Exposé of Polygamy
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CHAPTER VI.

We return to England—How Polygamy was taught there—The Girls happy—The Wives miserable—General Effects of the Doctrine—A Runaway Wife—How she acted in Haste and repented at Leisure—A Mother leaves her Babes—A Lady is “counselled” to emigrate without her Husband—Follies of certain Elders—Polygamic “Poetry!”

We returned to England in November, 1854, with the intention of leaving for Utah in the following spring. Until the period of emigration arrived, we went to reside in the house of the President of the London Conference, and it was at that time that I first began seriously to doubt the truth of Mormonism. I gradually became convinced, though I could scarcely explain how, that there was something wrong, something that I did not understand, underlying the whole system. I began to realize that there was more of frail humanity about it than of the pure and holy religion that I had believed it to be; for the reader must remember that, however much I was opposed to Polygamy, it never once entered my thoughts to question that it was a pure and religious principle.

I believed that my opposition to Polygamy in Switzerland was the result of my own “depraved nature,” and not the fault of my religion. But soon after our arrival in London, I began to hear things about the authorities of the church in Utah that I was convinced could not be right.

On the continent we had only seen and heard ourselves and our own converts on the new revelation. On our arrival in England, I was somewhat anxious to learn how others had received it.

The young girls were pleased with it, for it extended their chances of marriage, and they were the recipients of many attentions from the elders. It was natural for them to be gratified with the assurance that it was their “privilege” to tell any man of their love, and that it was his duty to marry them. But during a year’s residence in London, I never met a happily married woman in the Mormon Church who did not abhor it. They were submissive to its teachings, as it had no immediate results there; but it troubled them terribly and rendered them miserable when they thought of going to Utah.
Married women had, however, the same favorable attentions and compliments paid them as the young girls, for the Gentile marriage never stood in the way. It could at any time be broken, if the lady had only the inclination or nerve to do it. No married missionary could take another wife in Europe without special permission from Brigham Young; but they could, and did, teach married women that in “Zion” the “Gentile chain was broken,” and that the ladies could choose for husbands, “whom they would in the Lord,” when they got there, hinting, at the same time, that they, themselves, would be in the market. That teaching was not listened to by some; but it was by others, and many homes in England have been blighted by it, and broken up.

Women who were ill-mated, or imagined that they were, saw an easy way of settling their difficulties when Polygamic teaching instructed them that all marital covenants and obligations, before entering into the church, were unrecognized by the Lord. All that they had to do was to induce their husbands to take them to Utah, and if the husband refused to go, the wife could go alone. “Get away pleasantly and quietly if you can; if you cannot—get away any how.” This was frequently the counsel given, and not infrequently acted upon. A pretty face or attractive person never lacked facilities for getting away.

Husbands who were dissatisfied with their wives could leave them and their families, also, and go to “Zion” alone, if the wife and family refused to accompany them. The husband was the head of the wife, and should do his own duty, whether his wife and children did theirs or not. If his family did not follow him, he could take a young wife or wives there, and “lay the foundation anew” for another family; and in his experience he believed that the promise was singularly fulfilled, that “he who forsaketh wife or child for my sake shall have a hundred fold.” That run-a-way husband was, of course, entitled to a hundred young girls, if he could only get them and keep them.

Such things were not taught to ignorant men and women only, but also to people in very much better positions. I know one gentleman in Liverpool who separated from his family because of their unbelief in Mormonism, and made great sacrifices in order to go to Utah. He married an accomplished young lady in Salt Lake City, and lived long enough in Zion to wish that he had never been there. The last marriage was happy enough; but the gentleman and lady outlived their faith, and concluded to separate and leave the country. The young lady returned to London, the gentleman to Liverpool—a poorer, but a wiser man.

