CHAPTER XIV.

The Sacrifice of my Life—I give another Wife to my Husband—The Scene in the “Endowment House”—My Day of Trial—“It was all over now”—Bitter Miseries of Polygamy—Rebellious Thoughts—Retrospect of that Time—The first Wife not alone unhappy—Watchful Eyes—A Ludicrous Picture—Want of Sympathy—Seeking another “Jewel” for his “Crown”—Enlarging the “Kingdom”—“Stolen Waters”—Love-Letters read in Secret—Reading the “Revelation” a Second Time.

I was now expecting soon to be called upon to undergo the most fearful ordeal that any woman can possibly be required to pass through—that of giving my husband another wife. The thought of doing this was even worse than death. It would have been fearful to have followed my husband to his grave; but to live and see him the husband of another woman seemed to me like exacting more than human nature was capable of enduring. With all my faith in Mormonism, doubts would arise, and in my bitterest moments of anguish I would exclaim, “This is more like the work of cruel man than of God. Why should man have this power over woman, and she so helpless? Surely, a just and impartial God can have nothing to do with this!” Then, again, I would come to the conclusion, as I had many times before, that “the ways of the Lord are past finding out,” and, therefore, I must submit.

As the time approached for me to do this, I felt like a condemned felon in his cell, waiting in agony the day of his execution. I knew that my husband suffered also, now that it was so near; for he necessarily saw that it would make a great change in his future life. His freedom was gone.

The dreaded day at length arrived. As may well be supposed, I had passed a very wakeful and unhappy night, and I felt very sick and nervous; for I was soon to become a mother, and it seemed to me that I had not courage to go through that day.1 However, I nerved myself to the task, and silently made my preparations for going to the “Endowment House.” The morning was bright and lovely, and calculated to inspire joyous hopes and happy feelings. To me it brought nothing but fear and trembling. I could not even trust myself to speak to my children, for I was choking
with suppressed emotion; and they, not knowing how deeply I was suffer- ing, looked at me with wonder in their innocent eyes. “Oh!” I thought, “surely my husband will at last understand the depth of the love I bear him; for, were it not that he believes the doctrine to be true, I would even now dash this bitter cup from my lips!” There was a darkness before my eyes, and, struggle as I might, I could see no ray of light, no glimmering of hope. I was utterly cast down and broken-hearted, and felt almost as if the Lord had forsaken me. I could not go to my husband for sympathy; for I felt that his thoughts were with his young bride, and that my sorrows would only worry him at a time when he must desire to be at peace.

The time at length arrived for us to go to the “Endowment House,” and there at the altar the first wife is expected to give proof of her faith in her religion by placing the hand of the new wife in that of her husband. She is asked the question by Brigham Young, “Are you willing to give this woman to your husband, to be his lawful and wedded wife, for time and for all eternity? If you are, you will manifest it by placing her right hand within the right hand of your husband.” I did so. But what words can describe my feelings? The anguish of a whole lifetime was crowded into that one single moment. When it was done, I felt that I had laid every thing upon the altar, and that there was no more to sacrifice. I had given away my husband. What more could the Lord require of me that I could not do? Nothing!

I was bewildered and almost beside myself, and yet I had to hide my feelings; for to whom should I turn for sympathy among those who were around me? My husband was there, it is true; but he was now the husband of another woman, and a newly-made bridegroom. I felt that I stood alone, our union was severed. I had given away my husband, and he no longer belonged only to me! The thought was madness. I could not think it possible that there ever could be any copartnership between that other wife and myself. From that day, I began to hide all my sorrows from my husband; and it was only when I was compelled, as I might say, to give vent to my highly-wrought feelings, that I ever uttered a word of discontent. Then, when I spoke or expressed what I felt, it was in anger; but never in sorrow, seeking sympathy.

I remember well that when I returned home—that “home” which was now to become hateful to me, for his young wife was to live there—my husband said to me, “You have been very brave; but it is not so hard to do, after all, is it?” He had seen me bear it so well, that he even supposed I was indifferent. So much for the penetration of men!

During the remainder of that day, how I watched their looks and noted their every word. To me, their tender tones were like daggers, piercing me to the heart. One moment I yearned for my husband’s undivided love; the next moment I hated even the very sight of him, and vowed that he never
again should have a place in my heart. Then I would feel that there was no justice in heaven, or this great sorrow would not have come upon me.

