

HANS ULRICH BRYNER JR.

Hans Ulrich Bryner Jr., the son of Hans Ulrich Bryner and Verena Wintsch was born in Illnau, Zurich, Switzerland, the 22nd of April 1827. His father was a shoemaker and young Ulrich picked up and delivered the shoes for his father. His parents were good religious Lutherans and taught their children to pray, to be obedient, honest, prompt, industrious and thrifty.

When Ulrich was ten years old, his father bought a large farm, which changed their lives a lot. His mother no longer spent her time at the loom spinning thread for shoes, and his father left his cobbler's bench to look after the farm. Ulrich learned to do farming chores such as plowing, mowing and pruning. His sisters did the hoeing. Such things as weaving, spinning and knitting were done at night after the day in the fields. His father mended shoes at night while young Ulrich read the Bible to the family. They were allowed to go to the best entertainments that came along. They attended school from age six to twelve and did very well in their studies. By the time Ulrich was grown, he could speak six or seven languages. They were a happy united family and were fairly well off. They were always grateful for their early training and for their heritage.

In January of 1843, when Ulrich was nearly sixteen years old, he became very sick. His best pal also got sick and died. This upset Ulrich and he worried about it, thinking that he too might die. With this on his mind he was unable to sleep very well. He had a dream, in which a man with a grey beard and peculiar eyes took him by the hand and led him, in darkness, half way around the world. He could see nothing at all until they came to the top of the world. Then the heavens opened above their heads and he saw a bright light come down. He saw the City of Zion shining like gold, silver and glass —its loveliness was above description. He saw a big wall with three gates leading through it. Righteous and holy people were going through these gates into the city. He wanted to go in too, but the man said "You can't go through now, but if you are faithful and true, the time will come when you will be allowed to go." As he lay on his sick bed, he thought of this dream night and day. He thought a dark night was coming, but never guessed that he was going to be blind. He told his family of the dream and they all wondered what it meant.

When he recovered, he learned the butchering trade. He entered contests which were held to encourage the workers to excel. He was a good worker, quick and accurate. His specialty was killing hogs — he could kill, scald, scrape, hang and draw a hog faster than most anyone. He had won four cups as prizes. He received promotions until he became superintendent of the slaughter-house. He was also buyer for the establishment and went about the country buying animals. His languages came in handy in this assignment. He may have learned some of them on the job, although in Switzerland there are three official languages, taught in the schools, French, German and Italian. There are also many dialects. He wanted eventually to get into government service and worked toward that end.

In 1849 he married Anna Maria Dorothea Mathys, who was born 14 July 1828 at Wiedikon, Zurich, Switzerland, daughter of Johannes and Anna Dorothea Meyer Mathys. Their first child, Mary, was born 23 June 1851 at Wiedikon. They were happy and free from care for

two years. Then one day at work, he was trying to beat his own record in preparing for another contest. He had the hog hanging up, and its foot slipped off the cross stick (gambrel) and struck him in the eye, splitting the pupil. The carcass fell and dragged him down with it. He gave a cry and his brother Casper, nearly seven years younger, who worked in the same shop, came to his rescue. When Casper saw his eye was knocked out of its socket and hanging down on his cheek, Casper put his hand over it and led him down along the river bank to the doctor. Ulrich got infection in it, and with no antibiotics, he was sick for a long time, and of course had to give up his job. His parents took him to Germany to eye specialists, but they could do nothing. He was blind.

Friends came to Maria saying "Give him up and let him go home to his parents, they are well enough off to take care of him. You don't want to be saddled with a blind man all the rest of your life. What can he do for you now? You would be better off without him." But her mother said "No, Maria will not desert him, he needs her now more than he ever did." Of course Maria stayed with him, but nothing could comfort him. Their home was one of mourning. They could see no future, and felt that all their happiness was completely destroyed.

One day as Maria sat by his side, her mother came in and said, "You can do nothing but pray about it — perhaps the Lord will open a way for you. I believe the hand of the Lord is in it, for a whispering voice always says to me, "Don't feel sorry that Bryner is blind, it's good for you all but you don't know it yet." Ulrich's family was kind to them, and all were willing to provide for them, but Ulrich could not be happy. He felt that the Lord had cast him aside.

Four long sorrowful months passed by, then one morning in the latter part of July, he called his mother and father to listen, for he had had another dream. His family gathered round and he said, "I found myself in a great dark room with no glimmer of light. Three fires appeared, each of a different size. A man with a grey beard and peculiar eyes stood at my side, the same man I had seen before. He had an open book in his hand. He crossed out my sins and they fell to the floor. A voice said to me "You will have to go through the middle fire." I said, "I am able to stand that too." The wall opened so wide that we could pass through it. The light came in as bright as noon-day and we were shown the road to Zion. We had to cross the sea with a great company and take a long journey across the great prairie into the mountains to reach the City of Zion."

