Exposé of Polygamy

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Published by Utah State University Press

DeSimone, Linda and Fanny Stenhouse.
Exposé of Polygamy: A Lady's Life Among the Mormons.
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Marriage—The Age for Marrying—Seventy and Seventeen—Women privileged to choose their own Husbands—Some Women make a Choice—Joseph’s Widows—“Serving for seven Years”—“Celestial Marriages”—Baptism and Marriage for the Dead—Saving one’s Ancestors ad infinitum—Marrying “for Time and for Eternity”—The Register at Salt Lake City, from which the World shall be judged—Difficulties of “proxy” Marriages—“Proxies” for the Empress Josephine and Napoleon I.—“The next best Thing”—Joseph’s unproductive Polygamy—Divorce—Woman’s solitary Privilege—Divorce for ten Dollars!—Re-marrying—“Affinity”—Shocking Instance of self-fulfilling a “Revelation”—Perverted Heroism—Brother Hyde’s Argument—The Woman with seven Husbands—Statistical Facts.

The dominant principle of Mormonism is marriage, and the theory that men and women are not perfect without each other. The man is not perfect without the woman, nor is the woman without the man, in the Lord.

Every man and every woman must be married some time or other. They cannot otherwise attain to glory, and would be “angels,” or servants to the Celestial Saints. The woman ought to be married but once; the man may be married as often as he pleases, if he can provide for his wives and their families. There is no particular age specified as proper for marriage, but the younger the girl is, the better. It is seldom that there are any girls married under fifteen years of age; but sixteen is a very sweet age, and very desirable for men, themselves ranging in years from forty-five to seventy and over. An unmarried girl in Utah is old at twenty, and it is rarely the case that any attractive girl passes out of her teens before she is wedded.*

The boys seldom marry so early, but if capable of supporting themselves, the accumulation of property and experience are neither very necessary to becoming a husband. The teachings of the priesthood have

* Since the above was written, the Utah Legislature has entertained a bill as follows: “A bill has been offered and referred to a committee regulating marriage. It provides that males of fifteen years and females of twelve years of age may contract marriage, with the consent of parents or guardians.”—New-York Herald, Jan. 27th, 1872.
generally discountenanced prudential preparations that are common elsewhere. The chief object has been rather to encourage an increase of “the kingdom,” than to seek the personal happiness of the married pair.

In any other community, it would be remarked if a man of fifty, sixty, or seventy years of age should be paying his addresses to a girl of seventeen. In Utah, there is no attention paid to it; and not infrequently, married men with several wives may be seen courting and marrying girls much younger than their own daughters. It is a great wrong to the girls. They are too young to see the consequences of their folly at the outset, and the men who seek them for wives are too selfish to draw their attention to the error.

It is very amusing to see a vain, silly old man trying to be young again—dying his hair, and aping the fancies of juvenile courtship. This sight is any thing but rare among the Mormons. I knew a man who objected to his daughter being married, as she was only a few months over sixteen. The married man who was courting the young lady, tersely replied to the father, “Yes, she is very young; she is six months younger than my sister whom you are courting.” The sarcasm of the answer was enough, and in the course of time he got the daughter.

In the first years of polygamous experience, the elders tried in their teachings to give the institution of the patriarchs as favourable an appearance as possible, and told the sisters who had been neglected, that it was their “privilege” to choose their own husbands. This had some practical results; but the acknowledgment of it as a principle has never been much dwelt upon in the pulpit, as it has its inconveniences.

After the death of Joseph Smith, something had to be done for his numerous “widows;” and when the church was travelling across the plains, this “privilege” was extended to them to “choose” their future husbands. Very reluctantly Brigham accepted the preference of one of these “widows,” while another of them manifested in a similar way her preference for his counsellor—Heber.

A lady called one day upon a prominent bishop, north of Salt Lake City, whom I knew very well, and sought his counsel “in the interest” of her daughter. The mother related that a young man wanted to marry the daughter, but she did not love him; she had a preference for a gentleman already married. What was she to do? That was the subject upon which she wanted the bishop’s counsel. With a ready answer for every one, the bishop saw no difficulty. “Go,” said he, “to the married man, and tell him that your daughter loves him, and it is his duty to marry her.” The task was soon accomplished; the kind mother smiled and blushed a little, and then said, “Bishop, thou art the man!” The bishop could do no other than follow his own “counsel.” He was in comfortable circumstances, and the young lady shortly after became wife number six or seven of his household.
Many such cases of the sisters choosing husbands have occurred, and sometimes with very satisfactory results. When it is really a case of affection on the lady’s part, and the selected husband is a liberally disposed man, the affair goes off as well as any marriage of his own choosing; but when the arrangement is not an “affinity” affair, the lady receives very little attention, and often lives to repent of her choice.

