

## Biography of Louisa Ballif Benson

This biography is of a successful woman and is written with the hope that only inspiration and helpfulness may come to those who shall read it. In spite of great obstacles, in spite of pioneer environment this woman was a success. She lived to be admired by the stranger, to become an inspiration to friends and neighbors, an ideal wife and mother to her family. She served as Ward Relief Society President for twenty one years, Primary Stake President for five years and Relief Society Stake President for sixteen years. She lived to be seventy two years of age.

Among the beautiful places of the earth, Lake Geneva, Switzerland stands as one of the foremost. The surrounding towns and districts are noted for their beauty. It was here in the town of Lausanne that Louisa Ballif Benson was born on February 25, 1850. She was the first child of Serge Louis Ballif and Elise Marie LeCoultré. Her father was a gentleman of wealth and learning and her mother a lady of refinement and culture. Their home was a sort of ancestral palace with its coat-of-arms, its servants and all the other luxuries that would harmonize with them. Nine children were born to this couple: Louisa, Marie, Serge F., John L., Kimmie, Rachel, Jenny, Helen and Sergene. Helen and Sergene died when they were very young.

Louisa's parents accepted the Gospel and were baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints on June 6, 1852 by T.B.H. Stanhouse. On February 10, 1854, when she was four years old, they left their beloved Switzerland to come to America. A new and true religion had come to them. They were of the blood of Ephraim, heard the great Latter Day Saint call and were ready to sacrifice not only wealth and comfort but the good will of friends, relatives and citizens by whom they were held in high esteem. The story of the hardships and suffering in crossing the waters and the vast unknown plains and wilderness is known by all but the imagination need not be extreme to know that this suffering was more intense to people who had never known anything but luxury.

They emigrated to Utah and the first home of Louisa in the new west was at Cottonwood. Here her father purchased a farm and while struggling for existence the news came that Johnsons Army was coming and with the other saints they made, what is known as, the move south. Every day the great lesson of necessity and experience was preparing this little girl for her future. One incident in this move brings out the natural motherhood and wonderful medical ability of our subject. She owned a darling kitten which was carefully put into the huge wagon, but jumped out as the wagon began to move. It was run over and pronounced dead but Louisa pleaded to be allowed to care for it. She folded cloths, dipped them in cold water and kept the kitten packed. These were changed as often as they came to a stream of water on their way. Needless to say the kitten lived.

Other early homes were in Ogden and Logan, Utah where with the general failure of crops due to grasshoppers, lack of teams etc, the family was often in need. During these years many valuable pieces of silverware, clothing, embroidery work, etc. were sold in order to buy food. These years were however profitable in the development of mind and character. Louisa was naturally very religious and studious. Schools were scarce and aside from three terms consisting of three months each all the knowledge gained was obtained by self effort and the private tutership of her father and mother. At an early age she showed a natural aptitude toward nursing and motherhood.

In the spring of 1860, the first year they lived in Logan, her father was called on a mission to his native land of Switzerland. Children had been added to the family which meant more responsibility. How was the father to leave? But no such question arose. There was trust in God. He would provide.

Louisa was now ten years old and assisted much in caring for the children and home. At fourteen she assisted her mother in teaching a school for girls. Some of her students have said that she inspired them to learn and to live good honest lives. Who can estimate the good that was accomplished by this young teacher.

For five years she taught reading, writing and spelling. One of her students said of her, "How we worked and how we tried to please her and how we learned to love her. Throughout my life she has been my ideal and I have ever striven to emulate her many virtues". Another student said, "She inspired us not only to

learning but to live on a higher plane, to be more honest and fair, and to have noble ideals". These are typical of many expressions from those that were under her care.

She married George Taft Benson on December 20, 1867 in the Endowment House in Salt Lake City, Utah. Her husband's father, Apostle Ezra Taft Benson, performed the ceremony. This marriage must have been sanctioned by God for from beginning to end it was one of beauty and love. Thirteen children were born of this union: Louisa, Ezra, Elise, George, Sarge, Adeline, Florence, William, Frank, Marie, Carmen, Jenny and Kimmie. Many hardships arose, many obstacles came in their path but together they fought the battle bravely and always encouraged and assisted each other when it was needed. As their family increased and responsibilities were multiplied their love and devotion to each other grew more beautiful. Two of their children died in infancy, Ezra and William. Marie died of whooping cough when a child of about five years of age. Ten children were raised to man and womanhood.

These children were carefully cared for. Every effort was put forth to teach them properly. Special emphasis was placed on their morals, on religion, on being clean physically and mentally. All have married in the Temple and are parents of children of their own. Louisa was a true and great wife and mother.

Her public work began in the first year of her married life when she was called to be secretary of the first Relief Society organized in Cache County. In 1874 she was chosen first counsellor to the President of this organization. Her faithfulness and determination no doubt prepared her for her later work.

In 1884 they moved from Logan to a farm in Whitney, Idaho. The new home in Whitney was in an unsettled district. It was beginning all over again, a log cabin, long distances to travel, pioneer hardships. No trees or flowers. This noble woman met the situation with a brave heart. Trees and flowers were planted and the humble log cabin soon breathed an air of housing lovers of nature. One of the wonderful things about this woman was the love and success she had with flowers and trees. Wherever her home was there were flowers of all kinds to be found.

Her husband was soon chosen to be Bishop of the new Whitney Ward and in 1888 Louisa was chosen to preside over the Relief Society. This meant that whenever sickness or death occurred she was there. Sister Benson's name soon became a household word. She was an excellent nurse, bringing many babies into the world and no one can say how many baby's lives she saved and how many people were relieved from suffering through her skill and care. God had gifted her with a healing power and a faith that radiated. She was sympathetic, kind and generous and with her great faith in God she comforted many. She was never too weary with her own tasks to help those in need. It was nothing unusual to be called up at midnight and to ride miles in the cold to assist in the birth of a child. Often her own were left that she might lay out the dead and lighten the burden of those called to mourn. It has been said of her, "No one could sympathize, bless and comfort like the sweet presence of Louisa Benson". In a few years the Whitney Relief Society grew to be one of the leading societies of the Stake.

