Exposé of Polygamy

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Published by Utah State University Press

DeSimone, Linda and Fanny Stenhouse.
Exposé of Polygamy: A Lady's Life Among the Mormons.
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CHAPTER VII.

Mormon Life in London—"Counselled" to go to Salt Lake Valley—Sickness and Annoyances—Doubts and Fears—Faith waverings—Loneliness in the Great City—"The dear American Brethren"—Preparations for leaving England.

Mr. M., the Mormon President in London, was constantly in receipt of letters from Salt Lake during the time of our residence in his house; and I observed that he acted in a very mysterious manner with them. He would read them to my husband when he thought that they were alone, and conceal them when I came into the room. This made me resolve to see these letters, if possible. I mentioned this to Mrs. M., and she volunteered to get them for me. What I discovered I have no right to reveal now, just as I had then no right (although through the kindness of this lady they had been placed in my hands) to pry into them. Suffice it, however, to say that they set me thinking, and the more I thought the worse I felt. I was bewildered and wretched, losing confidence in myself and in every thing. In fact, I had not enough experience to rely upon my own judgment, and my husband was a slave to Mormonism; but from what I had read in those letters about the teachings in Utah, and from my observation of the conduct of the American brethren, I began to feel the greatest horror of going out to Salt Lake. I knew it was decided that we should go in the spring, and the thought made me very melancholy.

At this time—Christmas Day, 1854—my fourth child was born. When he was three weeks old, my second daughter was taken very ill. I mention these things for reasons which will soon be apparent to the reader.¹

I had now another—a real and tangible trouble added to the grief caused by my previous forebodings respecting the future, which I have already described. My child was very ill indeed. Her life was even despaired of, and in my then weak state I felt this additional trial all the more.

When the time arrived for us to prepare for emigration, it seemed to me impossible for us even to think of such a thing. The reader will understand this when I remind him that we had four little children—the youngest only a month old—and one dangerously ill. The Utah brethren
knew my state of mind, for I had talked with them very freely about the matter. It was therefore suspected that I was not willing to emigrate, and perhaps might even refuse to do so. This was an entire mistake; for I had not yet arrived at the feeling that I could reject Mormonism altogether and throw off my connexion with that faith. How often, afterwards, I wished it had been so!

Had I then been as devoted a Mormon as I was a few months previously, I know that I should have made a greater effort to go. But, although I still clung to that religion, my faith was already undermined; I was soulless and dispirited.

One day Mr. M. came home and said to me, “Mrs. Stenhouse, it has been decided to ‘counsel’ your husband to emigrate without you if you will not immediately get ready. I thought I would let you know this much, although it is not right for me to relate what takes place in council. But,” he continued, “I think it is villainous with this sick child on your hands and a young babe, to require you to do so. Yet, what can be done? Their plan is this: Your husband, if he finds you will not go, is to get ready and leave for Liverpool; and, as soon as he is gone, I shall be instructed to tell you that I need the rooms you now occupy, and that you must leave directly. You will be puzzled in the midst of your trouble to know what to do. Then some of the brethren will be at hand to send you after your husband, and you will be very glad to go; for you will have no choice, and will be ready to do anything to get out of your troubles.”

Oh! I can not tell how indignant I was when I heard this. I utterly loathed and detested every one of them; and I walked about the room so full of contending emotions that it was some time before I could utter a word. At last I was able to speak, and I said:— “Mr. M——, would you send me away?”

“If they ‘counsel’ me to do so,” he replied, “I shall have to do it.”

“Can you not, or have you not enough courage to oppose a thing you know to be wrong?” I enquired.

“If I did so,” said he, “I should get into trouble.”

He knew me too well to suppose that I should repeat what he said while it could harm him; nor would I now have written so much had he remained a Mormon.

“Now,” said I, “I shall tell them that I will not go in my present condition; nor will I! If my husband wishes to take their counsel and go, he may go alone; and they shall see that I will not follow him now or ever after.” I was greatly excited as I said this.