A very excellent Englishwoman is said to have entered Brigham’s family as a domestic, and from her devotion to her faith, and affection for the Prophet, it is related that she served, like Jacob in the house of Laban, seven years, to obtain her choice. She is a woman of good sense, and illustrates, in her quiet and almost solitary life, the tenacity of affection, even if only coldly returned. With a son that she has added to the Prophet’s family, she lives apparently contented. Another lady was less fortunate. The Prophet passed through the form of sealing and registering her name upon the “Book of Life,” but there the marriage ended. She lives in all the loneliness of married spinsterhood. Brigham honoured the law of “privilege,” and permitted her to be called by his name.1

What I have written of marriage hitherto has only been that which appertained to this world. I have now to give the Mormon views of a continuance of this marriage in the celestial world.

The Mormon priesthood claim that there is no legal and holy marriage outside of their church, and that all the Gentiles are, therefore, in the sight of God, living in sin. If this is true of the present age, it must necessarily be true of all the ages that have intervened, from the days of the fishermen of Galilee, to the advent of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young; for the latter claim that no true priesthood has been upon the earth till restored by Peter, James, and John, to Joseph Smith.

As all earthly associations are the foundations for eternal institutions, the marital relations naturally claim the highest and first attention of the Saints. The glory of a Saint in the world to come is, therefore, predicated upon the foundation laid here for that glory. Woman is the glory of man; children are the glory of woman; the more wives, the greater glory to the man; the more children, the greater glory to the woman.

Out of this faith comes the novel doctrine that it is not only the duty of men to multiply wives to themselves here, but that it also devolves upon them to see that all their relatives who have died are placed in a position in the world to come, where they also can have wives and children associated with their names, and thus increase their glory. Believing also in the rejuvenation of the aged beyond the veil, it is not uncommon to learn of some lady of sixty winters being “sealed” to a brother of half her age, and bearing his name before the community.

With a blooming bride of seventeen on one side, the Mormon elder may occasionally be seen (though not often) at his family table, with a
grandmotherly lady at his other side, and both are his wives. The younger one seeks his glory now; the other will when hereafter she is rejuvenated, seek his glory in the next world. These are matters on which explicitness is not particularly necessary. It is, however, very creditable to the faith of a young Mormon elder for him to provide for the declining years of the aged spinster or widow. When the old lady has money in her own right, she can literally say that “she eats her own bread and wears her own apparel;” and it is seldom that the condition of which I have written is seen without some such consideration.

With this explanation, the reader will readily understand the doctrine, not only of Mormon men and women being married themselves for time and eternity, but they will also comprehend what is meant by “proxy wives” and “proxy husbands.” For illustration: a man and his wife in Salt Lake City are married by the priesthood; they are married legally—as “the Lord” wants it. There is nothing that can separate this man and wife in time and in eternity but adultery or “apostasy,” unless the priesthood find some other reason, which they sometimes have done.

A record of Mormon marriages is preserved in the archives of the church, and only out of these records the world will be judged. It is therefore necessary that the names of my father and mother, and every other person’s father and mother should be recorded on the books in Salt Lake City as man and wife, otherwise they would be as “angels,” strolling about in the upper regions without any particular marital relationship. Should, however, my husband and myself agree that we shall be married as “proxies” for my father and mother, or for his father and mother, then we go to the “Endowment House” and personate the dead, each according to sex, and that is recorded. By this devotion and care on our part, Mr. and Mrs. Stenhouse, the elder, would then, but not before, be duly entitled to be husband and wife in the other world. As Mr. Stenhouse père had but one wife, his glory would necessarily be very limited, and it would become the duty of Mr. Stenhouse fils to see that he had some extra wives sealed to him for his father. As a dutiful son, the living, believing Stenhouse should see that his grandfather, great-grandfather, and all their fathers, right back to the first ages of Christianity, or even, possibly, as far back as old father Adam, were secured the same privileges.

To be consistently careful of his progenitors, and their happiness and glory in the world to come, the same attentions and courtesies should be extended to all my husband’s brothers, and to his uncles, as well as to all my brothers, uncles, etc., up to the beginning of time. The mothers are necessarily cared for in the marriage with fathers; but all our sisters and aunts have to be provided for in the same way. They must all be married, and the men clothed with the glory of numerous wives, and the women with the glory of many children.
As in life all the marriages have not been pleasant, it would be somewhat difficult to determine, among our dead, who wanted to know each other then, and be reunited in eternal marriage as they had been on earth. Besides these, difficulties innumerable and insurmountable spring up. I might be looking out for some maiden aunt or spinster sister who had never had their hearts touched by the tender passion, or perhaps might have set their affections on some particular person, and then to seal them to another would be rather awkward. In all this it would be very cruel if some were forgotten, or if others should be united, when perhaps they had waited with anxiety for death to set them free.

