

Green Teamsters/Stubborn Oxen
(Madsen, Carol Cornwall; *Journey to Zion*, pp. 320-321)

The emigrants found more than the natural wonders of the new land to discover. They also found their journey to be one of self-discovery. The western odyssey not only challenged them with new modes of daily living; it also tested the strength of their coping abilities. Men who had never seen, let alone driven, a team of oxen, for instance, had little time to learn the "science of oxology," as Horace Whitney dubbed it. British emigrant Duckworth Grimshaw stood helpless beside his newly acquired team of oxen until experienced driver John W. Young offered to instruct him on the fine points of "bullwhacking." According to Grimshaw, "he took the whip and brought it down on the ox leader then gave the nigh leader a prod in the ribs with the whip stock and this brought the cows up in good style. I thought, well they seem to understand that sort of driving, but when I tried it I found the lash around my own neck and decided [that] to become efficient in driving required practice like everything else." Christian Nielsen was also a novice teamster and struggled with his two teams. "In the beginning," he found, "it went slowly as the oxen were not acquainted with us and we not with them, as the way in which they drive them here is entirely different from the Danish way."

Rounding up hundreds of wagons, hitching up teams, and finding a place in the line of travel overwhelmed some emigrants. Andrew Nielson would always remember the July afternoon in 1864 that he left Atchison, Kansas, with a Danish company for the West. The combination of "wild and ignorant teamsters," who couldn't speak English, captains who couldn't speak Danish, and the struggle "in getting those wild animals yoked up and hitched to the wagons" made an unforgettable scene. "For five miles all around the plains," he remembered, "you could see oxen, wagons, teamsters, and a dozen horsemen going at breakneck speed, and it was a miracle that no one was hurt, nor anything broken, but under these conditions I have seen strong men cry".

Hannah Cornaby, mercifully exempt from the frustrating struggle, found the whole process humorous. "Imagine, if you can," she wrote, "the operation of starting over one hundred ox teams, chiefly by men who had never done anything of the kind before.... The oxen were wild, and getting them yoked was the most laughable sight I had ever witnessed; everybody giving orders, and nobody knowing how to carry them out. If the men had not been saints, there would doubtless have been much profane language used; but the oxen, not understanding 'English,' did just as well without it. But it did seem so truly comical to witness the bewildered look of some innocent brother, who, after having labored an hour or more to get 'Bright' secured to one end of the yoke, would hold the other end aloft, trying to persuade 'Buck' to come under, only to see 'Bright' careering across the country, the yoke lashing the air, and he not even giving a hint as to when he intended to stop."