There was also an old couple with whom I was well acquainted in Portsmouth. They were engaged in business, and doing very well. The wife joined the Mormon Church, and the husband, being a good-natured old gentleman, allowed her to do just what she liked, and she was very
liberal to the missionaries. She heard so much of the glories of “Zion” that she began to tease her husband to emigrate, although he did not wish to do so. But as he discovered that she was growing dissatisfied and unhappy about it, he consented to let her go alone, believing that she would return again. She went to Utah provided with abundance of every thing and plenty of money. Soon after her arrival there, she was married to an old Mormon elder, who built a house with her money and otherwise made himself very comfortable. Then he took a young wife, and then another; and among them they led the old lady such a life that she was glad to leave the house and labour for her support as best she could. She frequently heard from her husband in England, who had fretted until he fell sick. He had to get a nurse or housekeeper, and as he was well to do, this person contrived to get him to marry her. After a year or two, he died, leaving all his property to her; while the poor old lady was living in Utah in poverty, very unhappy and bitterly repenting her folly in leaving so good a husband as he had been to her. While the old gentleman was sick, I saw the old lady in deep distress of mind, as she could not get money to take her back to England. Had she got there while the old gentleman was still alive, she would doubtless have inherited all his property; but now she is poor and homeless.

Some years later, while living in New York, I saw other illustrations of the baneful teachings in England. One of the Mormon elders, on his return from a mission to Europe, came to my house accompanied by a “sister,” who, he said, had just arrived with other emigrants from England. He told me that she was feeling dull, and he would like her to be with some family of the Saints where she would feel at home for about two weeks. At the end of that time, they intended to go to Salt Lake.

She took one of my little ones in her arms, and seemed, for a stranger, to fondle it with great affection. I soon noticed that she was in tears, and my sympathy was instantly enlisted for her. I saw she had trouble on her mind, and I tried to discover the cause of her sorrow. She told me that she had left two little children at home, and was pining to see them. I asked her why she had left them, and she told me that she had been “counselled” to leave a good husband, a good home, and two darling little ones, and go to “Zion.” She was perfectly wretched. She had nothing to complain of in her husband’s conduct towards her, only he did not believe in Mormonism, and would not allow her to attend the meetings of the Saints. She had come off stealthily with the assurance from “the servants of God” that she should have her children soon.

I told her that I did not believe she would ever see them again, nor did I think that she deserved to, unless she returned to her husband immediately and sought his forgiveness. She had been taught, she said, that it was necessary for her salvation that she should “gather with the
Saints to Salt Lake.” Her husband opposed her going, and as she had to leave unknown to him, she could not manage to get her children away.

I used every means in my power to get her to return, and tried to picture to her that once happy home now made desolate through her desertion; but she felt that her religion required her to make the sacrifice, believing as she had been taught, that if she “sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” all other things should be added unto her. She was, after all, very much to be pitied; for she was a victim to the teachings of the elders, and she firmly believed that whatever they told her was the revelation of heaven to her.

She left me, and I feared that she would still pursue her journey in despite of all that I had said to her; but in about two months from that time, I was one morning told that a lady wished to see me. I was agreeably surprised to find that it was the runaway mother. She told me that after our conversation she could not go to Salt Lake, but had remained in St. Louis, had written to her husband and had made every thing right with him, and she was now on her way back again to her home in England. She was very happy, and I rejoiced with her.

This circumstance is given to illustrate the power of the teachings of the elders. To all appearances it could not have been a love affair, for there was nothing in the look of the man that could captivate any woman. To be sure, there is no accounting for taste in matters of love, and she might have seen qualities in him that every one else had failed to perceive.

Another circumstance somewhat similar to this came directly under my personal notice. In this instance the lady, whom I knew, was married very happily. Her husband held a very lucrative position, but who was at times obliged to be absent from home for several months together, on one occasion found it necessary to leave his family for nearly a year. He went; but not wishing to be separated from his family for so long a time, he wrote to her, requesting that she would come out to him with her children, sending her at the same time funds necessary for that purpose. The brethren heard of this, and “counselled” her to go to “Zion” instead, telling her that if she did not go then she might not have another opportunity for a long time, as the country would be involved in war. She obeyed the “counsel,” and without replying to her husband, left for Utah, and crossed the plains with her four little children, and arrived in “Zion” almost dead with the trials and difficulties she had had to encounter, not having a protector, and being so entirely ignorant of the nature of the journey. Her husband, who was a very excellent man, followed her, some time subsequently; but of course he felt that he had been very badly treated, and it was with difficulty that he could be reconciled.