I am afraid that I am getting lost in the magnitude and extent of the Mormon obligations for the dead, and I shall, therefore, stop here upon that point.

I was much amused at learning, in Salt Lake City, that a French lady of my acquaintance had been baptized as “proxy” for the Empress Josephine, while her son had stood for Napoleon I. How much further the mother and son carried their admiration for the imperial pair, I know not; but it would be consistent for them to have been proxies for Josephine and Napoleon in marriage, and for the son to have recorded in the archives of the “Endowment House” that he had stood proxy for Napoleon to be ordained a Mormon elder. Following that, he could also have had “sealed” to Napoleon any maiden of Utah, or any number of maidens who had an admiration for the prisoner of St. Helena.*

Illustrative of the folly, if not profanity, to which some carry this teaching, I was told of a lady who once asked Brigham Young if she could not be “sealed” to Jesus Christ, as one of His wives. Brigham replied that he could not go thus far, but he would do the next best thing, and that was to have her “sealed” to Joseph Smith.² Had the lady to whom I refer been an ignorant semi-savage of Asia or Africa, or a squaw of the Rocky Mountains, this could readily have been understood; but when I assure the reader that the lady in question was educated in New-England, and held a respectable social position there before she embraced Mormonism, the terrible extent of her credulity can be imagined.†

* General Washington has also in a similar way been kindly cared for by the Mormons. Judge Adams, of Springfield, was baptized as proxy for him, and he is now a member of the “Church and Kingdom” established by Joseph Smith.

† The Mormon Apostles insist that Jesus Christ was a polygamist; that the sisters Martha and Mary were two of his wives, and that the marriage at Cana of Galilee, when the water was turned into wine, was one of Christ’s bridal feasts. According to the Mormon faith, the lady alluded to above was, therefore, not so inconsistent in her request as might otherwise be supposed. Yet few persons can hear of such a desire being expressed, without considering it to be simply a bold profanity. Had I not heard the statement from the most reliable source, I should not have even named it.
Consistently with all this complication of marriages, another distinctive feature in Utah Polygamy is the raising up of children to the dead. When one of the prominent Mormons died some years ago, his five or seven wives, with their families and property, passed over to the care of his young nephew—one of the Apostles. The nephew had already two or three wives of his own, but that was a small consideration, and he assumed the extra responsibility. All the offspring of this plural marriage are the children of the deceased, and are to be “claimed” by him in the resurrection.

Though the object in instituting Polygamy is said to have been the “raising up of a holy seed,” it is not a little surprising that Joseph Smith, through whom the revelation is given, notwithstanding his numerous wives, had no children born to him in Polygamy. Since his death, however, his brethren have done well for him, and his posterity is numerous. One of the finest families of Brigham Young will one day pass away to the account of Joseph, his predecessor. The lady was sealed to Joseph for time and eternity, and she is therefore wholly his. But Joseph died; and, as the widow was young and handsome, from respect to the dead, Brigham assumed the responsibility of being a proxy husband to her during her lifetime. Devotion to the deceased, of course, demands that no love beyond that of brotherly and sisterly affection should spring up between them.

All this has, theoretically, a very devotional turn; but I am afraid humanity has something to say in it, as the lady in question has a very large family to Joseph, while another lady of Brigham’s household has but one daughter to the dead Prophet, and other wives of Joseph have had a similarly diversified experience.

With these numerous classifications of marriage, some from affection and others from necessity, or faith, or obligation, it would be natural to look for a law of divorce almost as large and liberal as that of the marriage itself. This is the case. It is easy to get married in Utah, and it is quite as easy to get unmarried. But the leading actors are reversed. Men marry the women: the women divorce the men; and this is about the only rational and just thing there is in connexion with the Mormon marriages.

The causes of divorce are as numerous as the ordinary disagreement between individuals; and the facility of obtaining a divorce leads often to very strange complications.

The first wife among the Mormons is not intentionally more privileged than the twentieth wife; but no first wife ever forgets that she is the legal wife of her husband, and that the priesthood cannot interfere with her status. Should the first wife have cause of complaint and seek for a divorce, she applies to the courts of law and obtains protection and alimony.*

* I am assured by a leading attorney in Salt Lake City that during the last twelve months, more than one hundred first wives have called upon him to enter suit for divorce and alimony.
All the other wives were married to the husband by the priesthood, and can only be released from him by the priesthood.

