CHAPTER XIX.


In every conversation upon Polygamy in Utah, the first question usually asked is, “How are the women managed? do they all live together—or how?”

There is no fixed principle regulating men in the management of their families. Every one is at liberty to do as he thinks best; and, with the greatest diversity of judgment and circumstances, there are scarcely two families alike. Where the husband is wealthy, separate homes are generally provided for the wives. Still, some wealthy men have all their families together under the same roof. When this is the case, if the wives number half a dozen or more, the “living” arrangements are ordered with a view to economy. If there is harmony in the household, some deference may be paid to the first wife, and perhaps she may be excused from part of the domestic duties; but as a general thing, all the wives take week and week about in the management of the house. The work of the kitchen, the laundry, etc., is done by hired “help.”

In such a house there is a common dining-room, large enough to seat the wives and the eldest and youngest children. Of course the table is often not large enough for all the children, and then there is a second table for the others. In such an establishment privacy is unknown. Each lady, however, has her own apartment.
In a very large house, with many wives, there is greater safety and peace for the husband than in a small house, with only two wives. When there are only two apartments, the husband is supposed to be in the one or in the other; and if there is any disposition to be bitter, the occupied room at once furnishes the object for the attack from the vacant room. In a large house, there are some advantages. The whereabouts of the husband is not so easily discovered, and the unhappy or jealous wife is at a loss to know on whom she should vent her ire. On this account, even men of small means prefer to have three wives instead of two, as the jealousy is then divided, and the wives do not well know which of the two others is her greatest enemy.

The husband who provides separate homes for his wives has to divide his time between them. Some men go from house to house, spending a day with one wife and a day with another, and so on until he has visited them all. Then he begins again where he first set out, and travels over the same road as before. Where the wives are not more than three in number, each wife generally has the society of her lord for two days in each week; and when the husband desires to show any preference to his first wife, the odd day in the seven is accorded to her, and this is rarely objected to; but not infrequently the extra day falls to the lot of the youngest and last wife—this very pious and impartial man justifying his preference by a kindly word to his wives about their all having had "their day," and that it was nothing but right that the young bride should have "her day" also. To such a delicate appeal to their generosity, and to such an exhibition of his manifest disinterestedness, and desire to be just, these loving wives could of course make but little objection!

A house with two wings is very popular among the men with two wives. The centre door opens into the parlour, which serves for the reception of visitors to both families. Two doors are sure to be seen—one to the right, another to the left, conducting to the family apartments of each wife. The husband spends one week on one side of the house, and the following week he goes to the other side of the house; and in the mean time he keeps trotting from one side to the other every day, to preserve peace in his family.

I have in my mind a prominent man in Salt Lake City, who is the husband of half a dozen wives; he divides his time after this fashion: The first week, he stays with the first wife; the next week he is with the second; then he goes back again to the first wife for another week. He then passes the fourth week with the third wife, and back he goes again to the first wife, and so on forward and backward, until he has blessed them all with his presence. By this arrangement, the first wife has the largest share of her husband’s society. The truth, however, requires that I should state that the last wife in this particular family was a young and
very good-looking girl, and she resided with the first wife. Thus while the husband was showing his devotion to his first wife, he was rewarded by the society of his younger one. The other wives only got a week of his society in about every eleven weeks; they have thus each about five weeks of his society in every year.

When abundant wealth can supply all the wants of numerous wives and children, and furnish every accommodation that a growing family demands, much of the jealousy and ill-feeling so common to Polygamy can in some degree be avoided. But when poor men have families growing up in some old, dilapidated house, and huddled together, it is a very painful experience. Polygamy with riches is bad enough; but Polygamy with poverty is terrible.

It is said that many men in Utah have entered into polygamic life with two wives under one roof, and with but a very doubtful partition in the bed-room. But even for this those poor people were hardly to be blamed. “Build up the kingdom! build up the kingdom!” has been drummed into their ears till all good sense and propriety were driven out of their heads. It is very common, however, to see families of two or three wives living together in one small house—the women with separate bed-rooms, but with only one kitchen to accommodate them all, and with one room that serves as dining-room and parlour—all for “the Kingdom’s” sake.*

A row of doors and windows may be seen in every settlement in Utah, and even still in Salt Lake City they may be noticed. To each door and window there was a wife, a fire-place, a bedstead, three chairs, and a table. When the family of either wife increased and required more room, a shed would be added behind. This was “celestial” marriage in Utah. Yet I have known more misery to exist in a handsome residence, and more ill-feeling between two wives rolling in abundance there, than probably was ever felt in some of those mud-roofed cottages of doors and windows where half a dozen wives resided.

