The Watchman and the Virgin River in an autumn setting. One of many gigantic buttes in Zion, the Watchman rises 2,600 feet above the river and with the Three Patriarchs guards the entrance to the Park. Photo courtesy Paul R. Franke, National Parks Service.

THE LAND THAT GOD FORGOT

By Juanita Brooks*

The desert of the southwest knows no artificial boundaries. Sliced through by the Colorado River and its tributaries, it sprawls and stretches to pale miniature mountains against distant horizons. Except for one brief period in the spring it is dun-colored, but given rain in January and February it bursts into life almost as if by magic. Suddenly every scraggy bush is standing in a bunch of grass which thins as it fans out into the open, but which in wet seasons becomes an almost solid carpet. The first blossoms are the delicate annuals — bluebells, buttercups, sugar flowers, and sego lilies. Then come the red cups of the slippery elm, the purple spikes of the sage, the pink sand-verbenas, and the flame-tipped Indian paintbrush. The vivid cacti and the tall stems of the yucca, heavy with waxen bells, appear last, like royalty making a dramatic entrance after all the common folk have assembled. It is as if Mother Nature would compensate for the brief blooming by giving it extra color and perfume.

But such loveliness cannot last. By June the grass is burned to a crisp, the little annual flowers are only blown bits of refuse, the dry yucca pods rattle upon their long dead stalks. Each plant which survives the summer heat has made its own adaptation — the leaves of the creo-

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sote covered with gum, the yucca spines and cactus thorns all encased in heavy cellophane.

Before cars and good roads erased the distance, men learned to make their trips through the desert between September and May while the weather was moderate. Even then they must linger at the creeks and springs, follow the river beds as far as possible, and make long forced drives across country to water. If they must travel during the summer months, they adopted the habits of the desert animals, moving in the late afternoon through the night and taking shelter during the day in the shade of cliffs or sand caves or, if they were fortunate, under trees beside a stream.

The terrain is still a monotony to be endured, an area where the traveler may ride a whole day without seeing a living thing — bird, beast, or reptile. Such is the nature of the desert. One who would know its secrets must take time to live intimately upon the ground, must listen and watch through many nights to become aware of even a small part of the activity of this strange land. For that reason some knowledge of the history of its past is necessary for a full appreciation of those who first came to live in it. Conquer it they could not, but they did exist in spite of it. For example, out of Las Vegas coming northeast on U.S. 91 the traveler passes a sign, “Mormon Mesa.” What does that mean? When was it named?

In May, 1855, a company of wagons drawn by oxen or mules left Salt Lake City en route to the springs at Las Vegas, where the men had been called to act as missionaries to the Indians. They were joined by others on the way until at the last crossing of the Virgin River they numbered forty wagons. By this time it was June, and the heat was so intense that they left the stream in the evening and traveled part way up the slope toward the top of the mesa. Young George Washington Bean told how the next morning they started over the last terrible mile, through sand from four to twelve inches deep on the hillside, which was almost perpendicular in places. Here they toiled the full day through, from sunrise to sunset. They used six yoke of oxen per wagon, plus twenty men pulling and tugging at a long rope in front, other men pushing from behind or carrying along large rocks with which to block the wheels at the stops. It was 7:00 P.M. before all were up, and in spite of the fact that their animals were jaded, they set out on a forced journey twenty miles to the Muddy Creek. About half of them would certainly have died of thirst if some of the more fortunate ones had not returned with water. Hence the name, “Mormon Mesa.”
Today in a comfortable car on a broad, hard-surfaced road, one finds no threat in this landscape, but only boredom with a terrain which stretches away as flat as a floor and as barren as the second day of Creation. The drop down into the valley of the Virgin River adds some variety, as does the village of Mesquite, Nevada. Soon the road leaves the river course and climbs toward a low mountain range. A scattered forest of Joshua trees covers the upper slope but stops abruptly at the foothills, and through a twisting gap the vista opens to vivid color. Vermilion bluffs jut out against a deep blue mountain backdrop; black lava-covered hills are pointed up by splotches of chalk-white clay. The combination is a fitting introduction to the scenic wonders beyond.

All the way the road has followed roughly the Old Spanish Trail, over which for ages the Indians had carried on their trade in horses and captive children. A favorite camping place was here on the Santa Clara Creek, where a small band of Shivwits still lives. In 1854 Brigham Young sent a group of missionaries to the Indians of this area. They made their headquarters about where a service station now stands, just at the entrance of the town of Santa Clara. Here they built a strong rock fort and planted some cotton seed as an experiment.

