Exposé of Polygamy
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CHAPTER XIII.

Fears realized—Meeting an old Friend from Switzerland—The Vicissitudes of himself and Family—How he was “counselled” to take another Wife—Brigham sends for me—My young Charge—“Not feeling well”—My Husband seeks a second Wife—A “Painful” Task—Striving to submit—My Attempts at Friendship with his Fiancée—My Heart not quite subdued.

Upon our arrival in Utah, I longed to see the converts who had preceded us from Switzerland. But it was some time before I had the mingled pleasure and pain that that meeting afforded me.

One day a countryman called to see us. It was Mr. ——. I was surprised at the difference in the appearance of this gentleman. I hardly knew him. He was changed from the fine-looking, well-to-do bourgeois to a hard-working, labouring man, poorly clad, sun-burnt, wrinkled, and old. I could have wept over him when I saw the change; and when I inquired about his family, he told me how they were, and that he had married the young servant-girl who had come with them from Switzerland. I was very much surprised at this, but dared not ask him how it had occurred. I thought I would wait till I could see his wife; but as they lived about eighty miles from the city, I was not enabled to do so till several months after.

He told me of his difficulties and struggles to obtain even a bare livelihood. His story was that of many others going to a new country. But he did not complain. When he arrived in Utah, he did not know what to turn his attention to, and, after some hesitation, went to farming. As he was entirely ignorant of agriculture, he could not, of course, succeed. Then the grasshoppers came and destroyed their crops; and one reverse after another followed, until they were reduced to miserable poverty, and utterly broken down. Still, though weak in body, he was firm and robust in his faith in Mormonism. He was a sterling man.¹

As soon as I had opportunity I went to see his wife. She was the lady to whom I had first preached Polygamy in Switzerland. I found her in a little log-cabin of two rooms, and of course no carpet on the floors. In this abode of poverty lived my two kind friends whom I had known under such different circumstances, and with them were their five little
children. But this was not all. The other wife was also living there, and she, poor girl, was certainly not to blame; and under the same roof were also her two children.

What a change was this! When I first knew them in their own country, this lady (the first wife) was a gay, light-hearted, happy woman. Now she was care-worn, dull, and broken-spirited.

I asked her how her husband came to marry.

She answered me:—"If you had been here during 'the Reformation,'* you would not need to ask that question." Then she added—"You ought to thank God that you were not. The men were all crazy here, and were marrying every woman they could get. The Bishop came to my husband one day and told him that he had not 'kept the commandments,' and that he must get another wife within a week. The teachers also went to the servant-girl and told her that she must get married, and that, if she had no one in view, they would select some one for her.

"Those were fearful times. No one dared refuse to listen to 'counsel.' What could we do?"

"My husband talked to me about the matter. He said that he had never before thought of it, and therefore he did not know whom to ask to be his second wife. We began to consider the whole affair in a practical light. If they made this girl marry and leave us, what should I do with all my family without her assistance? Only one solution of the difficulty presented itself, and we came to the conclusion that my husband had better ask her to be his second wife. As she also was 'under counsel,' she accepted him, and it made no great change in our household. She has been a good girl, and although, of course, I feel all this, I try to bear it—but I hate the Mormons!"

No one could see at that time how they could escape over these vast, dreary plains, and, therefore, they had to submit to their fate.

It is a matter of surprise to many persons that intelligent people can be influenced by the Mormon teachers to this extent. But it must be remembered that, when once the disciples of any faith can be brought to believe in present revelation, they think it is wicked to question what they are taught, and they do not allow their own judgments to influence them in the least.

I had been in Salt Lake City about two years, and had been working during that time at millinery in order to assist in supporting my family,† when one day Brigham Young sent me word that he wished to see me. I went to him, and he told me that there was a young girl, in whom he took an interest, and he wished me to see her. He said she "was not feeling

* 1855–6.—A period of great and almost incredible excitement in Utah, when the wildest doctrines were urged by the teachers and elders, producing the most fearful results.
well,” (which I discovered afterwards meant that she was almost ready to apostatize,) and he wanted me to have her with me every day, and try to make her “feel well.” If she wished it, I was to teach her my business; if not, I was to let her do just what she pleased, so that she was with me every day. Her parents, he stated, were both dead.5

I listened to all that President Young said, and accepted [sic] the trust in good faith, for I was very unsuspecting at that time. I called upon the young lady and made arrangements with her. She came to my house, and I found her to be a particularly sweet girl, but very unhappy and also very delicate.