All the missionaries, before they leave Utah, are instructed to make no selections from the lambs of the flock; and though many of them have
no doubt honoured these instructions, many others have seemed to do little more than preach on Sundays, attend one or two meetings during the week, and devote the rest of their leisure to the “sisters”—taking them to theatres, public entertainments, and wherever they themselves were invited to visit.

If any family invited a Utah elder to dine with them on any given day, if he was at all familiar with them, he was almost certain to bring “a sister” with him. This was frequently a great annoyance; for instead of imparting instruction to the family, or entertaining them with information about “Zion,” his chair after dinner was almost certain to travel with that of the lady visitor to the neighbourhood of a window, or to a quiet corner, where they could entertain each other with soft nonsense.

The follies of such missionaries, (though they doubtless preserved themselves free from immorality,) their silly talk, childish amusements, nonsense, flirting, and extravagance with girls as silly as themselves, was a great stumbling-block to many a married woman at the introduction of the principles of Polygamy in England.

At the time of my sojourn in London, there was a feeling of great uncertainty among the Saints about every thing connected with domestic relations. Ignorant men preaching the doctrine of Polygamy to a public audience might be expected to talk a great deal of nonsense upon such a delicate subject, and that was bad enough; but when to this was added the fanatical feeling about the glory of “Zion,” and the destruction of the Gentile world within a few years, it was worse still. There was much anxiety and excitement among the Saints. It was one continued stream of prediction that the world was to be devastated by wars that would destroy the greater portion of the men, and thus bring about a fulfilment of the prophecy which says that “Seven women shall take hold of one man.” The women were to become so urgent in their importunities for marriage, that they would gladly promise to “eat their own bread and wear their own apparel;” and all they would ask would be the privilege of being called by some man’s name, to “take away their reproach.”

With such preaching, Sunday after Sunday, it is not to be wondered at that the Saints became bewildered, scarcely knowing what to do. One thing alone they knew: that they were to “flee to Zion,” and get all their marital relations settled in the “Endowment House,” so that every woman should have a husband who could “save her,” and every man have all the wives and children that he could gather round him, before the “great day of wrath, and the coming of the Lord.”

One of the most popular axioms of the elders at that time was, “It is better to be the mate of a ship of war than the captain of a schooner.” This was well understood by the sisters to mean that it was better to be one of the wives of a great man in “the kingdom,” than to be the only wife of a
little man. It was of no consequence how kind a husband might be to his
wife and family; if he was not also abounding with zeal, and full of talk in
the meetings, he was very little esteemed. Many a silly woman has been
carried away by such nonsense till she scarcely knew what she was doing
or wanted to do. She probably loved her husband, but mourned to think
that he could not take his stand among the favoured of the Lord. In the
course of time, her regrets would grow into discontent; and when some
raving, enthusiastic preacher came along, she was ready to form the con-
clusion that she ought to hasten to Zion; and thus, from one step to the
other, she was soon on her way to Utah, with her children, if she could, or
without them if she could do no better.

This was the period when Polygamy was introduced, and that was
the spirit of the times when I made my visit to London, preparatory to
going to “Zion.”

The following are one or two of about a dozen verses of Mormon
“poetry,” once extremely popular among the “Saints,” and which certainly
express very truly their sentiments at the time of which I speak:

“The time the prophet saw is on the wing,
When seven women to one man shall cling.

“Not for the lack of clothing or of bread,
But for a husband—a man—a head!
To obviate reproach and share his name,
As to be single then will be a shame;

“For war will strew its victims o’er the plain,
And maddened men rush heedless to be slain;
A man shall be more precious in the land
Than golden wedges from the Ophir strand.

“If you perchance among the worthies stand,
And seven women claim your saving hand,
Do not reject the six and save the one,
And boast of magnanimity when done.”

Doggerel, no better than this, and much of it a great deal worse,
might be heard in almost every meeting of the “Saints.”