Exposé of Polygamy
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CHAPTER IX.


I was now in the chief city of “Zion”—the dwelling-place of the Prophet and the principal Saints, which every good Mormon longed so earnestly to see. I had suffered very much, as I anticipated the time when we should arrive in Utah, and my fears of the future had long banished all peace from my mind. Now I had an opportunity of learning whether the evils which I dreaded really existed, or whether I had too credulously listened to scandalous reports, and the promptings of my own womanly apprehensions.

I had the daily and hourly cares of a young and dependent family devolving upon me, and, of course, had not much leisure for anything else. At the same time I had abundant opportunities of observation, and thus my experience of Mormonism and Polygamy in Utah is much the same as that which any woman of ordinary sense could tell, if she had the inclination and opportunity.

When Polygamy was first taught in Europe and in the United States, great stress was laid upon the assertion that in no case would any man be allowed to take a second or third wife without (as they wished it to be supposed) the entire consent and approval of the first. This statement, though false and deceptive, naturally silenced the fears of many women who would otherwise have opposed the doctrine; for they were deceived into thinking that, as their husbands could not take another wife without first consulting them and obtaining their permission to do so, it would always be in their power to refuse; and thus they supposed they would not themselves be practically affected by Polygamy until their own faith prompted them to consent. I need not say how greatly they were deceived. The elders have been often accused of deception in thus explaining away the doctrine to the women. But it seems to me that, although they were not right in doing so, it is very probable that they were influenced by good
and kind motives. The fact is, many of the elders were much better men than their religion taught them to be; and when the “revelations” which they had to teach were harsh or unjust, they would try to adapt them to the weakness of their hearers, and put them in as pleasant a way as possible. Such was the case when the revelation on Polygamy was introduced.

The theory of plural marriages in Utah is this:

When a Mormon husband desires to take another wife, the prescribed formula requires (1) that the Lord give a revelation to Brigham Young that He approves of the proposed extension of the man’s family; next, (2) that the would-be patriarch obtain the “consent” of the first wife to take another; then (3) he is to obtain the consent of the parents or guardians of the selected damsel, so that he can address her in loving terms respecting his devotion to God, His kingdom, and herself personally; and (4) he must secure the acquiescence of the damsel. Should “the Lord”* veto the proposition, the suit is ended. Should “the Lord” approve and the wife disapprove, no further advance can be made. Should the parents withhold consent, “the Lord” and the wife are held in check. Finally, if they are all agreed and the maiden objects, then the approval of all the other consenting parties is set aside. That is the theory.

But there is no truth in all these statements—not a particle. Without the consent and approval of Brigham Young, no patriarchal marriage can be consummated; with his approval, that of the wife, the parents, and the girl herself can all be dispensed with.

Cases are not few to sustain these assertions. Many a maiden has been married without the consent of her parents; and others have “obeyed counsel,” when they had no heart in the matter—then or ever after.

The “Revelation on Polygamy” was written by the scribe of Joseph Smith, from the prophet’s dictation, after he had already taken other “wives.” It is worded so as to have at one moment the appearance of a fair and proper understanding between the husband and wife whenever the former entertained the idea of taking to himself another bride; and yet, when viewed in another light, it has quite an opposite sense, and tries to terrify the first wife, if disobedient, with threats of the wrath of God.¹

When a woman’s “consent” is asked, she knows very well that she will have to give it—if she is not prepared to live in open warfare with her husband. She knows, too, that he will take that other wife independently of her, and she is powerless to prevent it. She may as well consent.

* On one occasion, when a Mormon gentleman from Liverpool was expressing to one of the Apostles his dissatisfaction about something, he remarked, “Surely the Lord would not sanction this!” Whereupon the Apostle, touching him on the arm, pointed to the White House, where Brigham Young resided, and emphatically remarked, “Your ‘Lord’ resides up there!”
But some brave women have never given their consent, and have never allowed the second wife to enter their homes. Some refined ladies, with excellent families, have had the happiest of homes destroyed by withholding their consent; and where peace and warm affection were proverbial, the bitterest strife ensued.

The men who have acted in this way are not the gross and ignorant brethren, but more often the particularly “pious” men, who make long prayers in their families, who preach in the ward meetings, and in the Tabernacle; men of smooth words, with the name of the Lord always upon their lips. These are the men who have mercilessly wrung the hearts of the wives of Utah. What to such men are a wife’s tears and sorrows? Nothing.

If the wife shows “temper,” it makes it only worse. He wants peace, so he says; and if he can not find it there, it furnishes him with the better excuse for going back again to his younger wife—just where he wants to go!

Aiding and abetting these brethren, and encouraging them in multiplying their wives, there is a class of good-meaning sisters who are always dabbling in other people’s affairs, and making love-matches. These go round from one unhappy victim to another, and talk to the poor, broken-hearted women, to soothe and comfort them; and before they go away they give them the very pleasing assurance that woman was cursed in the Garden of Eden, and that

“We’ve all got the cross for to bear.”*

They are “laboured with” in the interest of the husband till they are, in most cases, entirely subdued.