In 1895 she was made Stake President of the Primary Association. Here her work was very efficient as she loved little children. She truly sensed the responsibility of the life of the child and worked assiduously to raise the standard of the Primaries and to establish a uniform system of teaching religion to the child.

At this time the Oniada Stake extended as far as Baker City, Oregon. In 1897 President Benson was called to make a visit to Baker City. This trip was made alone but when she reached her destination she met a warm reception and found a well organized Primary. After giving instructions and blessings to all she met the return trip was begun. The children were asked to pray for Sister Benson's safe return and their prayers were answered in a most miraculous manner. As the train neared Glenns Ferry a terrible wreck occurred. The train was thrown down a thirty foot embankment. It was about 9:00 p.m.. Although alone she had no fear. Something whispered to her to sit still and hold to the arms of the seat. The car rolled over three times. Through her mind ran the beautiful words of a hymn, "When through the deep waters I call thee to go, My grace is sufficient 'Twill not thee O'er Flow".

Every passenger on the train except herself was injured. A car was dispatched from the nearest station with medical aid, but even before its arrival Sister Benson had bound up wounds and had made many of them comfortable. She spent the entire

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night assisting the doctors and comforting those afflicted. The Primary children from Baker City, when they heard of the accident, felt that their prayers in Sister Benson's behalf had been answered. The trainmen on the wrecked train said, "This woman surely was wonderful. Her self possession saved her. Her skill, kindness and power to calm and comfort helped to save others".

For five years she labored as Primary Stake President. In 1900 she was called to act as Relief Society Stake President of the Onieda Stake. It was in this capacity that her piety and power as a presiding officer and her great love and sympathy drew out the best that was in the women of this Stake. This placed her Stake as one of the leading Stakes of Zion for many years. There were twenty two wards in the Stake and she visited one of these wards each month. In this work her kind and noble husband was always ready to assist and take her long distances by horse and buggy. She often said that with such help from her husband, such faithful women to labor with and the blessings of her Heavenly Father anyone could do what she was doing. Her life's keynote was to ever retain her humility and give others the praise. Love governed the labors of this good woman.

At one time when President Emeline B. Wells, who was then General President, made an official visit to the Stake she made this remark in a public address, "Sisters we are proud of your work and the efficient manner in which your many and varied labors are conducted. You have one of the most capable women in the church for your President. We have learned to love her for her real worth and to honor her as a Woman of God". Especially beautiful was the love she bore her counsellors. It was an inspiration to see them together. Nothing but good will and kindly feelings ever existed between them.

With the advancing years Louisa and her husband longed to work in the Temple so in 1916 they moved back to Logan, the home of their childhood, where this could be accomplished. Here they built themselves a little bungalow on the exact spot of ground on which the first Ballif home, a log cabin, was built. The devotion between these two was an inspiration to everyone with whom they came in contact.

However, only one year elapsed after they moved into their new home until Brother Benson was stricken with heart trouble. For two years Sister Benson cared for him as she would an infant. It was a sad but beautiful sight to see this great woman giving her final tribute to the man she had loved for so many years. Her strength was taxed to its capacity night and day. He was her constant care. Everything was done for his pleasure and comfort and when finally the end came on May 14, 1919 she was by his side to receive his smile of love and gratitude and to perform the last rites that only those who love us can perform.

Sister Benson lived three years after her husband's death. Only those who came unaware to the little bungalow and found her either on her knees in prayer or sitting with his picture in her hands knew the brave fight she was making. She never became accustomed to being separated from her devoted husband. She found great comfort in singing the church hymns as she went about her work. Her children and grandchildren were a great source of joy to her and they always loved to visit and partake of the sweetness of her spirit and love. On February 7, 1922 she was stricken and passed peacefully on to her reward surrounded by those she loved best -- her children. The funeral service was held two days later in the Logan Tabernacle. The speakers, old friends and co-workers, bore eloquent tribute to her sterling character as a true friend, wife and mother.

A few weeks later the Relief Societies of Cache and Onieda Stakes held a memorial at which music was furnished by the grandchildren and talks given by members of the Relief Society who knew her best. It was a beautiful service full of glory for the dead and inspiration and counsel to the living.

This sketch would not be complete without a closing tribute to the love she bore her children and grandchildren. They were constantly her thought and care. When sickness was in their homes she was always there with her faith and skill. Often when doctors had given up she stood alone on the brink and brought them back to life. Some of the grandchildren must know that they owe their lives to her faith.

The remainder of this good life story remains to be told by her offspring. They alone can glorify her name by living as she would have them. They alone can bring her the joy she so well deserved.

## MY MOTHER

Her name is Louise, "Lou" for short, and in her breast there beats  
the purest heart that ever man could win.

She has two eyes of skylight blue, look in their depths and you  
know they are true.

She has two hands so soft and white,

Her hair is the color of mooning night.

Her face is as clear as a mountain spring, tapering to a neck so  
white and clean.

She is like a soft white rose.

Her slender form in spotless clothes.

She was married when but eighteen when in the prime of youth,

She was the second wife she knew, but I think she was the best  
of the two.

We'll leave that for God to judge when all is through.

She is the purest mother that ever brought life into this world of  
blighting strife.

She gave birth to three and seven with the help of great God  
in heaven.

She is my mother I am proud to say, the dearest mother on earth.

She is the one that suffered death, just on account of my birth.

-- George Benson Parkinson --