All law contention is avoided in the Mormon divorce cases, and they are also unattended with expense. A young wife presents herself at Brigham’s office and complains of her husband. Brigham listens. If he has any personal interest in the absent husband, he will probably defer his decision, and afford him an opportunity of being heard in his own defence. Should it be otherwise, and Brigham would rather humble the husband if he can, he readily accepts the woman’s statement. The clerk is instructed to “make out the papers.” The discontented wife signs them, and her marriage is dissolved. The husband is notified that he is “wanted at the office.” He goes—it may be without any knowledge of the nature of the business—and is informed that his wife Ignatia had been there, and had related all his “brutality” to her, and his “shocking neglect,” his greater preference for some other wife, or that he had stayed two days more in every week with his favourite—Susannah, than he had with her or with Mary Jane, and she “was not going to stand it.” The husband may supplicate, promise better behaviour, or suggest a more just disposition of his hours and affection, and then the signing of the papers is deferred. Other husbands take dissatisfied wives at their word, thankful for the opportunity of sundering ties that were irksome to both. He watches the occasion of Brigham’s absence from the office, goes round in a great hurry, sees the clerk, asks for the papers and signs them. He then hands ten dollars to the clerk, and beats a retreat from the office without giving any opportunity for repentance, and rejoices in the glory of being once more a free man—“a one-wifed bachelor!”

This divorce business has about as many ludicrous phases as the marriage is stamped with cruel severity. In the marriage ceremony, the husband and wife are “sealed up unto eternal life.” Nothing but adultery can unloose those bands. Yet it frequently occurs that a dissatisfied wife “gets a bill” of divorce and marries again another man to whom she is “sealed up” also to “eternal life;” and cases are known of women being “sealed up” to “eternal life” to three and four different husbands. And after all this professedly sacred service has been performed, Brigham in some of his comical humours will tell the people in the Tabernacle that “the divorce is not worth the paper it is written upon; but the people insist upon getting them, and the ten dollars is pin-money for my wives.” What a picture to contemplate! What reflections arise upon purity! He first teaches Polygamy as the marital relations of the purest and the highest
in the heavens: he introduces it with the grandest promises: it becomes intolerable, and for peace’ sake he gives divorces and then gets into confusion. The truth is that Brigham now begins to realize that he has more on his hands than he knows what to do with.

Women are to be met with in Utah with even a much larger married experience than many of the men. I know a good-natured soul who has had four husbands. I first knew her at my house as a laundress. Ever since that, whenever I chance to meet her, I expect to hear something interesting. She now lives in the country, and only comes into the city about once a year. The last time I saw her she came up smiling good-naturedly, and said—“What do you think, Mrs. Stenhouse? I have just seen two of my old husbands! One I knew was here, but I did not expect to see the other.” She seemed to look upon this rencontre as a cheerful and amusing incident, and from her manner while speaking of them, I should think that she was on very excellent terms with both. Their divorce had caused no bitterness.

When any woman has not been seen for some length of time, a little caution is necessary in addressing her by name. She may have been Mrs. Smith when you last spoke to her: have become Mrs. Jones, or Robinson, and be now Mrs. Smith again! I have generally waited to hear something which might indicate if any change had taken place before I would venture to address her by the name which she had borne when I last saw her. It is not uncommon in Utah for a wife to leave her husband, marry again, be divorced, and go back to her first husband.

This changing round from one husband to another is, however, not altogether the result of personal caprice alone, and the indelicacy of such “trading” of husbands and wives cannot be charged entirely to the fickleness of the persons interested. Faith, as taught by the priesthood, has been a disturbing element in married life.

Though the word “affinity” is not used by the Mormons, its meaning has, in fact, been often illustrated among them. Wives in Utah, as well as elsewhere, have passed from one husband to another; but the worst of the matter is, that in Utah a divine revelation is claimed for these proceedings. In connection with the “affinity” doctrine elsewhere, the parties satisfy themselves and act on their own responsibility. If they blunder, and are punished for their mistake, they have only themselves to blame; but when “revelation” is claimed as authority for what is done, one of the parties is generally the innocent victim of the other.

To avoid wounding the feelings of an innocent and excellent lady, I withhold names; but I may say that I know of a lady in Salt Lake City who was many years ago married to a man of about her own age. She is a very handsome woman. A certain man officiating at the marriage ceremony in the “Endowment House,” is said to have remarked to some members of
his family that he had that day married to another man a sister who ought to have been his own wife.