Several of my friends, who were old residents in Salt Lake City, said to me, “Mrs. Stenhouse, there is some design in all this. Be on your guard.” Some women in Salt Lake are always ready with their painful advice. In this instance, however, they were not far from the truth. I did not suspect any thing; I soon formed, however, an attachment for the young girl, as she did also for me, and I may add—my husband had also for her; although I had no suspicion of it then. She remained with me many months, until her health became so poor that she was obliged to stay at home. During this time, ladies would frequently tell me that my husband visited her regularly, and that it was supposed he would marry her. As may be supposed, I was very much shocked at this intelligence, and asked him about it. He told me that there was no truth in what I had heard, and I tried to believe him. However, he spent much less time at home than he used to while she was with me, and although I did not know certainly where he was when absent, I felt sure that he was engaged in something which interested him very much.

I may here mention that it is not customary for a Mormon wife to ask her husband where he is going when he leaves home in the evening after arranging his toilet very carefully. If she feels that she must say something to give vent to her overwrought feelings, it is simply to ask him when he will be home; and in many instances to wish in her secret heart that he might say—“Never!”

I sometimes am almost inclined to think that the baneful effects of this fearful religion will not only pursue us through life, but will also go with us to our graves. To this day, although every thing is so greatly changed, and my husband is now “all my own,” I cannot entirely forget the past, and often I feel like a guilty thing if I venture to ask him where he is going, or where he has been. The reader who knows what the varied experience of life is, will understand what I mean, but which words fail me to tell.

I have lived a separate life so long, hiding my sorrows in my own breast, that now it has become almost impossible to restore that long-lost confidence which constitutes the true pleasure of married life, without
which no woman is really happy. I cannot forget the past. It was fraught with a perpetual fear which my mind can never entirely shake off—a fear which even now makes me think that the teachings of that religion can never be utterly effaced from our hearts, and which reminds me sadly of the words which the poet has put into the mouth of one of those sympathizing angels who are said to watch over the interests of mankind:—

“Poor race of men, said the pitying spirit,
Dearly ye pay for your primal fall;
Some traces of Eden ye still inherit,
But the trail of the serpent is over them all.”

But there was no poetry to soothe my mind in the hour of my trial. There was no music then that could lull the storm which gathered in my breast. The only word which could then depict my feelings was—weariness!—weariness of mind and body, a longing to die, that I might be at rest. If the reader never felt thus, let him not judge me. If he has known troubles such as mine, he will, out of his own experience, sympathize with me.

But I return to my story.

I began at last to think, as some of my friends had told me, that Brigham Young had some design when he sent the young girl to my house. Possibly he never thought of it.

However, I saw no more to trouble me at that time, and as my husband persisted in denying the truth of the rumours which I had heard, I tried to believe that they were false. But at the same time, I was so troubled and agitated by these things that I found it impossible to make up my mind to go and see her.

From this time my husband (apparently) began to feel seriously that it was his “duty to take another wife.”

Some years later, when I had more experience in the ways of men, I discovered several never-failing signs by which one might know when a man wished to take another wife. He would suddenly awaken to a sense of his duties, and would have great fears that “the Lord” would not pardon him for any neglect. He would become very religious, attend to his “meetings”—testimony meetings—singing meetings, and various other meetings! In fact, he would show a great determination to leave nothing undone which ought to be done. My husband, being a good and conscientious Mormon, experienced all these feelings. Of course he did; and his kind brethren, knowing just how he felt, sympathized, urged, and even aided him in his noble efforts to carry out the “commands of God.”

The young lady was at last selected. She was very pretty, and very youthful. The last qualification is very necessary in a Mormon’s wife, for then it is expected that she will have more time to bear children to the
glory of the kingdom. It must not be supposed that any other consider-
ation influences a Mormon mind. O dear! no. They are such very pure-
minded men.

Then commenced the task, the painful task of paying his addresses
to her. It is a “painful task” I know, for my husband told me it was, and of
course I, as a dutiful wife, believed him. He seemed, however, to bear it
remarkably well, and went at it with a zeal that was perfectly astonishing
to me, who knew, from what he said, how painful it was to him.

I had really to restrain him a little for the benefit of his health; for
when the duties of the day were over, and evening came, he would
scarcely take time to eat his supper, so anxious was he to continue this
labour of love.

But deeply as I sympathized with my husband in the “painful duty”
which he had to perform, there were times when I felt that my real sor-
row was greater than his fancied difficulties. I was in fact now truly over-
whelmed with trouble. It seemed to me as if affliction was right at my
door. I would sometimes almost rave with anger. Then I would pray,
then cry. Such were the days and nights that I spent, not once only,
but constantly, and without ceasing. I may truly say that I never knew
at that time what it was to smile. I never knew in any sense what it was
to be happy. I was pale, thin, and nervous, and I was often asked by my
friends, who only judged from appearance, if I were consumptive. Yes,
I might have answered, there is a consuming sorrow at my heart that is
gnawing my life away. There was no possibility of evading my trouble. I
had to face it, and though I felt that I had not courage to endure it, yet
I lived!