Why did the Lord implant this love in my nature? If it is wrong, He could have created me without it. Or was it for the pleasure of torturing His daughters that this was done? I could not but feel that the Lord whom I served was partial; for He allowed His sons to indulge in their love, while His daughters, who by man are considered the weaker vessels, were expected to be strong enough to crush out from their natures all love and all weakness.

I felt that day that if I could not soon get away by myself, in privacy, and give vent to my overcharged feelings, I should certainly go mad.

It was only in the dead of night, in my own chamber, that I gave way to the terrible anguish that was consuming me. God and my own soul can alone bear witness to that time of woe. That night was to me such that even the most God-forsaken might pray never to know; and morning dawned without my having for a moment closed my eyes.

It was all over now. Nothing remained but for me to face the fearful reality day after day and hour after hour. I do indeed believe that a man, if he could have felt as I did then, would have sunk beneath the trial. Who but a woman could endure such things and yet live?

I had been married then about fifteen years. When I look back to those days, I feel that all ill-feeling, all those manifold causes of sorrow, have fully died away; for the cause is now removed. I can now afford to think as kindly of the second as well as of the first wife; for those young women who marry into Polygamy very often—in fact, I may say, generally—do so from a sincere belief that it is their duty; and I know that they also have their trials. What can they know of happiness—real happiness? If they are sensitive, intelligent girls, they must feel almost as intruders in the home of another woman, never daring to show their affection for their husbands, and knowing as they do that keen eyes are always watching them.

If their sorrow is even less than that of the first wife, they certainly can know no joy. And if the husband has the whole of his family in one house, as is often the case, where is his happiness? One might truly say that then he is nothing but a slave in the midst of his slaves—his own wives. This can be readily understood. His every look and action will be closely watched and criticised. If he should chance to give a new dress to one, he must also give a dress to the other, no matter whether she needs it or not. Every thing is noticed. Nothing is overlooked. When a woman’s heart is anxious, her eye is never weary.

This state of affairs, painful as it must be to all who are themselves personally interested in such things, not infrequently presents a ludicrous picture to those who are only lookers-on. In fact, sometimes these things
are even grotesque in their results. I have more than once seen sights of this kind which were most laughably ridiculous. Let the reader imagine a very old wife, and a very young one, dressed alike! Yet this is not infrequently the case. The poor old lady sometimes thinks that if she can only make herself look a little juvenile she will be quite as attractive to her husband as his young wife is. All women would prefer to be young; but women in Utah have a perfect dread of growing old, for they do not like the idea of being set aside to make room for younger ones, which is very often their fate. In fact, this is so common, that it is seen daily.

I had lived in Polygamy for about three years, and nearly one year of that time it was brought home to me most painfully, for it was right before my eyes, under my own roof, day after day. To attempt to describe to the reader the contending feelings that continually and without ceasing tortured my very soul, would be impossible. In my struggles to hide them I thought they would send me mad. I felt that it required more courage to live than to die, but the thought of my little ones restrained me; and I thought that, although my life seemed so utterly worthless to me, it was of the utmost value to them, and to them it should be devoted. I would not die. I would live for their sake.

All this time my husband was kind to me. What would it have been had he been otherwise? But this perpetual conflict of feelings unfitted me for my duties. Even the prattle of my children, which had always been as music to my ear, was now almost a discordant sound. Their little questionings, too, were irksome; for I wanted to be alone. I had no sympathy; for there was none that knew of all these sorrows and trials, or who could feel with me in my affliction; no, not one. Besides, whom could I tell them to if not to my husband; and I certainly could not tell him now. Then, too, what good would it do me to tell him of my grief? The thing was done, and I must endure it; or, as I have heard some men say to their wives, “You must round up your shoulders and bear it; it is as much your duty as mine.” Besides, I thought, how do I know but what he may tell his other wife of my feelings? and that would be too great a humiliation for me, should she think that I am jealous.

I am not naturally a jealous woman. But, I contend that where there is no jealousy there is very little love; and, in the trying situation in which Mormon women are placed, they must be more than human not to feel it. Besides, I did not think that what I felt was jealousy. Even if it was so, it was mingled with feelings of indignation and humiliation.

I was indeed indignant at seeing another woman under my roof, bearing my husband’s name, and treated as his wife. Oh! this seemed sometimes really more than I could endure. I was ready to say, She is not his wife! dare to call her by his name! Then I would feel humiliation at the position which I occupied, when I fully realized it in all its bearings.
If any one had then told my husband that those were my feelings, he would not have believed it; for when we had assembled in our little parlour of an evening, (men generally spend their evenings at home after taking a new wife, at least for a while,) I would so far have subdued my feelings as at least to be calm, if not entertaining. But how I watched their looks! how I weighed every word, and often put a meaning to many things where there probably was none.