The next year the married men brought their families, and the single boys courted and persuaded their brides to join the community. Such an interesting group! Jacob Hamblin, the oldest man, was thirty-four years old, his wife Rachel, thirty-two; Dudley Leavitt was twenty-four and his two wives twenty-two and seventeen respectively; Zadoc K. Judd's wife was not yet twenty and the mother of two children. The five brides were still in their teens. Here, two days' travel from the nearest settlement, they supported each other through childbirth, fear of the Indians, and loneliness. For six years this rock fort was the last outpost on the desert.

In the fall of 1861 a company of twenty families, newly arrived from Switzerland, were sent here to raise grapes. It would be impossible to imagine a more complete, more total change in environment than they faced in the move from the lush Alpine slopes to this valley of blue sage set in salmon-colored sand. Everything was strange — plant life, animal life, Indians, the whole landscape. But they had come to Zion with joy, and after dragging their handcarts from the Mississippi River to the Salt Lake Valley and making the trip south in relays from one community to another, they still "excited much curiosity through the country by their singing and good cheer."

Soon after they arrived, they surveyed the site for their town, num-
bered the lots, and placed corresponding numbers in a hat from which each man drew one to be his homesite. Since they could not plant until they could get water to the land, they began at once to dig a canal. All hands joined in the task, working a twelve-hour day for a credit of $2.00 on the books. By Christmas Eve it was done, at a cost of $1,030 in labor. Now they could celebrate!

But that very night the rain began, such a rain as none in this area had ever seen before. For forty days it continued intermittently, and on February 2, 1862, came the flood. Such a flood! It washed away the rock fort, the orchards of the first settlers, the burr flour mill, the molasses mill — and the new ditch.

Now the old settlers moved away, leaving the Swiss to make another ditch before they could raise a crop. Those were hard, near-starvation years, those first two, but the people persisted and by their industry and frugality had within a decade become a prosperous community that boasted no poor in its midst. Though many of its young people have moved away, the town is still essentially Swiss, as evidenced by the fine homes and well-kept yards.

A week after the arrival of the Swiss company on the Santa Clara, a much larger group — three hundred wagons — pulled onto the site of St. George. This was known as the "Cotton Mission" or the "Dixie Mission," because of the hot climate. This accounts for the white "D" emblazoned on the black hill and the use of the word Dixie as part of the name of so many businesses. Today a stalk of cotton would be a source of wonder to the children of Utah's Dixie, but in 1861 with the Civil War cutting off the supply from the South, the people did plant and raise cotton for the state.

Following the orderly Mormon plan of colonization, this was a picked group with the right proportion of farmers, builders, carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and coopers to care for the erection of homes. Musicians and schoolteachers also were called to set the cultural tone of the community.

Life here was rigorous. The heat, the alkaline soil, the recalcitrant river, the flies and mosquitoes combined so effectively that some families returned to the north after the first season. Those who remained started work on a red sandstone tabernacle before their own homes were finished. It stands today with its clock and steeple, a building which looks as if it had been transplanted bodily from New England. That structure up to the square, the stonemasons started work at once on the impressive temple which now, snow-white, dominates the landscape. A
third public building, the courthouse, was built while the temple was still in progress and stands foursquare in the pattern of courthouses from Boston to Vandalia. These three structures speak of the quality of their builders more eloquently than could volumes of words.

St. George today is a tourist center where modern motels and restaurants daily furnish accommodations for more than a thousand people, most of them en route to the National Parks. It is interesting to note that the very liabilities of the early settlers are the greatest assets of their descendants. This multi-colored land, with its barren, fantastically eroded hills, which then seemed such a curse, is now a blessing. Its very wildness, its untamed grandeur, provides “gold in them thar hills” of a kind that only increases with the intangibles which each visitor carries away.

From St. George through the village of Washington, also settled as a part of the cotton industry, you pass on through Hurricane Valley with its luscious fruits and berries and its ditch hanging high along the hillside, up and up a winding road to the top of the plateau. Stop here and look back at the scene behind you, just in case you don’t come back this way.

Directly below you Hurricane covers the valley, a patch-work quilt in neat squares. To your right clumps of green mark the location of ranches or settlements, and beyond stretches the wasteland cut through by ridges and punctuated with upthrust masses of violent red rock standing on end. To the left rolling hills stretch out, one blanketed with some fifty acres of bright cerise sand, rippling and as clear of vegetation as beach sand, a miniature Sahara. Away and beyond this tucked-in corner stretches the desert.

Pioneer travelers, measuring these distances in terms of days and nights on the road, of hours plodding across a sandy stretch or up a grade to a summit, called the whole area “the land which God forgot.” This view to them was not something to admire but the place where they must live; these colors spoke to them more of sterility than beauty.

