Exposé of Polygamy
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CHAPTER XI.

Illustrations of practical Polygamy—A “Sister” in deep Affliction—A Husband’s Cruelty—A sad End—Various and fearful Results of Polygamy—Broken Hearts and Lunacy—Men “spark-ing” in the Ball-Room—Women sitting as “Wall-flowers”—Painful Memories—Introduced to five Wives—“Are these all you have got?”—Matrimonial Felicities.

Soon after my arrival in Salt Lake City, I visited a family where there were five wives, three of whom I met on my first visit. They were all three intelligent women; but it pained me very much to see the sorrow depicted on the face of the first wife. She appeared to me to be suffering intensely while I was there; for the last wife, who seemed to be a thoughtless, lively girl, was jesting with her husband, toying with his hair, and fussing with him in general, in a manner which I felt at the time was quite out of place, even had she been his only wife. Under the circumstances, it was to me terribly offensive; and I felt that, if I had been the first wife, I should have annihilated her, could I have done so.

My sympathies then were all with the first wife. In fact, they have been always so, to a very great extent. But I also feel deeply for young girls, who contract such marriages from a sincere conviction that they are doing what is right, and what will be most pleasing in the sight of God. Then there are women who ignore religion, and every thing else, in the matter; all they think about is getting the man they want. These women are devoid of principle, and invariably cause trouble.

My whole soul was drawn out toward the lady whom I have just mentioned, when I saw how deeply she was suffering. I felt as if I wanted to throw my arms around her and speak words of comfort, if one in misery could console another; and I resolved to become better acquainted with her. I did so, and we became very friendly. She told me of her sorrows. She thought it was very wicked of her to feel as she did, but she could not help it; and she told me that when she saw her husband so happy with the other wives, it was then that she felt most miserable, and could not hide her feelings from him. At those times, he would “sulk” with her, coming in and out of the house for days together without noticing her, and
showing more than ever his fondness for the other one. She said, “I bear it as long as I can, and then I beg of him not to treat me so, as I can not live without his love.”

I asked her how she could continue to love him when he treated her so?

“O Mrs. Stenhouse!” she said, “when he treats me at all kindly, I am satisfied. When he smiles on me, I am only too happy. When I cease to love him, then I must be dead; and even then,” she added, “I think I should love him still!”

I felt all this very much; and, after a few words of sympathy to the neglected wife, I left her. But what I had heard made a great impression on my mind. “Thank God,” I said, my husband will never act like this!” In fact, I did not at that time believe that he would even wish to take another wife; but I was soon to be undeceived. I saw this lady many times after the occasion which I have mentioned, and I became very much attached to her. She was a very sweet, intelligent little woman; and she would often say to me, “I think I should like to die when my babe is born; for I feel that they could do without me, and I am only a trouble to them here. I am always sick, because I am always unhappy.”

I tried to rally her out of these sad feelings, but my efforts availed but little. I was myself sick a few weeks after; and, when I recovered, I heard that she was dead, and her babe also. I said, “Thank God, she is now at rest!”

This is only one sad story out of many equally as sad.

Some wives have gone crazy, and died in this condition, all through their sad experience in Polygamy. Not long since, the fifth or sixth wife of one of the leading men of Salt Lake City died bereft of reason. Her husband was about marrying a young girl at the same time, and refused to go and see his dying wife. That man’s name would astonish my readers, did I publish it, for he is universally respected as one of the best men in Mormonism; and I can only account for his inhumanity by considering the poverty and debasement into which Polygamy had plunged him.¹

Several cases of lunacy have come under my own personal notice; and two young women, of very respectable families, with whom I am acquainted, narrowly escaped from the effects of poison, which, in their misery, they had taken as a last resource. I have heard of many more cases of desperate attempts at suicide.

To say that there are no men who try to be just in the practice of Polygamy would be very wrong, for there are men in Utah who try their best to act rightly to all their wives. These men are generally those who care very little about religion; and I have often said of them, (of one in particular,) if they are good with Mormonism, how much better would
they be without it. It is my firm belief that Mormonism has perverted some of the best of natures.

On the other hand, I have known men who were reputed good husbands and fathers before they went to Utah, and, after they had been there a few years, they did not seem like the same beings. They became harsh and cold in their natures, and so cruel to their wives and neglectful of their children, that it seemed as if they thought of nothing but getting wives and pleasing themselves, regardless of whether they could support their families or not. These were generally the most religious men.

We had not been long in Salt Lake City before the ball season commenced. These balls afford splendid opportunities to the men for flirting with the girls. No matter how old and homely a man is, he thinks that he has as much right to flirt and dance with the girls as the youngest boy; for they all look upon themselves and each other as boys and single men, even if they have a dozen wives. There is no limit to their “privileges.” They are always in the market. Brigham, in his public discourses, has said that the brethren “are all young men under a hundred years of age.” With such an extended privilege, it is here in Utah that hoary Winter and smiling May can be seen galloping forth in the dance together. A thoughtful subject for the artist’s pencil.

It is of no consequence how much a man may flirt in the presence of his wife or wives. They must not presume to say one word to him about it; for the husband is free to do whatever he likes. He is one of the lords of creation. He is master of his wives, of his children. Then, how can one of his own dare to call in question any thing he may think fit to do? She may, it is true, do so; but she must take the consequences of that rash act.