A few months later, in February 1854, a Mormon elder by the name of George Meyer came to the Zurich from America. The Bryner family was anxious to see if he were the man Ulrich had seen in his dreams. Several members of the family walked for two hours to get to Bern, to hear Elder Meyer. As soon as they saw him they recognized him as the man in Ulrich's dream. George Meyer was very cross-eyed and wore very thick lenses. They invited him to come to their home.

Two days later, late at night a knock came on the door, and when Maria answered, it was Elder Meyer. She asked her husband if he thought it safe to let them in at this time of night. "Oh, yes," he said, "take them up to my old room." She took them up to the fourth-floor bedroom, and from that time on, it was their headquarters in that part of Switzerland. Some of

the neighbors objected to their being there. They threw rocks and broke the window. Years later when grandsons were in Switzerland on missions, they said they could still see the broken window.

Needless to say, the message these brethren brought from over the sea was listened to eagerly and believed. There were so many beautiful things in this religion that were lacking in their Lutheran faith — new revelation, a prophet of God, angels visiting the earth again, a new golden Bible, a call for repentance, baptism as John practised it, the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost and for ordinations, and many other beautiful principles. Twelve of the Bryners and Mathys's were baptized, with Ulrich being the first one. They were so happy they thanked the Lord and wept for joy. They knew now that He had answered their prayers.

In a few days, Elder Meyer administered to Ulrich for his sight. He said he wished only Ulrich and his mother in the room, but two neighbors wanted to be there, so they were allowed to stay. The next day, Ulrich was able to see a little, and he was happy. The Daily News stated "If this man gives Bryner his sight, we will believe and be baptized."

"Next evening," he said, "as I lay in my bed an evil spirit came very near to choking me to death, and I cried out loud, 'In the name of Jesus Christ, leave me alone.' I rose from my bed to find out where the evil spirit had come from. My parents awoke and I told them what had happened to me. They said, 'Oh, go back to bed, it's only a dream.' But next morning I was unable to see anything at all."

He talked to one of the ladies who had seen the administration and told her of his experiences. She said the same thing had happened to her. The evil spirit had choked her so hard she had had to promise that she would have nothing to do with the Mormons in order to get rid of him, and she never did join the church. But this experience didn't weaken Ulrich's faith. He knew the gospel was true and bore testimony to his brothers and sisters. He knew from his vision of the fire that his life wasn't going to be easy and that troubles lay ahead for him.

They wanted to join the Saints in Utah, and began to make preparations for the long journey. They couldn't all go at once, so Casper and Barbara Ann went first to lead the way and make preparations for the others to follow. The most ardent and thrilled of the group was his mother-in-law, Anna Dorothea Meyer Mathys. She worked hard and planned carefully for the trip, but she passed away before the sailing date. All the rest of the family, five in all, came to U. S. and crossed the plains to Utah.

As was the custom in Switzerland, Maria, for her trousseau, had spun and woven sheets, pillowcases, and all kinds of household linens, enough to last a lifetime, but their baggage was limited to seventeen pounds per person, so most of it had to be left behind, and they came with very little. Ulrich had painted a life-size portrait of Maria, and they had to leave it hanging on the wall. It was 1856 and they now had two children, Mary Magdalena and Gottfried Henry. They felt the little boy was too young to make the trip, so they left him with his grandparents, to come later on. They travelled the same route Ulrich had seen in his dream. They were in the sailing vessel, the "Enoch Train," for forty two days, and landed in Boston, and went on via New York

to join the saints.

His brother, Casper, had purchased a wagon and oxen, and hired a teamster, so everything was ready for them to go on to Utah. They left Florence about the first of September, 1856. Travel by ox team was difficult for the pioneers, especially for Ulrich who could not see. He held onto the back of the wagon, and if the going got tough for the animals, he would help push the wagon. There is a painting done by Lura Redd, in the D.U.P. museum in Salt Lake City, of Ulrich clinging to the back of the wagon as he stumbled over the rocks, bumps, ruts, hillocks and gopher holes, and was sometimes dragged along when he lost his footing.