You now stand almost midway between the two lanes of traffic through Utah — U.S. 91, which you left some twenty miles back, and U.S. 89, which lies ahead. For nearly three hundred miles they run parallel, much of the way only forty miles apart, and joining them in a sort of magic circle are the scenic wonders of Zion, Bryce, and Cedar Breaks, all within a circumference of 150 miles. To instead of being the land that God forgot, it is the land that man remembers and tells his friends about, reinforcing his telling with pictures of unbelievable
quality. It is a land to return to again and again, for no one can ever wholly see it, so responsive and sensitive is it to the hours and the seasons.

Back on your way again, you ride across a level plateau, the skyline ahead a teasing lure to hurry you on. Close against your left is another flat elevation, the top held together with a tight band of hard rock from which the layers of softer earth burst away in flounces and billows and folds, horizontally striped, like permanent models for the abundant skirts of the Navajo maidens. On top of one elevation you may catch a glimpse of buildings and mechanisms connected with the government experiment known as “Project Smart.” Here Dummy Sam is repeatedly being catapulted from a cockpit at a speed greater than that of sound — thrown through the air over the edge of the cliff to test the various effects on a jet pilot similarly ejected. No, visitors are not admitted except by special permission and when accompanied by authorized attendants.

Rockville and Springdale are little one-street rows of houses crowded between the Virgin River and the hills. Now for the first time you are close to the stream. Innocent looking, isn't it? Hardly large enough to be called a river, it ripples along, shallow and cheerful. You could take off your shoes and stockings and wade it almost anywhere without wetting your knees. Yet it was this same stream in flood that washed out the early village at Pocketville — houses, barns, and all — and then swung back in demoniac glee to scoop out the land upon which Duncan was going to establish another settlement. It has been said that the stream daily carries out of the canyon 180 carloads of ground rock.

After you reach the ranger station at Zion, make haste slowly. Pull up at the first viewpoint, stop, and get out for a general over-all impression of the place — the Three Patriarchs on the one side and the Watchman on the other guarding the entrance. Past this point the Indians would venture during the day, but would not let the evening catch them there. There is something so overwhelming about the place as the canyon narrows that they shrank away in awe, afraid of too close association with the spirits that whispered among the rocks.

Drive to the Temple of Sinawava, the end of the road for cars, and then get out and take time to enjoy this indescribable place. The general feeling is of mass — sheer cliffs that stretch up and up. How high? Why try to conceive the number of feet of several Empire State Buildings placed one on top of the other? The impression is of mass and height overwhelming, red walls in variegated shades, sheer, hard as
The Falls of Sinawava after a summer shower. Located just below the "narrow" of the Virgin River where it debouches into the upper end of Zion Canyon are the cathedral-like walls of the Temple of Sinawava. Photo courtesy Paul R. Franke, National Parks Service.

Honed steel. There is vegetation, of course, but so little that it is dwarfed and lost on the blank upper reaches. Close on the trails, aspens take the edge off the magnitude of what towers above and beyond the stretch of the imagination.

Follow to the trail's end at the edge of the Narrows, where the stream rushes out as from a huge pipe in an opening, only twenty feet wide in some places, between the 2,000 feet of sheer ledge, clean-cut and polished. It is said by those who have followed through this canyon, entering from above and coming down with the streams during low-water time, that the defile is so narrow and the slit of blue sky so far above that the stars can be seen in midday. Here you may see the work of the stream more clearly, as it has cut its channel at the rate of an inch or two a year, and continues still to grind down the stone.
Linger in the Park as long as you can; your time will be well spent. Go on the guided tours and listen to the stories of those who have background to help you see what you look at. Or, with one of the “self-guided tour” booklets to direct you, explore for yourself.

You might try to hike up Angel’s Landing, for it is not too strenuous, leading as it does by winding trails up the back to bring you suddenly to the top and the edge of the cliff. Now you can get a better view of the still higher walls that surround you, and, even at this elevation, things take on a different aspect as you sense the distance both up and down.

Do not attempt to climb Lady Mountain on the west rim unless you are in condition, but if you are, tackle it with the assurance that the effort will be richly rewarded. There are no words coined to describe the magnificence of the view from here, the expanse of unexplored land that opens to the west, numberless peaks whose tops are on a level with the high plateau, divided by a labyrinth of abysmal chasms. Beyond them the view stretches out as though to the end of the earth. Is it thirteen mountain ranges that you can count? Some say more, some less, depending on the strength of their eyes and imaginations. But it is an unforgettable experience.

