

Ben's Gift

BY HOWARD R. DRIGGS

(Based on a true story that took place in the 1840s in Nauvoo, Illinois)

Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33).

Ben loved his father's wagon shop. It was a busy place, with the music of saws, planes, hammers, and chisels filling the air all day long.

"Don't get too close to the workers," his father often warned the curious boy. "And leave the sharp tools alone."

"But I want to make a wagon of my own, Daddy. Why can't I?"

This plea usually earned him some boards, a few tools, and a spot out of the way where he could hammer to his heart's content.

Then came a joyous day when his father promised to make him a wagon for his birthday. It would be exactly like the big ones—only smaller.

"Just think," he told his mother, "a real wagon—all my own! I can take baby brother for rides, and I can bring things for you from the store. Won't that be fine?"

Mother agreed that it would be. She was almost as happy as her little son.

On the morning of Ben's seventh birthday, he awoke to find his dream had come true. There in the living room was his beautiful new wagon, gleaming with a fresh coat of paint. Tears filled Mother's and Father's eyes as their happy son gave them a loving squeeze. Then out he went to run up

and down the street and show his friends the rare gift.

True to his promise, Ben took his baby brother for many rides. He also ran errands for his mother most willingly. Ben and his dog, Bones, became a familiar sight around the streets of Nauvoo. With his father's help, Ben rigged a harness and trained the clever animal to pull the wagon and his young master around the streets near home.

One of Ben's favorite errands was to start down Mulholland Street, turn past the lot where the great temple was being built, and go on to Parley P. Pratt's

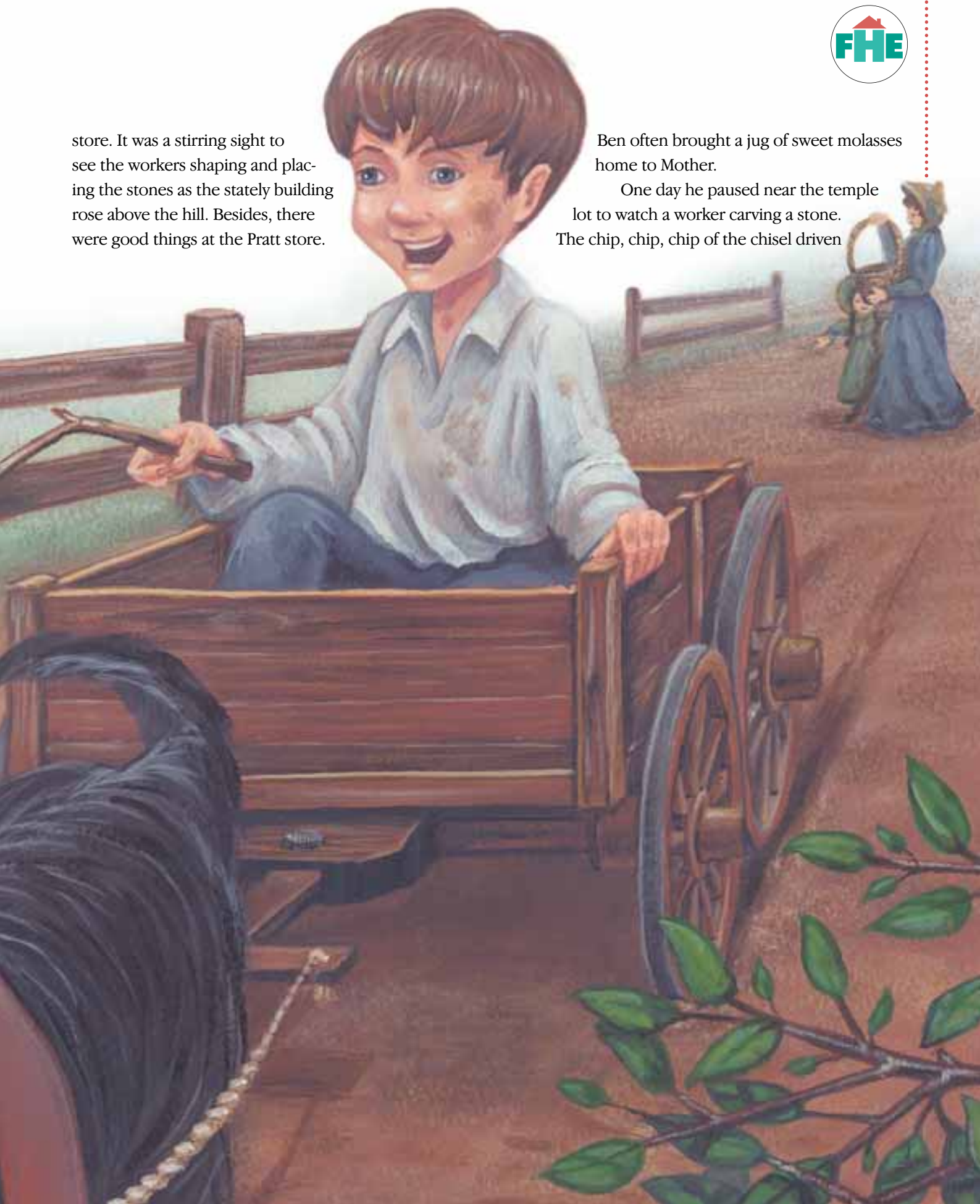




store. It was a stirring sight to see the workers shaping and placing the stones as the stately building rose above the hill. Besides, there were good things at the Pratt store.

