Exposé of Polygamy
DeSimone, Linda, Stenhouse, Fanny

Published by Utah State University Press

DeSimone, Linda and Fanny Stenhouse.
Exposé of Polygamy: A Lady's Life Among the Mormons.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/12760.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/12760

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=381596
CHAPTER VIII.


About the middle of November, 1855, we sailed from Liverpool, with several hundred Mormons, for New York, where we landed on the last day of the year.¹

Before we left England, Mr. Stenhouse concluded that ten years’ constant missionary service, without fee or reward, and living in the dependent condition that I have related, was all that the church had any right to expect of him, especially as his family was growing up, and would soon demand more than daily bread. It was his purpose to seek in the New World any occupation for which he might be fitted.

He regretted that the vessel we were to sail in was to land us at New York; but in emigration, as in every thing else in Mormonism, the priesthood dictate; and to have sailed in any other vessel would have been evidence of want of faith and a good spirit. He would have preferred almost any other seaport, as he wished to avoid the Mormon newspaper office; for he had an idea that he might possibly be called to associate himself with it in some way, and that again would be a renewal of missionary life. The very thing he dreaded came upon him.

Our residence in New York, while Mr. S. was associate editor of the Mormon, was characterized by extreme poverty. But, with all the luxuries in the world around me, my spectre—Polygamy—would have spoiled them all.

There were four brethren from Utah at that time in New York—an “Apostle,” two “High-Priests,” and a “Seventy.” The last was much like myself in faith; and, on his return to Utah, he settled up his affairs, and, with his family, left the country. The High-Priests picked up each a young lady, to whom they were married after they returned to the mountains; but the Apostle was favoured with a special dispensation from Brigham Young, and took his sixth wife—a very amiable young lady, then living in
Connecticut. They occupied a pleasant house in East-Brooklyn, and had all the comforts and endearments of home while on mission.

The “Apostle” was well used to the polygamic business, and suffered no inconvenience on returning home with his youngest bride; but the High-Priests realized the truth of the adage, that the course of true love does not always run smooth. The first wife of one of them kept him at a respectful distance from her “bed and board,” and the first wife of the other kept her younger rival at an equally respectful distance from herself. The first “High Priest” has “gone to heaven,” and the second High Priest had, in course of time, to give a bill of divorce to his young wife. They were all three good girls, and accepted their copartnership in matrimony as purely for the sake of their faith as ever women could do. What happiness they have had in it they best know; but the young widow seems the most contented of the three.2

The difficulty in Utah in 1857 brought the Mormon to a close, and, with its expiration, my poverty vanished. Mr. S. was now at liberty to do as he pleased, and his pen found ready remuneration on the staff of the New-York Herald.

The settlement of the “Utah Difficulty” in 1858 threatened another change in our life. Mr. S. was appointed by Brigham Young to preside over the Saints in the Eastern States; but he had got a taste of freedom, and he never afterwards was wholly engaged in the propagation of Mormonism.

In the following year, Elder George Q. Cannon, now the prominent Apostle in Utah, was appointed to succeed Mr. Stenhouse; and, at the end of the emigration season of that year, we were permitted to go to “Zion.”

Our journey across the plains occupied three months, and we experienced the same vicissitudes of travel as other emigrants who have already told their tale.3

It was the month of September—the commencement of our beautiful Indian summer—when we emerged from the cañon and caught sight of Salt Lake City. Everything looked green and lovely; and, in spite of all the sad forebodings which troubled me in crossing the plains, I involuntarily exclaimed, “Ah! what a glorious spot!” It looked like a beautiful garden—another Eden—in the midst of a desert valley. We had a glimpse of the Great Salt Lake, far away in the distance, stretching out like a placid sheet of molten silver, while everywhere were the lofty and lonely-looking snow-capped mountains, which entirely encircled us, like mighty prison walls.

It would be impossible for me to describe my feelings at that time. Even while I was enchanted with the glorious prospect before me, there arose again in my mind that haunting spectre of my existence—Polygamy! I remembered that this little earthly paradise would probably be to me a prison-house; and with a mother’s instinct, I dreaded what my daughters
might be destined to suffer there. Lovely as the scene was, there was yet a fatal shadow overhanging it all.

If the sad forebodings of my heart were realized, I could see no prospect of ever getting away. As to having a railroad across those plains—that seemed to me utterly impossible. Even if I had ever thought for a moment that such a work could be carried out, I never should have believed that it could be accomplished in my own lifetime. No! there was no help for me—even if it came to the worst.

I felt that my doom was sealed; and many another woman in the company was troubled at heart with thoughts as sad as mine.

What living contradictions we were!—singing the songs of Zion night and morning in a circle, and listening to prayers of thankfulness for being permitted to gather out of Babylon; and during the day, as we trudged along over the plains, in twos and threes, we were expressing to each other the bitterness of our thoughts. How little, sometimes, do the songs of gladness reflect the sentiments of the heart! Have I not heard many a woman sing, to the tune of the “Bonnie Breast-knots,” the sweet though untruthful song, “Hey, the merry Mormons!”

“I never knew what joy was
Till I became a Mormon!”

My edition of the song was slightly changed. I substituted sorrow for “joy,” and then the words seemed more applicable to my own case.

We were kindly received in Salt Lake City. Having been missionaries for so many years, we were known by name; and we also had a wide circle of personal acquaintances among the chief Elders and emigrants. It was now that the fearful Polygamy, which I so much dreaded, was to be brought before my eyes in practice.

Almost all the elders with whom I had formerly become acquainted had more than one wife. Some of these brethren called on me, and kindly insisted that I should visit their families, which I, in many instances, refused, for fear that what I might see would make me feel worse, and that was not at all necessary.

Shortly after our arrival, we visited President Young, who received us very graciously, and appointed an early day after that for us to dine with him. On that occasion, he invited some of the apostles and leading elders, with their families, to meet us at his table; and we passed an exceedingly pleasant afternoon and evening, Brigham making himself very affable. His wives, I found, were all, as far as I could judge, amiable and kind-hearted ladies, making every effort to render our visit agreeable. I was much pleased with the manner and appearance of Brigham Young, and felt greatly reassured; and I began to hope that there was no truth in the reports which I had heard of him while in London. I was
thankful to feel this, for it gave me encouragement to think that, after all, things might not be so bad as I had anticipated. Brigham to-day does not seem the same man! I have no doubt that if he were to deign to read this little work, he would say, "It is Sister Stenhouse who has changed, not me." I would give much to believe that some of the facts of Utah history were but an idle dream!

During that visit, Brigham hinted to Mr. S. something about another mission; and when we got home, Mr. S. asked me how I should feel if he were sent away again. After all that we had gone through for Mormonism, I thought that this would be exacting too much; but Mr. S. was ready, and really began to plan how he could secure bread for us during his absence—the butter I should have had to provide myself, or go without; but he soon became very useful with his pen, and, therefore, was not sent away.