Perhaps you do not care to hike at all. It is almost as well, for you can sit quietly in the shade of one canyon wall and look at the other; you can close your eyes and feel the spirit of this place. Stop where you can contemplate the Great White Throne, the unconquered peak scaled by only one human being — a seasoned mountain climber proud of his achievements in the Alps. He would win added fame by being the first to reach the top of this monolith! For one night his signal fire glowed on top of the crest, and that was all. Searching parties were sent out; airplanes flew over. It was futile, for the man had disappeared completely, and the mountain stood in silent disdain of their puny efforts.

If you are fortunate enough to witness the moon rise over the canyons, you will understand better why people can believe in elves and fairies, and why the Indians might shun the eerie shapes that the moonlight conjures up. Or you might happen to be there for one of the brief summer showers when each cliff has its own waterfall, a misty, varicolored veil. But at any hour of any ordinary day Zion Canyon will provide pictures for your memory album.

Leave the canyon by way of the Zion-Mount Carmel tunnel, one of the engineering feats of the world. You snake your way up the mountain side and enter the darkness. But stop at the windows to look back
at the canyons and cliffs and to get perspective. It is almost like a summary at the end of an interesting chapter, tying the individual points together and showing them in relation to each other.

The scenery beyond Zion to the east is varied and interesting—the checkerboard mountain with its bare slope neatly marked into squares, the wooded hills, the open valleys, and the patches of cleared land. At Mount Carmel Junction the road joins U.S. 89.

Visitors who arrive at this junction from Phoenix and intermediate points have come up out of a desert very similar to that of California and Nevada. They have witnessed the same empty expanse, felt the same silence beating in waves against the eardrums, endured the same withering heat during the day, gloried in the evening sunset—a spectacle of color that reflects across the landscape—and experienced the same nightly benediction. There is one marked difference in Arizona country. Navajo hogans, never in villages, dot the landscape. These rising swells and knobs seem almost like natural formations until one notices their blanketed doors, which always open to the east. The Navajo people have learned the insulating qualities of the good earth, so have built the hogan partly underground using a heavy layer of sod around and above to keep out the heat.

Past the Navajo land, across the Colorado River at Marble Canyon, skirting the Buckskin Mountain, the road drops to open country, where just a stone's throw from the Utah line is the village of Fredonia. Today, busy with lumber and with the backwash of Kanab's boom, it is much like any other rural Mormon town. Its background was unusual in that Zane Grey used it as the locale for some of his Westerns, for during the years when the Mormons were living polygamy proudly and defiantly, this town was a refuge for plural wives. Safe over the line in Arizona, they were secure against arrest by Utah officers, while still near enough to friends and neighbors at Kanab. So great was the annual crop of babies that some wag called it "the lambing ground."

Five miles farther on and just over the Utah line is Kanab, another town with a long and colorful past, though not more exciting than its present. In the early 1940's the Parry brothers helped some of the moving picture companies discover the scenery in this area—the cliffs, ledges, caves, trails, the meadows with streams and greenery beneath high mountain peaks—with the result that a number of pictures were filmed here, and nearly every summer finds one company or another headquartered here and working on location nearby.

But now the most important element in the economy of Kanab is
not moving pictures but the Glen Canyon Dam that is under construction seventy-five miles beyond on the Colorado River and the influx of people who come in to find work. The trailer house villages, the rude temporary camps, and the crowded schools combine to pose real problems for the city fathers.

Twenty miles north of Kanab is the Mount Carmel Junction, where those who have never seen Zion Canyon will want to detour. Others, en route to Bryce, will continue up U.S. 89 through Mount Carmel and Orderville, sheltered by trees and surrounded by lush farms and orchards. Of these two, Orderville has the more unique past in that it is the one place in the state where the attempt to live the communal “Order of Enoch” succeeded.

The idea grew out of earlier attempts to establish a Utopia in which there should be no rich and no poor, but all should live in equality and fraternity. In the beginning this village consisted of an enclosed square around the edge of which individual homes, or more accurately perhaps, sleeping apartments, were built, while the large building in the center was a composite of living-room, dining-room, meeting-house, and dance hall. Attached to it was the kitchen with its huge stone ovens and great kettles, while the dairy-room, the deepfreeze of the time, was outside the square.

Under the “Order” all ate at the same table; the men and boys old enough to work in the fields were served first, the women and children later. The work of the household was rotated, the girls taking turns at serving, washing dishes, caring for the milk, butter, and cheese, cleaning the bedrooms, spinning, weaving, sewing, and so on through the whole list of occupations. The men’s assignments were more often for the year — with each man responsible for some project. The blacksmith, the shoemaker, the baker, or the carpenter might retain his position for years with apprentices under him, while the farmers, the lumbermen, and others whose work was seasonal might rotate or share occupations. Frequent discussion meetings kept everyone up to date and ironed out misunderstandings. Each worked according to his ability, and all shared equally in the profits of the enterprise. Annually when the books were balanced, debts were forgiven and everyone started anew.