Ben often brought a jug of sweet molasses home to Mother.

One day he paused near the temple lot to watch a worker carving a stone. The chip, chip, chip of the chisel driven



deftly into the stone was so captivating that Ben lost track of time. He did not notice that two workers had also paused to look intently at his little wagon.

“That wagon would be a mighty handy thing to haul our tools about in,” one of the men said. “Sonny, how would you like to let us have your wagon to help build the temple?”

“Oh, no, I couldn’t do that,” Ben replied.

The man looked at him closely. “Isn’t your father the boss of the big wagon shop?”

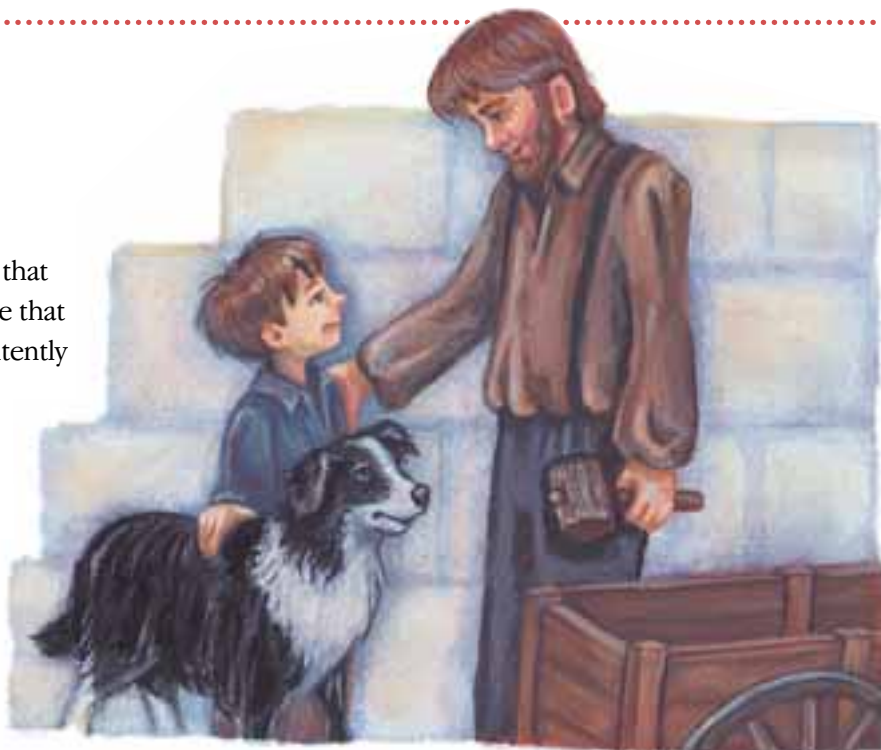
“Yes, sir.”

“Well, we’ll talk to him about it.”

Frightened at the thought of losing his precious wagon, Ben ran home with Bones at his heels. Arriving, he burst into tears. “Mother, you won’t let them take it away, will you?”

Mother looked up in alarm. “What are you talking about, Ben?”

“Some men at the temple asked me for my wagon to



his father finally came home, the same two men appeared at the door.

That night Ben and his parents had a heart-to-heart talk. “You see, Ben, everybody is giving something to help build the temple,” Father said. “I know how you feel about your wagon, and I’m not going to make you give it away. But just think about it. Ask Heavenly Father to help you decide what to do. It is the house of the Lord we are building.”

“I know you will do what is right,” Ben’s mother said. At bedtime she kissed his tearstained face, patted his ruffled hair, and left him to say his prayers alone.

The next morning, Ben pulled his wagon down Mulholland Street and over to the temple lot, followed by his faithful dog. Walking up to the man who seemed to be in charge, he said, “I’ve brought you my wagon to help the men building the temple.”

Looking into Ben’s face, the kind man replied with feeling, “God bless you, my boy. I know what this means to you. No one has made a greater sacrifice to help build the Nauvoo Temple.” He gripped Ben’s shoulder gently.

Ben walked slowly home with Bones by his side. He had done his part. ●

This story is adapted from *Ben the Wagon Boy*. Its author, Howard R. Driggs, is the son of Benjamin Woodbury Driggs, Ben in the story.



“Two companion qualities evident in the lives of our pioneers, early and modern, are unselfishness and sacrifice.”

Elder Dallin H. Oaks
Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles
From an October 1997 general conference address.

haul their tools in. When I said I couldn’t give it to them, they said, ‘We’ll see your father.’ ”

“Perhaps they were just joking. Come now, you are late for dinner. You’ll feel better after you eat something.”

But he was too worried to eat much. And just after