As every word falling from his lips is looked upon as a divine “revelation,” his wives very naturally regarded what he now said in that light. His statement was not long in finding its way to the newly married wife. She, with the usual faith and confidence of the Saints in all that is uttered by him, believed what she heard, and looked upon her marriage with the young man as a mistake which would have to be set right some day, and so became very unhappy. After having borne two children to her husband, and only a few months before the birth of her third child, she became the wife of the “great” man!

Terrible as the trial must have been to her young husband, he was forced to accept the situation, and remained in fellowship with the church for several years afterwards. He is now amongst the Liberals of Utah. The lady is still young and very good looking, but she is made to realize most keenly that she is only one of a number of wives; while her “priestly” husband is spending his leisure hours with a more recent favourite.

But this is by no means a solitary instance of the kind. One of the “Twelve Apostles” met with his death from the hands of a husband who considered himself outraged in his wife leaving him, adopting the new faith, and marrying the apostle; and although the Mormons very much regretted his death, the most intelligent and thinking portion of them felt that in the situation of the husband they might have done the same thing. No “Gentile” could interfere with a Mormon wife in Utah to the same extent without being visited by “judgment.”

Many instances could be given of ladies leaving their husbands under the impression that they, though good men, were not as able to “exalt” them as other men in the priesthood. Two ladies in Salt Lake, whom I know and have already alluded to, while they were in Nauvoo became the sealed wives of Joseph Smith and yet still maintained their relationship to their own husbands. This is very revolting, and exhibits to what extremes faith will sometimes conduct people. These ladies today think that that which the world would universally condemn was an act of the noblest heroism. Their names, if printed here, would perfectly astonish many who personally know and respect them. I do not doubt for a moment that they conscientiously thought that they were worthy of the highest honor for believing the “revelation” of “the Lord,” through “His servant,” and accepting the position of handmaids to “the Anointed.”

Enough has been written already to set the most devoted Saint thinking over the crooked paths of Polygamy. I have not attempted to enter into any argument hitherto, but I think I may venture to conclude this chapter with a word to Brother Hyde about his statement justifying the practice.
“Brother” Orson puts forth perhaps the best argument that has ever been given in its favour. But let us see what this argument is. He says:

“Some man will perhaps marry a wife of his youth. She dies. He loved her as he loves himself, and her memory ever lingers about his heart. He marries another, and she dies, and he loved her equally as well. He marries a third, and so on, and he loved them all. By-and-by he dies, and he dies with devoted affection and love to them all. Now, in the resurrection, which of these wives shall he claim? There is no difference in his love to any of them; and they have all, perhaps, borne children to him. He loves the children of one mother as well as the children of another. What say you? Which shall he have in the resurrection? Why, let him have the whole of them; to whom are they more nearly allied?

“There is a case opposite to this, where a woman married a husband, and he died, and so on, until she had been married to seven husbands; and then she also died. The question was asked the Savior—‘Whose wife will she be in the resurrection, for they all had her?’ A curious answer was returned—‘In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels of God in heaven.’”

Brother Hyde appears willing that the woman with her seven husbands should be “as the angels”—whatever that condition may be; but he would rather himself decide the fate of his own sex, and he very generously says of the man with seven wives, “Let him have them all; to whom are they ‘nearer’ allied?” Be just, Brother Hyde, and allow to the poor woman who has had seven husbands the whole of them: who deserves them better? She might similarly have loved all her husbands; and if the argument is good for the man, it is good for the woman. Why should she not be permitted to have them all in the other world, instead of being compelled to become “an angel”?

The question arises in my mind—if all these seven brethren are faithful members of the church, and if their only chance of glory and “exaltation in heaven” consists in the number of wives and children which each has, why should the unfortunate six be sentenced to be kept out in the cold—wifeless, and with only a faint taste of the bliss of Paradise? Why, also, should only one be favoured? And, then, which ought to be that one?

It is, I think, very evident that Brother Hyde expressed only the desires of his poor, weak, erring nature when he said—“Let him have them all, to be sure!”

Brother Hyde has provoked statistics. The women of Utah who have listened to so many sermons in the Tabernacle, about the women so far outnumbering the men in the world, and hence the necessity of Polygamy, so that every woman should have a husband, will be interested in the perusal of the following table, which certainly does not prove the assertion.
### TABLE
OF MALE AND FEMALE POPULATION OF THE TERRITORY OF UTAH IN 1870.

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In the above table, for which I am indebted to the Census Bureau at Washington, the reader will perceive that in polygamous Utah there are two thousand and fifty-six more males than females!"
Brigham Young at Home.