If a woman gets “broken in,” or “tamed,” the husband rejoices, and the “sisters” “join in prayer,” relating in the subjugated woman’s ears all the blessings of “obedience,” the great glory that awaiteth all who live in the holy order of “celestial marriage.” When their work is complete, it is fortunate for all parties; but a dose of that kind generally only lasts till the first wife gets a glimpse again of the second wife, or hears about her and her husband going together to the theatre or to the dance. Then “the devil,” who was only scotched, is “raised” again; and before he can

* The following is from the New-York World, November 14th, 1871:—
Reporter—What is really the position of the women on the question of Polygamy?
Mr. Perris—They are generally subject to what may be called a forced lead, by the older women—those who are childless, and the others who seem to be entirely without maternal instincts. These go about among the mass of better women, talk to them, impress upon them the practice as a religious duty, even necessary to their salvation; get them to sign papers in its favour; and, if they hesitate, threaten to expose them as having become dangerously weak in the faith. That is the way an appearance of unanimity in favour of Polygamy is maintained.
be finally “laid,” the whole affair has to be repeated from the beginning, and in many cases the experiment has to be tried again and again before the desired results are produced, and not infrequently this labour of love is a total failure, when a bitterness ensues which is unknown outside of polygamic households.

When kindness fails to “soften down” the rebellious wife, then wrath is poured into her ears, and she learns from the revelation that “If any man have a wife who hold the keys of this power, and he teaches her the law of my priesthood, as pertaining to these things, then she shall believe, and administer unto him, or she shall be destroyed, saith the Lord your God, for I will destroy her.”

This is a beautiful position for any loving wife to be placed in! Her husband is to teach her Polygamy, and she must believe; for it is distinctly said, “She shall believe.” But should she lack evidence of the truth of the revelation, and can not believe in its divinity, then “She shall be destroyed,” and the Lord, like a kind and loving father, adds, “I will destroy her.” What language to place in the mouth of a kind and loving God and Father! How opposite is this to the teachings of Jesus Christ! But it is in keeping with the other teachings of the Mormon Church. Mormonism taught me to look upon the great Ruler of the Universe as a “God of vengeance,” while every thing in nature has taught me that He is a “God of love.”

So repugnant has this teaching of the Lord’s vengeance been to the women in Utah, who oppose Polygamy, that many of them have the utmost disgust for religion, and care as little about “the Lord” as they do about their husbands.

How little do the Mormon men of Utah know what it is, in the truest sense, to have a wife, though they have so many “wives,” after their own fashion. Almost imperceptibly to the husband, and even to the wife herself, a barrier rises between them from the very day that he marries another woman. It matters not how much she believes in the doctrine of plural marriages, or how willing she may be to submit to it; the fact remains the same. The estrangement begins by her trying to hide from him all her secret sorrow; for she feels that what has been done can not be undone now, and she says, “I can not change it; neither would I if I could, because it is the will of God, and I must bear it; besides, what good will it do to worry my husband with all my feelings? He can not help me, and is he not another woman’s husband?”

Then comes the painful feeling, “I have no longer any desire to confide in him.”

Perhaps, too, she may detect some familiarity between her husband and the other wife. Then she would feel full of anger and bitterness toward them both, and, strive as she may, human nature would prevail.
His presence becomes irksome to her; even his touch would make her shudder. And yet she might hide all this; but with what anguish of soul! She might keep up a calm exterior, and when spoken to about plural marriages, might lead persons to believe that all was pleasant; and even her own husband might think that his wife had become “used to it.” Don’t you believe it, men of Utah! Your wives never get “used to it” until they have, in a great measure, or perhaps entirely, lost their love for you.

When this little book falls into the hands of some of the women of Utah, they will, I know, acknowledge in their hearts, if not in words, how true my statements are. A man may have a dozen wives; but from the whole of them combined he will not receive as much real love and devotion as he might from one alone, if he had made her feel that she had his undivided affection and confidence. How terribly these men deceive themselves! When peace, or rather quiet, reigns in their homes, they think that the spirit of God is there. But it is not so! It is a calm, not like the gentle silence of sleep, but as the horrible stillness of death—the death of the heart’s best affections, and all that is worth calling love. All true love has fled, and indifference has taken its place. The very children feel it. What do they—what can they care about their fathers? They seldom see them. I am writing now of polygamists in general. Of course there are exceptions to this rule.

When a man has more than one wife, his affections must certainly be divided; and he really has no particular home, for his homes are simply boarding-houses. Should he have all his wives in one house, as is often the case, then they are all slaves; for they know that each one is watching the others, and in many instances trying to discover something that they can secretly tell their husband, to draw away his affections from the rest, and secure them to themselves.

There are again other women, frequently the first and second wives, who become friendly to each other. When this is the case, they care very little for the husband. They set their faces against the third, and the others who come after. The poor girl is to be pitied, and the husband too, who ventures to bring her home; for the two friendly wives are sure to lead her and him a terrible life. The man who enters this most delightful order of marriage ought not to allow his wives to become too intimate, for they will certainly plot mischief, and destroy his power and peace. The more they hate each other, the more secure he is.

But what a state of mind is this for mothers to be in! And if children partake of the nature and feelings of their mothers, what kind of dispositions can these poor children inherit, whose mothers have been the victims of these strong and fearful emotions? Oh! it is a cruel wrong to womankind; it is a terrible wrong to innocent children! It is a most wicked wrong, in every sense of the word!
Mother and Daughter Wives to the same Husband.