The journey was slow and uneventful for the most part, but at times there was plenty of excitement. They had two yoke of oxen on their wagon. Usually the lead yoke had to be led. When the cattle stampeded, the driver would jump on the back of one of the lead oxen and beat them over the heads with a whip he always carried. This caused the oxen to shut their eyes, and then they would slow down. When Ulrich's oxen stampeded, the driver broke his arm and the wagon was upset. An old lady who was riding with them, had been holding little Mary on her lap as she sat on the stove. In the upset, Mary was on the bottom, then the lady, then the stove on top of her, and lastly the wagon. The lady tried to shield the child by bracing herself on her arms, and was so badly hurt that she died. Mary's life was saved, but she had nervous spells afterwards.

The trip, about 1000 miles, took nearly four months, and it got very cold when they were about half way. Ulrich and the driver both froze their feet and legs, so Maria then had to look after them, do the cooking and the driving. Ulrich was administered to for his frozen feet, and Maria treated them with poultices made of pulverized sage and snow, as advised by Brigham Young. His feet healed and he was later able to walk as straight as anyone. By the time they reached Devil's Gate, many people and oxen had frozen to death, so they had to double up and leave some of the wagons behind. Since the remaining wagons were loaded so heavily, everyone who could possibly walk, did so.

They caught up with the ill-fated Martin handcart company, and were asked to take another family in their wagon, so they had to leave more of their belongings beside the road. The bitterly cold weather made travel very slow, and provisions were scarce. Many died on this trek. The ground was frozen so hard they couldn't dig graves so they buried the dead just under the snow. Little Mary got so cold they thought she was frozen, but her father rubbed life back into her little cold body.

However help was on the way, and it came none too soon. Riders had taken word of their predicament into Salt Lake. Brigham Young sent rescue parties with wagons and supplies to meet them. The snow was nine feet deep. People had to go ahead and tramp the snow down so the animals could pull the wagons over it. How happy they were to finally reach Salt Lake!

When Ulrich's brother Casper had learned of the trouble this company was having, he started out to meet them, but as he was in Lehi, a couple of days travel further on than the others, he was late getting there, and began meeting rescue teams coming in. He spoke so little broken

English that it was hard for him to make them understand, so he'd ask, "Has anyone seen a blind man?" None had, so he went on to the next group and asked again. All this time he didn't know whether his folks were dead or alive. Finally someone told him that the blind man had gone into Salt Lake over the other road. (There were two routes into Salt Lake.) So Casper turned around and went back to Salt Lake City and started all over again in his search. Kind people in the city had opened their hearts and homes to take in the cold and hungry ones, so now Casper went from door to door and asked, "Has anyone here seen a blind man?" Finally he came to the door of the house where Ulrich and his family were. Great was Ulrich's delight when he recognized his brother's voice! They fell on each other's necks and wept tears of joy. This was December 24, 1856.

They packed up in a hay rack and went on to Lehi, where Barbara and the rest were waiting for them, and there was a happy reunion. Barbara had married Maria's brother, John Mathys, and they were willing to share all they had. They told of the happenings in the preceding year. They had suffered through a cholera epidemic and the grasshopper plague. Ulrich told of their travels, the stampede and injury to his daughter, who had been administered to and promised that she would live to be his guide. He told of being snowed in for eleven days at the last crossing of the Platte river, of sixteen persons freezing to death in one night in the handcart company, of having to leave wagons behind because so many oxen had died, of leaving belongings beside the road to make more room in their wagons, of travelling through rain, mud, wind and snow.

The next summer, 1857, Ulrich's parents and sister came from Switzerland, bringing his little son with them. What a happy reunion that was! The parents had also travelled by ox team, having accidents along the way in which his father was badly injured and never completely recovered.

While in Lehi, a daughter Pauline was born. They moved to Ogden, where Ulrich operated a farm near his brother Casper. Elizabeth Ann (Lisette) was born in Ogden. Then they were called to settle in St. George, Washington county in 1861, and travelled three hundred miles through snowstorms and lived in a tent. They say that in those days, St. George was the coldest place on earth in the winter, with the fierce piercing winds which blew the red sand in upon everything. Albert was born there. Later they moved to New Harmony, not far from St. George, where Mary Verena and Frank were born.

Of course, there were no homes, no stores, no money in New Harmony. They had to provide everything themselves. They planted cotton, carded it, dyed it with roots and herbs, and Maria spun it into thread on a spinning wheel which Ulrich's father built for them. Brigham Young pronounced it the best home-made thread he had ever seen. They wove material for their clothing, and sewed everything by hand with the tiniest stitches imaginable.

Maria must have been a wonderful woman. She was very capable and could do most anything. Her life, after Ulrich lost his sight, must have been very different to what she had planned. She devoted herself to helping her husband. She was very small, but quick and efficient. Her friends said she was a sweet and charming as well. She spent all day with Ulrich

in the fields, guiding him as he did his work, and helping with the farm and orchard work herself, at the same time bearing six more children and training them well.