My husband would frequently say to me, “You do not feel bad now, do you? You have got used to it.” I am proud to say, *I never got used to it.*

I had lived in Polygamy about three years when Mr. S. thought it was about time that he should add another jewel to his crown. I raised no objection to this; for I felt that he might just as well have twenty more as the one already too many, particularly as we had been taught to believe, the more wives the more glory. He told me who the favoured damsel was, and I had no objection to her. The only promise I tried to exact from him was that there should be no long courtship. This he did not object to. But I was doomed to be disappointed, although there seemed to be no obstacle in the way this time; for her mother declared to me soon after that “no man had ever moved her daughter’s heart to love” but my husband; “he was her first and only love”—pleasant communication to make to a wife! Her daughter confirmed this; and I myself had little doubt that she spoke the truth, when I saw letters constantly coming to my house, brought by persons who I knew came from her, and I perceived how much care was taken that they should not fall into my hands. It had always been represented to me, as to every woman, that I was a partner in the affair, and I thought that it was nothing but right and just that I should see and understand for myself how the courtship was progressing. I did not wish to be guilty of any thing that was mean; but as my partner in the business did not seem inclined to show me those letters, I thought that I would just take a glance at them without leave. Accordingly, while he was sweetly and unconsciously slumbering, night after night I extracted those charming epistles from his pocket. When I opened them, I found that one glance at them only gave me a taste for more, and I was not satisfied till I had read them through. I do not wish to justify myself for acting thus. But let the reader remember what cause of provocation I had, and how desperate I felt, before he too hastily judges me or condemns what I did.

To my great astonishment, I found from those midnight readings that the affair had progressed far beyond my utmost anticipations, and when I saw the intensity of the love depicted in those letters, I began to think that I had before known nothing about that tender sentiment.

The young lady became most terribly exacting during fifteen long and dreary months, so fraught with misery to me that it would be impossible to tell truly a thousandth part of what I felt. Even the recollection
of those times I wish to banish. What I endured through this love affair was simply what many a woman has had to pass through before me in Utah, but which I then firmly resolved I never would endure again. I had come to the conclusion that if the Lord would not give me “salvation” without that, I would do without it. I had striven hard to do His will; but I had failed in every single instance to see, in what I was called upon to suffer, any indication of a God of justice. “How,” said I, “could the humiliation, abasement, and misery of thousands of women contribute to the glory of God?”

I now determined that I would satisfy myself concerning the true origin of Mormonism, and of that extraordinary “revelation” which first established Polygamy.

I had through all these years seen many, many things that, even after making every allowance, and taking them at their best, I knew were wrong. At least they appeared so to me, and, according to my views, the teachings of the church abounded with inconsistencies which considerably weakened my confidence in its authority.

I procured a copy of “The Revelation on Marriage,” and read it carefully and calmly. I had not seen it since I had partially read it in Switzerland seventeen years before. Then I had cast it aside in grief, with disgust and indignation. But I now perused it with anxious care, desiring only to learn the truth. I saw plainly from its own wording that if ever it had been given to Joseph Smith, no matter by whom, it was given after he had practiced Polygamy, or something worse, and to sanction what he had done. I began to make careful inquiry into all these things; and I found that evidence was not wanting to prove, at least to me, that this doctrine of plural marriages was not of divine origin.

To doubt one doctrine was to begin to doubt all, and I soon felt that my religion was rapidly crumbling away before my eyes, and that I was losing confidence in every thing and every body. I was like a ship at sea without a compass, not knowing where to go or what to do.

At that moment, I believe I would sooner have proved my religion true than false, much as it had caused me to suffer. But the more I tried to prove it true, the more I proved it false; until in disgust I gave up the idea of solving my difficulties, resolving that I would have nothing more to do with the matter. I had noticed, for some time past, with no small degree of pleasure, that my husband’s faith in the divine mission of Brigham Young was shaken. He would not confess as much to me; but the way I discovered it was very simple. My ears were opened, and my eyes were ever watchfully bent upon him, and I observed that in his prayers with his family when he would ask that Brigham Young might have the Spirit of God to enable him to judge justly of the actions of his brethren, and that he might comprehend the situation of the people, I thought I detected
in his peculiar earnestness a foreshadowing of doubt creeping over him, and I rejoiced to think that at last there was a probability that he would yet use his own brains and experience, upon which I placed great reliance, and be no longer a slave to others.