When Mr. S. returned home, I told him what had been said; but, as he agreed with me in believing that it was impossible for me to go with our sick child, that settled it for the present. The elders visited me and talked with me until I was nearly worried to death. They made Mr. M.
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give us notice to leave his apartments purely on that account; and I had
to move our sick child in cold, damp weather, just as she was getting bet-
ter. As might be expected, she caught cold and had a relapse, and we
despaired of her ever recovering.

I was now so worn out with care and anxiety and watching my sick
child that my health began to fail, and I grew weaker and weaker. My
little one was, however, now becoming better. She had been sick for more
than two months; and I myself alone had carefully tended her during all
that period, at the same time having the charge and nursing of my young
babe. All the help I had was the assistance of a girl, a mere child, only
twelve years of age.

My husband having frequently to preach at a distance, was now a
great deal from home, and I led a lonely life. I was, in fact, buried alive
in the vast wilderness of London; and nothing can be more desolate than
the feeling of loneliness in the midst of a great city. Left to my own melan-
choly thoughts about Polygamy and the reported teachings in Utah, my
confidence in the authorities of the church was most terribly shaken, and
I dreaded worse than death going to Salt Lake City. This so preyed upon
my mind that my health was fast failing, and I was unable to walk across
the room or hold my infant in my arms.

My physician told me that he did not know what was the matter with
me; and twice, when visiting me, he urged me to confide in him, that he
might be able to benefit me. He said that I had no disease, yet I was fail-
ning fast. I could not tell him of the sorrow that was eating my life away. I
never knew what he said to my husband; but, immediately after consulta-
tion, I was sent to the West End of London with a nurse, hoping by this
slight change to recruit my health, and a kind friend took charge of my
children. I did not care much what was done with me, for I fully believed
that I was going to die.

I had not been away more than a week when Mr. S. came to tell
me that he had been notifi ed that a ship would sail from Liverpool in
the course of two weeks from that time, and that it was expected that we
should sail in her.

I did not feel that this was possible; but the fact of Mr. S. speak-
ing to me about it, showed me that he particularly wished to go, and I
resolved to make the attempt. We ordered a carriage and I went to my
apartment, leaving my babe with the nurse. Mr. S., after taking me to the
house, left me, and I began to pack a trunk. Before I had been busy ten
minutes, I fainted; but how long I remained in that condition I cannot
tell. When Mr. S. returned and found that I was so very ill, he telegraphed
to Liverpool to say that I was not well enough to make the journey. A tele-
gram was returned:—“Bring her along, and she will get better.” But Mr. S.
had a little independence left, and we did not go.
The summer passed very drearily, as Mr. S. was away from home nearly all the time, lecturing in different places. My children were too young to be companions, and the Mormons rather shunned me, because of my weakness in the faith. The young sisters did not like to hear me talk about those “dear American Brethren,” and therefore they stayed away. I had, however, a few particular friends, and I felt that that was sufficient. And yet it was my husband’s society that I yearned for, and this fearful Mormonism always deprived me of that. I could not, therefore, feel happy; for when he was away from me, I was always imagining some dreadful thing, which afterwards proved to have had no foundation in truth. I was doubtful of every thing now. This was the beautiful result of my religion!

I fear that by this time the reader may begin to think that I must be of a very unhappy temperament. But this is not exactly the truth. Until the time when the horrors of apprehension respecting the doctrine of Polygamy began to weigh upon my mind, I had always been looked upon as a cheerful, lighthearted, and hopeful girl. But there was a canker-worm gnawing continually at my heart now. Hope had died out. I felt that I was doomed for time and for eternity, and sometimes it seemed to me impossible that I should pray to a God who could make such unjust laws. How could I teach my little ones to love Him?

How different to me were these ideas of God and of His truth, from the feelings and sentiments which were mine when a girl! Then I could look around upon the beauties of nature and see the hand of God in every thing, while my soul would be filled with joy and gladness; my only anxiety being to know what I should do to become acceptable in His sight. But now I saw no beauty in any thing. Nothing had power to divert me from my sad thoughts.

Mormonism to me at that time was a melancholy fact.
“Labouring” with a Rebellious Wife.