibit a sensitive appreciation of form and texture and a more-than-draughtsmanly skill.

W. H. Holmes, for example, whose drawings appear in a number of Geological Survey monographs, is by almost any standard the best artist who ever attempted the monumental job of reproducing the canyon and plateau country. In Dutton's *Tertiary History of the Grand Canyon District* his drawings are side by side with several by Thomas Moran, ordinarily spoken of as probably the best Western artist of the period. It is not Holmes that suffers by the comparison.

Or Captain Dutton, Powell's particular protege, who worked in the high plateaus and in the Grand Canyon region. He found, as everyone who ever attempted to write about that country has found, that word pictures are about as inadequate as painted ones. The country is too big. The eye simply cannot take in, the imagination cannot compass, a thing like the Grand Canyon, a hole in the ground big enough to accept into its maw the whole White Mountain range and not have a single peak, even Washington, sticking above the rim. Buttes that in the canyon are mere details, even minor details, are likely to have a mass greater than any mountain east of the Rockies; the whole immense mountain-range-in-a-ditch is calculated to render words, paints, and camera all inadequate. Add to the enormous size the delicate shadings of color, changing at every hour of the day, with every passing cloud, and the peculiarly architectural, almost symmetrical forms that erosion has filled the canyon with, and the job becomes almost impossible. For all that, Dutton not only tried to describe

it, but did. His monographs are at least half nature writing, as far from stiff geology as they can well be, and there is no one who ever tried the Grand Canyon as a literary subject who approaches him in accuracy, strength, and sensitiveness. From that lost and forgotten geologist whose works collect dust on library shelves Charles Dudley Warner on occasion stole whole paragraphs. Both John Muir and John Burroughs read him before they dared take off on the Grand Canyon, and both borrowed more than they put quotation marks around.

They were monumental men in a monumental country doing a monumental job. No one knows the plateau and canyon country if he does not know the work of Powell and Dutton and Holmes and Hayden and Gilbert. There has seldom been a group of similar stature gathered together on one project. They added something to that country by their presence there. As surely as Brigham Young and the Mormon settlers, they were pioneers, and they built broadly and well.