Exposé of Polygamy
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CHAPTER XII.

Going to the “Endowment House”—Wives cruel to other Wives—The Story of a young second Wife—How she came to Marry—How she was treated—Her Husband’s neglect—Cruelty of the first Wife—Goes to the “Bishop”—How young Girls in Polygamy value the Attentions of their Husbands—The Ways of Mormon Men.

One day my husband came home, apparently very much pleased about something, and said to me, “What do you think?—we have the privilege of receiving our ‘Endowments’* next Saturday.” This, he added, was really a great favor, as many had been there a much longer time and had not received them. I made no answer, and finally he asked—“Are you not pleased with the invitation?”

I answered—“No, I do not want to have my Endowments.”

“And why not?” he enquired.

“Because,” I said, “I have heard so much about it, that I have not only no desire, but I have a great repugnance to ‘going through the Endowments.’”

This surprised him. We had, as might be expected, a little very pleasant (?) conversation on the subject; and finally Mr. S., dissatisfied with my opposition, left the house. When he returned, he told me that it was not absolutely needful for us to go on the ensuing Saturday, but we could go on the Saturday following, and that would give me time to think of it. In my own mind I said—I shall not go at all! But, after quietly reflecting about the matter, I saw that my husband was willing to concede somewhat, and it only seemed fair that I should do as much; particularly as I knew that when he was told to go there, he was obliged to do so. For if he had said that he could not go to receive the Endowments because wife did not wish to, he would have made himself an object of ridicule. He would probably have been “counseled” to take another wife and go through the Endowments with her, (as he could not go alone,) and I should have been baffled and humiliated. I, therefore, thought it was best for me to submit; but I did not do so by any means with a good feeling. I simply “stooped to conquer.”

* Secret rites of the Priesthood.
I went through that “Endowment House” with the very worst feelings that any woman could have, and scarcely noticed what was passing around me. In justice to the Mormons, I feel bound to state that the accounts which I have frequently read, professing to give a description of the “Endowments” given in Salt Lake City, are almost altogether exaggerated, and have generally been written either by the enemies of the Saints, or by those who knew nothing at all about the matter. I myself saw nothing indecent; though I had been led to believe that improper things did take place there, and I was determined not to submit to any thing of the kind.

When we had got through, I thought—“If there is really any good in these ceremonies, or any blessing to be derived from them, I certainly shall never get it.” It did not, however, trouble me very much; for I was beginning in real earnest to feel tired of serving “the Lord” after the fashion taught by the Mormon elders, and that I should have to give up the whole religion. It was a one-sided affair altogether, and it was rarely that I could get so much as a good feeling to help me along.1

There was scarcely a day passed without something unpleasant, or something calculated to shake my faith, occurring before my eyes. Either some woman was suffering from neglect, while her husband was living with a young wife and spending all his time and money with her; or some young girl was abused and persecuted by the first wife; or it might be that there was nothing but quarrelling, hatred, and complaints among them all. Then I would ask myself—“Where is the Spirit of God in all this? Surely this is none of His work!” The injustice and cruelty of men to their wives, the hardness of women towards each other, and the dejected, timid, cringing women who were afraid to call their lives their own, were sights so painful to behold that I could scarcely continue to believe that the Lord had any thing to do with the Mormon faith.

These are things that I have seen, and that I know to be true. Were I at liberty to do so, and were it not a betrayal of confidence, I could give the names of women in Salt Lake City who are now residing there, and who have suffered and are suffering this oppression as much now as then.

I could tell the reader tales of such cruelty in the case of one woman towards another—wives of the same man—that he would hardly believe it could be true, and I should be ashamed to relate the story. I will, however, give one short account which will perhaps afford an insight into the whole system, when illustrated by bad men.