The result was a very close-knit society, with all the girls dressed in dresses of identical material, though they might try their ingenuity in the trim or pattern, and the boys all in home-spun and manufactured jeans or suits, straw hats, and serviceable shoes from the hides of their own cattle. Oldsters remembering these days insist that they were happy
The Silent City, Bryce Canyon. Taken from Inspiration Point, this flamboyantly colored scene is enjoyed by thousands in its summer glory, but relatively few are familiar with its winter solitude.

and peaceful and that there was a spiritual and emotional unity among them not of this earth. Certain it is that they were dedicated to the idea, for while most of the other communities where similar "Orders" were established continued the experiment only past the second year, these good folk lived it in full fidelity for eleven years, and then formally dissolved only after they were counseled to do so by their leaders.

The ride through Long Valley is a delight, with the road just high enough along the hillside to miss the grassy bottomland and to give an excellent view of the mountain on the other side. The stream grows smaller as the road ascends until at last it is a mere trickle between pools or seeps from among the grass edges. Then suddenly the water is running in the other direction, for here on this divide the Virgin and the Sevier touch finger tips.

Through Asay town and Hatch the country opens toward the Sevier Valley, and soon after you pass the Bryce Canyon junction you get a hint of color in Red Canyon. But nothing can prepare you for the impact of Bryce. You are riding through mountain growth among pines and aspens at an elevation which seems to extend without break to a distant horizon. Then suddenly there you are! A horseshoe-shaped
bowl opens beneath you, and you find yourself looking down into an amphitheater covering fifty-five square miles, filled with pinnacles and towers and figures. It is almost too magnificent, too violent to grasp, for in addition to the enchanted chaos of form there is the play of color, shading from the frosted white top which crowns the higher peaks through yellow to coral and rose. Subdivide the colors in any way you choose — saffron, apricot, persimmon, watermelon — they are here. That is, at one time or another, in varying degrees of density they are here, for this is color changing.

Here is none of the classic simplicity of Zion. Here you are not an infinite small speck looking up at mass and height. Here you stand on the edge of a fairyland with gentle trails luring you to come down and explore. Descend even a few hundred yards and surprise yourself with the magnitude of these individual sculpturings — pinnacles in rows, in groups exchanging confidences, or standing aloof and disdainful of company. The Greeks would have peopled this area with a special kind of deity.

If you arrive at midday and find the colors pale and washed-out, do not be disappointed. Stay and watch them bloom in the light of the sinking sun, bloom and glow as with an inner illumination. Then as the shadows gather in the defiles and fill the narrow gulches, rising inch by inch along the base, see how the spires burn like flaming tips. Or in the morning watch them drop the blue veil from their shoulders to folds around their feet, to vanish as the sun limns the edge with a pencil line of pure gold.

As you stand at this elevation and look off to the east into the unknown land, you can quite clearly see white spires jutting out of the ground like pale asparagus tips rising above the plain. “The Stove Pipes” local folk call them, this formation for which even the most learned geologists have neither name nor explanation. If you love exploring, if you like to live daringly and on the edge of things — and if you have time — take the trip over the rim and down into this amazing land. But get directions and guides and carry along a good camera with color film or you can never make anyone understand what you found on “Kodachrome Flat.”

Returning now to U.S. 89 you may want to go on north past Pan­guitch (Indian for big fish) and on into Salt Lake City. But if you want to complete the circle and return to U.S. 91, go back to the Long Valley junction and take the high road over the mountain, over wooded hills and past brush-filled valleys where fern and columbine thrive, through
tall ponderosa pines skirting Navajo Lake, on up until you are literally on top of the world. A vista opens out to the south and west, and you are suddenly caught up in a sense of vastness and peace above and beyond the smog and clangor, away from the race with time and the demand for tranquilizers.

Pull off and view Cedar Breaks at the viewpoint called Brian Head, the highest point in the area. Here you see Bryce as it was aeons ago when the wind and water were just getting on with their work, for this is the same scene, only millions of years younger.

Back at Cedar City on U.S. 91 you fall again into the stream of life, but the memory of these natural beauties will be as a fresh breeze across your face, the whole experience something in the nature of a baptism. Surely this is not the land which God forgot, but the one He has preserved inviolate to minister to the troubled heart of man.