I knew the very hours that my husband was with her. Mentally I was
myself with him, and saw all. O the anguish that I felt in those times! No
tongue can describe it, no one is capable of imagining it, but a woman
who truly loves her husband and has endured the same anguish as that
which I then felt. Had my husband been in any sense a bad man, I dare
say, like many other women, I would have hardened my heart and have
tried to forget that I ever cared for him. But this was not the case. He was
a really good man in every respect. I knew how fondly he had once loved
me, and in my heart I believed that he would even now be unchanged but
for the influence of his religion, which he still thought was “the way, the
truth, and the life.”

If I had for one moment supposed what he did was from any other
than the purest motives, I should have cast his love from me; but even
up to that time I feared, and almost believed, that all this might be right;
although I saw so much wrong connected with it.

I knew very well that if it was the law of God, as I had been led to
believe it was, I must endure it, though it should cost me my life. Besides
which, Brigham Young and all the authorities used to say that it was “a cross that we all had got to bear,” though I used to think that the heaviest portion of the cross was put on woman’s shoulders. They have all told me frequently and positively that there was no salvation or “exaltation in the heavens” without it. The thought of it was, nevertheless, so revolting to me that, had I been left to my own choice, I would rather have gone to some other place than the kind of heaven they spoke of, without it, than have gone to glory with it. But I was a wife, and had to consult my husband’s interests as well as my own. No matter how weak I was in the faith, if my husband felt condemned by not practising the doctrine of Polygamy, it became my duty to submit, or at least I thought so.

With these convictions and feelings, I would sometimes nerve myself to the task of enduring; but if I happened to get a glimpse of the girl that my husband was going to marry, all my good resolutions would vanish like chaff before the wind, and I would feel sick and nervous, and entirely unfitted to attend to my duties.

I had often heard it said that the Lord gave strength according to our day, but I certainly felt that it was not true in my case. My day had come, but I had very little strength.

About this time my husband left the city to go to the Eastern States, and his marriage was put off to some indefinite period on account of the extreme youthfulness of the bride-elect. I felt in a measure relieved; for now they could not meet, and I thought that it would be a good opportunity for me to try to show her some attention, which I felt it was my duty to do. I thought that I would invite her to my house, now that there was no danger of my husband meeting her, and I did so. She came, and I had one or two other ladies present, for I was not like my husband in this particular—I could not endure to be alone with her.

I don’t think that she enjoyed herself very much, for I could not at this time take to her. I longed for the time to come for her to go home, and when she had gone, I did not feel very satisfied, but thought that I would try it again. I did so, but this time it was an entire failure; for before she came, I had been brooding over the matter, and so hated the sight of her that I feigned sickness and kindly asked her to go home. After that, I gave up my attempt at friendliness as a bad job, and thought she must take her chances of any attention from me. She was a very nice girl, and under any other circumstances I think I could have liked her very well.

During my husband’s absence, the young lady that I mentioned before as having lived with me, had not recovered from her illness, but was growing worse all the time. She had been out of the city, and I had not seen her for some months. She now sent for me, and I went to see her every day; for I saw that she was failing fast, and I felt assured that she could not live long.
She told me that she had left my house because she would not do any thing to make me suffer. She said that my husband had hinted at marriage to her, and that she liked him, but had avoided him for my sake. This was an instance of such self-denial as I had never expected to find in Utah, and I looked on her as almost an angel. I told her that my husband had denied it, and she said that he did so to spare my feelings, as it was not likely to result in any thing.7 This I did not appreciate at all. I only felt that I had been deceived. But Polygamic Mormonism is full of deceptions. They deceive each other, and are at the same time often themselves the most deceived.

I knew well enough that my husband was not happy. It was not in his nature to have deceived me; but he was compelled to do so from the very circumstances of the case; and, as I said before, for peace’ sake. He knew that there were times when I was perfectly wild with despair, and was reckless of consequences; and I was prepared to cast aside my hope of salvation, my life, and every thing, rather than endure another day what I then was suffering.

At these times I would say the most bitter things that I could think of, of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and all the leading men of the church. My husband was perfectly awe-stricken at the attacks I would make upon those whom he then believed were the servants of God. I know that there were times when he felt that it was the greatest sin that I could commit to speak thus.

In my calmer moments, seeing my husband so terribly in earnest, and having confidence in his superior judgment, I would come back to the old feeling that the wrong was in myself, and I would earnestly pray to the Lord to be forgiven.

I do not think that I should ever make a very good saint, for in all this that I have related there was one thing that consoled me—I felt that my husband’s intended would some day learn that she was not his first and only love after myself. I am almost ashamed to own that this should be any gratification to me, but the young girls at that time frequently got the idea that the men had never really loved until they met with them. How far the men were to blame for this I do not know; but it is a fact, and I have little doubt that they had a pretty good share in the deception.