I knew a young woman who was a second wife, and she had two children. She came to me one day in great distress, and asked me if I would allow her to come and work for me. I saw she was in trouble; and, as I had seen her several times before, and knew that she was a second wife to a
man who lived only a short distance from us, I asked her to tell me what her trouble was. At first she hesitated, and then she told me that she had nothing to eat and nothing for her little ones. I was surprised at this, for I knew that her husband was in good circumstances; and I asked her where he was. She said, “He is away just now, but it makes no difference when he is at home; it is all the same. I live,” she added, “in the garret, and the wind blows through the roof, and it is so cold that we are nearly frozen; and, when I have asked for a stove, he has told me to go and earn one. I can cook at their kitchen stove; but, if I stay there too long, his first wife and children do not like it. I have not been out to work since I have been confined.” Her babe was then only one month old.

Presently she continued—“I am out of every thing, and the other wife says that she won’t give me any thing; that I must go and work for it.”

“But,” I said, “you can not work yet; you are not strong enough.”

“Oh! yes, I can,” said she. “My husband made me work in the yard when I had only been confined two weeks.”

Reader, would you believe that this man (if I may call such a creature a “man”) was an American? Now, I have always thought that the American husbands spoiled their wives; but I do not think this man was guilty of doing so.

The poor girl told me that during her confinement she had been left alone in that garret. They would bring her, once a day, something to eat of whatever chanced to be at hand, but she had no light or warmth, and she added—“I have neither food nor proper clothing for my children, and I must go to work; I must try to get a place to live in, as my husband will not give me one.”

I told her that she might come and work for me, and she had to bring her two little children with her. How I pitied her! She was a really good-looking Danish girl; and, before she had married this man, she had worked in his family as a servant, and had helped in the field. I believe that he married her only to retain her services; for she said that both he and his wife ill-treated her because she would not work in the field all the time.

Another case I think I may mention as confirmatory of what I have stated. It is that of a young woman who was a sempstress. The first wife had induced her to marry her husband; and, as soon as they were married, she (the first wife) discovered that she could not endure Polygamy. Then began a series of persecutions. She managed to make her do all the sewing for the family, which consisted of boys; and, when that was done, she insisted on her going out to work by the day, and giving her the money that she earned; saying that she knew best how to spend it. This poor silly girl did as she was told; all the home that was allotted to her being a miserable little room scarcely furnished.
She worked as long as she could, trudging through all kinds of weather to go to her every-day labor, until the very day that her first child was born. The first three days after the birth of her child, the first wife procured some help for her; but after that she would just open the door and put in something for her to eat, on a tin-plate. This she did, not because she had no other plates, but because she wanted to show her contempt for the young mother; and if her husband went into the room for ten minutes to see her, there would be a tremendous fuss. As soon as she was able, she was made to go to work again. This was a house where the first wife ruled.

The poor creature (the second wife) went to the Bishop, and asked what she should do. He told her to bear it, and “the Lord” would make it all right some day. “The Lord,” however, failed to do so. After she had borne her weary trials for four years, and after a long illness, in which she was shamefully neglected, she concluded very wisely that she would endure it no longer, and she left them. It is hardly possible to believe what the poor girl suffered in that illness. Weak and sick as she was, she had to get out of bed and crawl to the fire-place, (for she was far too weak to walk,) and then prepare a fire as well as she could, in order to make herself a little tea, or any thing she might require. This was when her second child was born. But this is nothing, compared with what I might write. I pass over such very painful details. This is the kind of treatment that one woman will sometimes give to another under Polygamy; and it is those women who, from religious zeal, are most anxious to “get wives for their husbands,” who thus misconduct themselves, when their religion is put into practice. Thank God that such women are comparatively few!

There is another class of men in Polygamy who are deserving of notice. These are honest, good men, untiring in their efforts to make their wives comfortable and happy—were that possible. If they could provide a palace for each wife, they would do so. Such men, it may well be said, are slaves to their families; but, with their best efforts, they can not chase away from their homes this skeleton—Polygamy.

With their several wives these men try to be scrupulously just, never showing partiality in look, word, or deed. I know quite a number of such.