Poverty is ill to bear in Polygamy. It is a terrible physical affliction, and develops the lowest feelings in both women and children, who are ever afraid that other wives and their children are getting more than their

* I have frequently mentioned in this work the word “Kingdom.” To my “Gentile” readers, this expression will probably not be very clear, and it is only right that I should give a word of explanation. The Mormon doctrine is, that in the other world, a man’s children and descendants will form his “Kingdom.” Hence it is that they are anxious to have numerous families, as the more children a man has, the greater will be his power and glory hereafter, as their patriarch and monarch. A knowledge of this doctrine will give the reader a better insight into much that has been written, and will explain why it is that Polygamy has taken such hold upon the minds of the Mormon people, and how natural it is that the idea of a future “kingdom,” if once believed, should enter so deeply into their thoughts and language, and so largely influence the practice of their lives.
share of bread, potatoes, and molasses—the staples of such a home—but in the houses of the rich, with every thing in abundance at hand, it is there that the green-eyed monster—jealousy, has the fullest rein. The mind, thus unoccupied with the cares of providing for a home, is the more at liberty to count the hours of a husband’s absence, to brood over the remembrance of the last kind look which he gave to the other, or to note the more delicate shade of the last silk dress, or the richer shawl, which she did not get. I have seen such women; I have heard them confidentially tell their woes; and I have watched them pine away to that physical weakness which makes life a burden.

Possibly the other lady was innocent of ever doing any thing intentionally wrong, and quite as likely, too, the lord of the mansion was as careful as man could be to guard his tongue, to control his eyes, and to measure all his acts, and knew not why his wife should pine and always have her headaches and retire to her own apartment. With, or without cause, the sensitive woman is afflicted, and not infrequently she it is who suffers most who has the most attention. One kind, insinuating glance of the husband to the other wife obliterates from the afflicted one’s memory the ten times greater acts of kindness that he has shown to her. All is forgotten in an instant; the waters of Lethe pass over the tablets of her memory, and the recollections of the pleasantest hours of her life are washed away for ever.

The effects of Polygamy are singularly illustrated in the appearance and condition of two sisters (twins) who reside in Salt Lake City. The contrast between the two ladies is very striking, although in many respects they resemble each other so strongly that it is almost impossible even for their most intimate friends to distinguish the one from the other when apart. Sometimes even their husbands have ludicrously mistaken them. One of these ladies is the wife of a liberal, kind-hearted man, but he is a Polygamist, and has three other wives besides herself. The other sister is the wife of a monogamist; and, of course, is the sole mistress of his heart’s affections.

When, however, the sisters are together, a marked dissimilarity can be observed between them. The wife of the Polygamist—good-hearted man, as he is—has a touching look of care and sorrow constantly dwelling upon her features, for she has but a share in her husband’s love. The wife of the monogamist has no such sad expression on her face; for small as her husband’s heart may be, she knows that she alone rules therein—its sole queen and mistress.

I knew two wives—very pleasant ladies and naturally kind-hearted—who tried the Polygamic life in its varied phases. They were unhappy together and they separated, and tried the experiment of living in different parts of the city. That was, however, still worse than before. When the
ladies were both living together, either lady could at once see whether her husband’s hat and overcoat were in the hall; but when he had a second home, he was gone entirely, and no trace of him was left behind. When both were in one house, prudence might suggest to the husband the number of the absent hours; but out of the house, he might find a thousand business excuses for a prolonged absence; none of which the suffering one would believe implicitly. Besides, when all together, in the same house, one table served for both wives, and the husband could not, of course, “get a better dinner in one house than in the other.”

Women naturally seek the happiness of their husband, even though they may be bitter against him and Polygamy. They try to preserve his favour and make their homes as attractive as possible, so that he may always be pleased when he comes to see them. Out of their frequently poor allowances for the maintenance of their families, and what their own labour may add thereto, some women try to be exceedingly economical while they are living by themselves, so that when it comes to “their turn” to receive the husband, he may be well entertained. I have one lady in view who earned her husband’s flattering opinion for economy in this way, and by some unlooked for change in his family, this good opinion has been of some service to her.

That is the course adopted by a woman of years and experience. Young and thoughtless wives sometimes try the opposite experiment, and when their husbands come to see them they are always poor, suffering—always needy; they never have enough of anything. The effort at creating sympathy is not half as successful as the pleasant home and smiling welcome of more experienced ladies. Many a woman has missed her opportunity from want of a proper knowledge of human nature and good cookery.

Some of the leading men have wives in different parts of the Territory; which is, of course, very convenient when travelling. It is quite common to find a man with one family in the city and another a few miles in the country. The city residence is necessary in the pursuit of business, while the country wife overlooks the farm and dairy.