Oh! how I loathe even the very remembrance of those hateful ballrooms, where I have seen so many unhappy wives, and have heard so many tales of sorrow. For, while the wives would be sitting as “wall-flowers,” along the sides of the hall, after having danced the first dance with their husbands, as a matter of form, I have heard them many times telling each other about what they had seen their husbands doing during the evening; and how they had been compelled to pay attention to some jabbering little girl that their husbands chanced to fancy; and they had to do it also for peace’ sake, and appear to be satisfied.

I do not mean to say that I did not like these social amusements myself, for I did; and could, under other circumstances, have enjoyed them very much. But I had been told so many things of the unpleasantnesses of a ball-room in Salt Lake City—at least, to married women—that my apprehensions were aroused. But all that was ever told me never half came up to the truth; nor can I possibly myself give the reader any correct idea of the heart-aches and sorrows which these scenes bring to the wives of Mormons.
It is quite a common thing for married men to go with young girls to these balls. The majority of the men, however, prefer to take their first wives with them at the same time; but it is not infrequent to hear a lady say, in the ball-room, “My husband has brought his girl here to-night; but I have not spoken one word to her, nor will I do so.” Yet if any one were to ask these same ladies if they believed that Polygamy was right, they would say, “Certainly, I do; but I do not like her,”—and this simply because their husbands had paid her attentions. This seems like inconsistency; but it serves to show what conflicting feelings Mormon women have to contend with.

The men should hear what their wives say about them in the ball-rooms, and the hatred they feel for them. I have seen some women sitting quietly eyeing their husbands, as they danced or flirted with their younger loves, till their cup of indignation was full. Then they would make for the dressing-rooms, where their anger would burst upon the ears of a group of eager listeners, who were seemingly pleased to learn that some one else was suffering as well as themselves. A half-repressed threat, “I will be equal with him,” has escaped the lips of those who, before that, had passed for being happily situated.

Where new matrimonial alliances are continually taking place, the arrival of a gentleman, with his wife, wives, or a maiden, in the ball-room, is never remarked; and, not infrequently, different wives arrive at different hours during the evening, as it suits their convenience; and thus it would be difficult to say who came with their “lord.” Besides, no observation is made if a lady thus enters the ball-room alone, though it is expected that her husband is aware of her coming. This coming alone, however, is not a common habit; but, as it is admissible, it does occasionally happen that a husband is dancing or enjoying himself in the ball-room with his last fiancée, when a vigilant pair of eyes searches over the room and lights upon the happy “lord.” When eyes like these encounter the eyes they seek, a change is seen, and the youthful airiness of the gentleman vanishes, and sober looks follow the gaiety of the earlier hour.

It is a very difficult thing for a woman, after passing through such scenes over and over again, and knowing them to be true, to have much respect left for the Mormon men who practice Polygamy. Though they consider themselves to be benefactors, they act like oppressors of woman-kind. I am not alone in this opinion. I know scores of ladies in Utah, both married and single, who feel and speak exactly as I do on this subject.

I met President Heber C. Kimball at one of these balls, soon after my arrival. He said that he would introduce me to his wife. Every one liked Heber for his outspoken, honest bluntness. He took me up the hall and introduced me to five wives in succession! “Now,” said he, “I think I’ll quit; for I fancy you are not over strong in the faith.”
I asked, “Are these all you have got?”

“O dear! no,” he said; “I have a few more at home, and about fifty more scattered over the earth somewhere. I have never seen them since they were sealed to me in Nauvoo, and I hope I never shall again.”

I thought this was terrible; but it was only the beginning of worse things.

After this winter, I had very little peace; for the women were constantly talking to me about my husband getting another wife. He held out, however, for five years, but at last he “felt it was his duty to do so,” and I was silly enough to allow that “he was not living up to his religion” unless he took an extra wife.

I shall never forget those ball-room scenes. Even to this day, when I chance to listen to tunes which I used to hear played in those times, they grate so terribly upon my ear, and bring back so many sad recollections, that I want to get away from the sound of them as quickly as possible, for they are more than I can endure. Bygone recollections are often recalled by trifles such as this.

A few months ago, I attended a ball in Salt Lake City. It was the first I had been to since I withdrew from the church; and of course it was got up by the “Liberal Party.” I felt free and happy, for there was nothing to annoy or disturb me. Suddenly the band struck up a tune which I had heard while attending the Mormon balls. It sounded like the death knell of all my pleasant feelings, and aroused memories of the past which were so intensely painful that I could not rally from the depression that I felt for the rest of the evening. I had heard that tune before, and many like it, and had even danced to it, while my heart was breaking. Can it excite wonder that I should feel thus? I knew too much of those assemblies, which to some are heaven, to others purgatory!

Let me ask my lady readers—those, I mean, who have never been in Utah—Ladies, how do you think you would feel if you were kept waiting long after the hour of midnight, far away into the morning, until your husbands had got through with their dancing and flirting, while your own hearts were breaking? I think I hear you say, “I would not stand it.” You do not know, I assure you, what you would do under the circumstances. What can you know—you, American women, who are petted and indulged to such an extent that you do not really know what sorrow is? How can you possibly judge what the feelings of a Mormon woman are, who has been taught to believe that “her desire shall be unto her husband, and he shall rule over her.”

This is no imaginary “rule,” but a stern fact. Woman in Utah is only a chattel!