But a short time since I met with one of them while spending the evening with some of my friends. His fourth wife—a young lady—was present with him. He was very attentive and kind to her; and, had she been his only wife, he could not have been more so. My attention was attracted by her manner towards him. A stranger would probably never have noticed what I then observed. There was a certain sarcastic bitterness of tone while accepting his attentions, as if she felt that they were simply hers by right. I looked at her and thought—“Is it possible that you have arrived at that condition already?” She was a young lady scarcely out
of her teens, only a few months married, and surrounded with every comfort. I knew how she felt, for I had passed through a similar experience myself. It recalled vividly to my mind scenes that had passed in my own home, when my husband had perhaps taken particular pains to show me some attention, or speak kind words to me; and I had met him with that same half-concealed bitter tone, believing that he was only acting a part with me.

I was pained to think that one so young, whom I had seen only a few months before a gay and happy girl, should feel like this; and yet I knew that it was the fate of every woman who lives in Polygamy. It can not be otherwise. She felt, I know, that all these attentions and loving words would be given to another—perhaps an hour after leaving her—and then to another and another still; and thus they lost their value to her. Thence the cold and thankless tones with which she responded to her husband.

A gentleman of my acquaintance who has lived many years in Polygamy, a good, kind husband and father, recently said to me that one of his wives suffered terribly from Polygamy. He always avoided any mention of the word in her presence. He told me that he had often seen her happy and gay, with everything pleasant and agreeable around her, when, by some unforeseen fatality, some one present would allude to Polygamy. In an instant a deep gloom would come over her face; and, strive as he might to drive it away, it was impossible. It would haunt her even for days.

Such men as these lose no opportunity of showing their wives every kind attention. If they are affluent and keep a carriage, they may be seen driving out with one of the wives on every occasion. Their sleighs are the first out in the season. They are to be seen at nearly every public amusement. They attend all the balls, and dance only with their wives and other married ladies, except when compelled to do otherwise with their intimate acquaintances.

All this they do to try to make their wives happy and divert their thoughts from their secret sorrow. These poor men do not know that the very means which they take to destroy that feeling only excites it the more. A woman, as she receives these kindnesses, only loves her husband the better and wishes that she had all his love.

There is no possible happiness in Polygamy, even with such men. There can be none! And, therefore, the less love there is, the better are women able to bear it. Brigham knew it when he said in the Bowery some years ago that there should be no love; it was only a weakness. He understood the case perfectly.

It was once remarked to me by a visitor to Salt Lake City, in speaking of a lady friend of mine—“How beautiful she is when she smiles, but what a difficult thing it is to get her to smile; she looks so sad and mournful.”
I had known that lady for many years and how deep her sorrow was. Her husband had been away for a long time on a mission; and on his return, when he had been home only a week or two, he married two young girls. It is said that his father “counselling” him to do so; and from that day, now many years ago, she has mourned in deep affliction, to which has been added the troubles which her two lovely daughters have experienced.

Some men, feeling that they have got to practice Polygamy or else lose their hopes for futurity, set themselves to work to discover in what way the task can be most easily accomplished to spare their wives’ feelings, and make as little change as possible in their households. On the arrival of the emigrants, they will visit the camp; and, if they see a young girl who takes their fancy, (it may be that they have met before in another country; if not, it makes no difference,) they will offer to take her home until she can “look around and see what she can do.” Or, if it should be the fall when they arrive, (and it always was so before the railroad was in operation,) they would offer them a home for the winter, which was generally accepted with gratitude, as a great many of them had no relatives to go to.

Then they had an opportunity of becoming well acquainted with each other and with the first wife; and many a wife consents to this addition, believing that, as she has got to pass through the ordeal at some time, this will be the best way. I know an indulgent husband who has taken half a dozen girls, one after the other, into his house for this purpose; but not one of them seemed to suit his wife exactly, and he has seemingly given it up in despair. I hope his sweet little wife may never be suited!
Wife at Home.—Husband Abroad.