Many of the patriarchs in the country are very judicious in their selection of wives—that is, if they have comfortable homes. I remember many years ago reading a letter in a newspaper from a “brother” in the south of Utah. He had one who was a good housewife, another who was a good weaver, another was a good seamstress; and all his ambition then was to find another wife who could teach the children.

Some men are not quite so fortunate in their patriarchal relations. They do not seem to know how to dispose of themselves and keep peace in their families. In the language of the teachers, these are “weak men, who fall in love with one wife, and are not smart enough to conceal it
from the others.” Perhaps something occurs in course of time to break in upon his sweet communion with the favourite, and he leaves her and goes to another wife. Then the unfortunate patriarch has the favourite’s indignation added to the complaints of the other wives, and his latter condition is worst of all. No amount of “teaching” in the world would make such a family happy. Women are argus-eyed, and nothing can escape their notice.

No man with weaknesses should ever think of Polygamy.

Of the privacy of Brigham Young as a man, I shall not write—no, not a word. His wives and children are as sacred to me as I would desire my own family to be with the public. But as the head of a system, I have no scruples to speak of him, and of the example of “celestial marriage” which he sets before the world. He cannot consistently object, as he has repeatedly told the people to follow him as he follows Christ; and as he permits no one to question him, the natural conclusion is that his family is the pattern of the patriarchal order.

Very extravagant statements have been published of the number of Brigham Young’s wives and children. How many he has had from the time he courted Miss Martha Brotherton until now, it would be difficult to estimate. Some of his wives are dead; others have left him, and many probably have been sealed to him who strayed away like those of Brother Heber, and he knew not whither they went.

Of Brigham’s present family I am personally acquainted with nineteen of his wives. Before he was a Mormon, he had a wife and family, but of that lady I know nothing. Two of her daughters are in Utah.¹

His Mormon family begins with his first, legal, wife, who is still living—Mrs. Mary Ann Angel Young. She is probably about his own age, but is physically less preserved, and looks much older. She is a most excellent and amiable lady, and bears traces of having had her full share of earthly troubles.² She is the mother of his three prominent sons, Joseph A.; Brigham, Jr.; John W., and two daughters—Alice and Luna. Each of the sons has three wives.³ The first daughter is the third of four wives in a polygamic household. The other daughter is the first wife of a young man, and has for a companion wife her father’s daughter by another mother. The eldest daughter, Alice, has also her half-sister as an associate wife in her husband’s household.
The *legal* wife of Brigham is:

I. Mrs. Mary Ann Angel

His Polygamic Wives are:

II. Mrs. Clara Decker,  
III. Mrs. Lucy Decker,  
IV. Mrs. Emeline Free  
V. Mrs. Harriet Cook  
VI. Mrs. Twiss  
VII. Mrs. Eliza Burgess  
VIII. Mrs. Susan Snively  
IX. Mrs. Lucy Bigelow  
X. Mrs. Harriet Barney Seagers  
XI. Mrs. Martha Bowker  
XII. Mrs. Margaret Pierce  
XIII. Mrs. Amelia Folsom  
XIV. Mrs. Mary Van Cott Cobb  
XV. Mrs. Eliza Ann Jay Webb  

His “Proxy” Wives are:

XVI. Mrs. Emily Partridge  
XVII. Mrs. Zina D. Huntington Jacobs  
XVIII. Miss Eliza R. Snow  

[These were formerly “sealed” to Joseph Smith, and are now “Proxy” wives to Brigham.]

Also—

XIX. Mrs. Augusta Cobb  

[who was “sealed” to Joseph Smith since his death.]

Besides these, there may very likely be other ladies “sealed” to Brigham, but I myself know personally no more than the above named.

Brigham’s first home in Utah was in a little cottage called “The White House,” which every visitor to Salt Lake will notice on the hill-side, north of “The Eagle Gate.” In that house Mrs. Young, the first, is domiciled. She is much loved by her children, and with their attention and affection, this good old lady probably long ago became indifferent to the additions that have been made to her husband’s dominions. She is much beloved by the people for her own worth.

In the “Bee-Hive House,” the official residence of Governor Young, adjoining his office on the east, there is but one lady occupant—Mrs. Lucy Decker Young. There is a privacy about this dwelling that no one invades. It is here that the Prophet has his own private bed-room, and at this house he breakfasts—when he has been at home over night.
In the “Lion House”—a very long, narrow building on the west of the business office—the larger number of his wives reside. The basement floor is used for kitchen, dining-room, pantry, and a general receptacle for the odds and ends of a large family. The first floor has a passage up the centre, where probably half a dozen of the wives with small families have their rooms on the right-hand side. On the left, at the entrance, is the parlour, and the other rooms on that side are occupied by mothers with larger families, and ladies who have a little more than ordinary attention. The upper floor is divided into twenty square bed-rooms.

