Elizabeth Simpson Haigh Bradshaw

Born 10 February 1808 in England Age 48 Martin Company

Elizabeth was born in England in 1808. Her family, the Simpsons, invented the famous grandfather clock, and they were very wealthy. When Elizabeth was only 9, her parents died, leaving her and her siblings orphans. Many children in England who lost their parents at such an early age were left to face poverty and economic hardship. But Elizabeth’s aunt took her in, and she continued to live in prosperity. In 1834, when she was 26, she married William Haigh, and they had two children. In 1840, William died. Soon after his passing, Elizabeth was introduced to the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and was baptized a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In 1844, Elizabeth married Richard Bradshaw who was also a member of the Church. Together Elizabeth and Richard were preparing to join the Saints in America. Before they could leave, however, Richard died of pneumonia in 1849, leaving Elizabeth a widow for the second time. Elizabeth was expecting their fourth child (her sixth) at the time.

Elizabeth did not give up her hope of coming to Zion, even in her second widowhood. For 6 years she worked and waited and prayed for an opportunity to bring her family to join the Saints who were now in Utah. Finally in 1856, her opportunity came. Her brothers tried to persuade her to remain in England and promised her they would raise and educate her children if she stayed. But she was resolute. “I am going to Zion,” she said. She took her 5 living children, Samuel Haigh (20 or 21), Sarah Ann Haigh (19), Robert Hall Bradshaw (11) Isabella Jane Bradshaw (10), and Richard Paul Bradshaw (6), said goodbye to her family and homeland and boarded the ship Horizon.

Before leaving England, Elizabeth received a blessing promising her she would take all her children to Zion. This was no small promise as the deprivations and hardships of late-season travel began to come upon them in full force. Although Elizabeth had been born to wealth and privilege, she was keenly aware of others who were less fortunate than she and had given most of her supplies away to those in greater need, keeping for her family only what would fit in her single handcart. This left little extra to keep her family warm and fed during their brutal journey across the high and windy plains of Wyoming.

Elizabeth’s example of faith and courage was not lost on her children. As they crossed the Platte River for the last time on October 19, her daughter Sarah Ann bravely carried at least 16 people across the icy waters. Samuel likely took Robert and Isabella across with the cart. This left Elizabeth with her 6 year-old son, Richard. Small and dainty, Elizabeth seemed an unlikely match for the swiftly flowing river. Undaunted, she put her small son up on her shoulders, wrapped his legs around her neck and started across the icy water. The force of the current knocked her off her feet, and she and Richard were carried downstream. Fellow travelers urged her to let go of her son and save herself, but she would not let go. She had been promised she would bring her children to Zion, and she would not let the water win.

Finally, after being carried some distance, she came to the far side of the river only to find the bank too steep to climb. Gratefully, help was there to lift her son to safety and pull her from the numbing cold water. This crossing of the Platte was brutal—between 13 and 18 people of the Martin Company died the next day from the effects of this crossing and the winter storm that froze their wet clothes upon their bodies as they reached the far bank.

Their trials were not over. As conditions worsened even further, Samuel was brought into camp and pronounced dead. To all appearances he was, but Elizabeth’s faith was strong. She had been promised she would bring all her children to Zion, and she believed that promise. She asked the elders to administer to Samuel, which they did. Miraculously, Samuel revived, recovered, and arrived in Zion with the rest of the family and company on November 30, 1856. Elizabeth eventually moved to Hyrum, Utah, and settled in a log house with a dirt roof and floor. Born to wealth, prosperity and influence, Elizabeth died in 1872 a humble, yet faithful, pioneer woman.

Source: Tell My Story, Too by Jolene Allphin, p.172-3