Ulrich could manage pretty well in the house if the furniture was always kept in exactly the same spot, and there was nothing littering the floor. He could still mend shoes, and butcher hogs as well as anyone. He could prune trees and grapevines expertly. He would pick willows and weave baskets — there were none better — fancy baskets as well as utilitarian measuring baskets. No one knew how he could judge, but he made accurate bushel, half-bushel and peck baskets. He trained his sons to do many things, among others, to drive a team by the age of eight.

His son John told of an interesting experience. Four men, U.S. marshals in disguise, and their armed guards, asked Ulrich and his eight-year-old son to haul some freight for them to Pioche, Nevada. It was slow going, as the wagon was so heavily loaded. When they reached Pioche, the marshals confessed that the load wasn't only horse shoes and toe calks, as they had said, but hidden in it was \$50,000 worth of gold, the payroll for the mine. There were so many robbers around, and officers were so scarce, they devised this scheme to get the money safely delivered — they figured no one would suspect that a blind man and a little boy would be carrying the mine payroll.

Ulrich was a good judge of horse flesh, having known them in Switzerland. He could tell by the feel of a horse's head, legs, shoulders, neck, etc. whether it was a good horse. Some even claimed he could tell the color of the horse by feeling it.

They had an old wagon which was still in pretty good shape. One day his young boys said a man wanted to trade a much newer wagon for it. Ulrich said that didn't make sense — nobody would do that kind of a thing, and he wanted to see the wagon. He went out and felt it all over, and said "I wouldn't have it. It's a narrow gauge wagon. It wouldn't 'track' in the ruts in the road, would be hard for horses to haul." The man must have been a stranger — no one who knew Ulrich would try to fool him that way.

He could recognize his friends by their voices, even though he might not have talked with them for years. There were several other Swiss brethren in New Harmony, Brother Brubacher, Brother Rohner, to name two. He loved to go visit them, and his grandchildren were called on to lead him to their homes, where he would visit for hours, it seemed, to the children who had to wait to lead him home again.

In 1868 Ulrich took a second wife, Margaretha Kuhn Wintsch, who had been widowed twice. He settled her in Toquerville, about twenty miles south of New Harmony, which was such a good place for growing fruit. Ulrich and Margaret had ten children. In 1884, he was called to go settle in Price, Carbon co. It took them three months to make the trip, as they had many cows with young calves and had to travel slowly. They would milk the cows in the morning, put the milk in the large churn tied to the side of the wagon. When they stopped at night, it would be churned to butter, and they would enjoy the buttermilk to drink. They arrived in Price on July 23rd, in time for the Pioneer Celebration on the 24th.

Theirs was the first house finished in Price — it was a two-storey log home, but three years later it burned to the ground. As it had been hot, some of them were sleeping out of doors and the rest managed to escape. No one was hurt except for Ulrich who did not realize how bad the fire was and went back in to get his important papers and money which were in a box upstairs. He was badly burned but recovered. There was no water with which to fight the fire, so they just stood there and watched it burn. Aunt Marget, as she was called, had a nervous breakdown after the fire, and was in hospital in Salt Lake for a long time.

The new house had to be fireproof, made of rocks and cobblestones like the homes in Switzerland. Ulrich supervised the whole thing. They made a form, filled it with rocks, then mortar was poured in and more rocks added. When this layer was set, the form was moved up and another layer added. It was a sturdy, well-built home.

They had brought fruit seeds from St. George, and had the first orchard and grape bowery in Price. Ulrich built three hundred beehives and honey frames, and extracted the honey, which was white and mild. He also braided rope from cowhide that was a specialty, and raised and sold vegetables and large barrels of sauerkraut. Only once in his long life did he or any of his family depend on outside help of any kind, and that was when the house burned and they were left with practically nothing.

Maria also went to live in Price, but we do not know just when. She died there in 1893. After Ulrich was seventy, he retired from his strenuous activities, and began to work in genealogy. As his children were industrious and independent and didn't need his money, he hired research done in Switzerland and spent the last seven years of his life in St. George doing temple work for five thousand of his kindred dead. His line was traced back to 1495 and the Mathys line to 1555. He died 9 Feb. 1905 of a stroke. They found him on his knees, as if he were looking for a shoe or something. He was unconscious. He left a large posterity, and had lived a long and useful life. He always said that he was glad that he became blind, otherwise he might have been too busy to listen to the missionaries. He loved the gospel so much, his joy in it far outweighed any trials or hardships.