There is no extravagance in the furniture of the homes of these wives, but they are comfortable and kept neat and clean.

It is in this “Lion House” where he usually dines at three P.M. Mrs. Twiss Young is housekeeper, and excellently fitted for the duties of that position. At three punctually the bell rings, and the mothers, with their children, move down to the dining-room, and all are seated at a very long table, that has had to be lengthened by turning round at the end of the room. Each mother has her children around her. Brigham sits at the head of the table, with his favourite—when in the house—vis-a-vis, or on his left, and any visitor sits on his right hand. The repast is frugal, but ample. Brigham is a sober and exceedingly economical man. This is the first time he sees his family.

In the evening, at seven o’clock, the bell again rings, and the mothers and the children fill the sides and ends of the parlour. When they are all seated, the Patriarch enters, takes his seat by the parlour table, and chats quietly with those who may go in with him to prayers. When all the members of the family are assembled, the door is closed; they kneel, and he prays for all—for Zion, and for the “Kingdom.” That is the last they see of him, unless they seek him privately.

Outside of the wall that surrounds these houses he has wives occupying six other houses. One other wife is far down South, another is at the farm, and one “proxy” wife lives with her son-in-law.

The wives of Brigham have all good homes, have the necessaries of life, and are comfortably, respectably, and neatly dressed. With the exception of the one who is called his “favourite,” and her growing rival, there is no indication of extravagance among them.

Up to an addition of late years, the community heard nothing of his family but what was pleasant and creditable to them. His wives are kind and faithful mothers, seeking to live the religion they have been taught, and ambitious to increase the glory of their “lord.” They are women who would be regarded with respect in the most moral community of any country; and are as far from resembling the Sultanas of an Eastern harem as one thing can be different from another. Most of them are women of devout faith. I know them all personally—some of them intimately; and,
while I have heard from some, with heavy hearts, of their difficulties in bearing "the cross" which all Mormon women have to carry, they have tried, I know, to be submissive, and I think it is due to them that I should make the present recognition of their goodness of disposition and purity of soul.

With his family he is said to be kind; but it is supposed to be more the awe which his position as Prophet inspires, than the love which they bear him as a man, which renders him successful in managing them. At the same time, that sweet familiarity is destroyed which should exist between husband and wife, father and children. He aims to be looked upon more as a ruler than as the head of a family.

With such a number of wives, he cannot possibly wait upon them in visiting, frequenting the ball-room, or places of public entertainment. With the exception of his reigning favourite, whoever she may happen for the time to be, no one expects his attentions. At the theatre, which is his own, a full number of seats are reserved, and his wives attend when they please or they remain at home. They sit in the body of the parquette, among the rest of the people; but one of the two proscenium boxes is reserved for him, and beside him is a chair for the favourite Amelia.

When he goes to the ball-room, the same special attention is manifest. He dances first with the favourite, and, if half a dozen more of his wives have accompanied them, he will dance with each of them once in the course of the evening; but with the favourite he dances as frequently as any youth in the ball-room with his first maiden love. The Apostles and leading men of the community, who dance attendance upon him and desire his favour, are sure to seek the pleasure of her hand and place her in the same cotillion with Brigham, who is thus able all the evening to enjoy her company.

This favouritism is ill-looked upon by the Saints, and, in their estimation, savours more of Turkey than of the "Celestial Kingdom." Were there greater devotion, or greater virtue in her, the people might find some argument for his defence; but the circumstance, whenever alluded to in society, is generally answered with a smile or a shrug of the shoulders.

Some Apostles look with pain upon this boyishness of the Prophet, and deplore it. Most of them are attached to their first wives, and have shown to them consideration and attention which has not always pleased Brigham. I have heard more than one of them express the wish that Brother Brigham’s devotion to the fair sex had more direction toward his first wife. It is but just to the reigning favourite to state that she has not been wanting in kindness and respect to Mrs. Young.

Brigham has had his favourites before; and, if he were to live many years longer, with the privilege hitherto enjoyed by him of doing just what he pleased, he doubtless would lose his fancy for his present toy and seek
another. One of his recent wives is a very handsome lady, and his attentions in that direction are already very marked.⁵

As I write, the thought comes over me,—What infatuated beings the women of Utah have been, with all these evidences of human weakness and passion exhibited by the “Priesthood” continually before their eyes, that they should ever believe that there is even a shadow of divinity in Polygamy! How could they imagine for an instant that it was possible for such a doctrine to emanate from God, or from that Adorable Being who looked upon woman with the sweetest tenderness that humanity could express! What a terrible infatuation! It is fearful to contemplate!