CHAPTER XX.


For many years there were very few Gentiles in Utah. Most of these were merchants and their clerks, and teamsters. There were also two or three Federal officials. Although they were but few, their influence was always dreaded by the Mormon leaders; and the Tabernacle and Meeting-Houses resounded with something disparaging to the Gentiles. Some of them doubtless commanded very little respect. But it mattered not how much others might be respected elsewhere, how pure and blameless their lives, it was enough that they were Gentiles, and a worse thing still to be a gentlemanly or educated Gentile. The pleasant manners of a cultivated life were set down as the wiles of the Evil One to seduce the simple and trusting maidens of the flock, and rendered the gentleman an object of suspicion and distrust. The rough and uncultivated could be easily guarded against and easily exposed.

No young woman could possibly accept any attentions from a Gentile without being disgraced—it was an unpardonable sin, and she was certain to be denounced and abused in the Ward meetings. It was a risk of reputation for any woman to be seen talking to a Gentile. It mattered not where they might have met before—at the store, or at a friend’s house, or even before they had gone to Utah—to recognize a Gentile in the street was to avow an intimacy which was associated with a suspicion of the vilest conduct. For any family to entertain gentlemen who brought letters of introduction from friends abroad was not impossible, it is true; but the less they had of this kind of thing the better. If these gentlemen were simply passing through Salt Lake City, an invitation to the theatre might be accepted by any member of the family; but they would be very
thankful when it was over, knowing well that all eyes were upon them. But if this friend happened to prolong his visit, and should chance to give a second invitation for the theatre or a carriage-drive, some falsehood had to be conjured up as an excuse for declining.

Some toleration was extended in the case of my husband, as he was an editor, and necessarily had many visitors whom he took pleasure in entertaining; but it was considered by many pious friends that we had more of that kind of association than was beneficial. At the present time, I have little doubt that our leaving the church is attributed to this cause.

I would not have permitted my daughters, had they had such a desire, to have accepted any attentions from a Gentile. Not that I believed it was wrong—I knew better—but I was afraid of the bitter tongue of scandal, which I knew was ready to wag. A very sweet little girl who lived near us, and who had associated with my daughter while growing up, became acquainted with Gentile ladies and visited them at home. There, naturally, she became acquainted with Gentile gentlemen; and as she was very good-looking she received attentions which were to her agreeable, particularly in her lonely situation. Of course, the acquaintance with my daughter had to be stopped, although I believed this little girl pure and spotless. The scandal against her as she grew up became of the very vilest character, and her offence was simply associating with the Gentiles. Had her faith in the Mormon Church been unshaken, she would certainly not have formed such acquaintances; but the poor girl was disgusted with the wretched phases of Polygamy constantly before her eyes—her mother could have told an awful tale of sorrow.

Another very beautiful young Mormon lady, the daughter of a gentleman who, when living, was one of the highest dignitaries of the church, was once chosen for her handsome appearance to represent the goddess of liberty in a Fourth of July procession. When Brigham heard it, the committee were rebuked and the young lady insulted by their afterwards refusing to accept her, although she had been specially invited—her unfitness being that she kept Gentile society.

These young ladies are now married to very respectable Gentiles.

When the United States army went to Utah in 1858, one half of the old Tabernacle was appropriated to the sisters, and the other half to the brethren. The centre of the new Tabernacle is now devoted exclusively to the sisters—no husband or brother sits near them. When Brigham built the theatre it was also specially partitioned off. The Mormon families occupied the parquette, and the Gentiles had the first circle. Of course, the poorer classes had no souls to contaminate, were less cared for, and Gentiles and Mormons sat together in the second and third circles.

At one time, the Saints were not permitted to keep Gentile boarders and retain good standing in the church. Some persons would persist in
doing so; but it was a source of great scandal, and they subjected themselves to attacks in the sermons. It was told them that Gentile society would bring a pernicious influence into their families. But what a change has come over the affairs of Utah! One of Brigham Young’s own wives, the one who was once the reigning favourite, now keeps Gentile boarders. Not long ago, I made some remarks about the inconsistency of this to a very good sister, who by-the-by was doing the same thing herself, and was also one of the persons most opposed to our receiving Gentile company. She replied that the times had changed, and that Brigham Young could not be responsible for what his wives did; they would do as they pleased. This excuse was worse than none; for every one in Salt Lake City knows that none of Brigham Young’s wives would do any such thing without his permission. The wife alluded to is as obedient as any he has got, and a very excellent lady with a large family. It enables her probably with her numerous children to procure many things which they might otherwise have to dispense with, and as long as “there is money in it,” and his treasury is saved, Brigham will “wink at it,” as he says the Lord does at certain things among the Saints. I could mention Mormons who have had a very bad name for years for keeping Gentile boarders. They will doubtless now feel better since it has become respectable and no longer renders them liable to “damnation.”

Notwithstanding the vigilance of the priesthood, several young ladies of highly respectable families have preferred Gentile husbands, and have left the Territory. These have invariably been traduced, and every rumour of misfortune occurring to them afterwards was a sweet morsel to be retailed with very ill-disguised gratification. For any lady to be spoken of with respect or as holding a good position after leaving the church is particularly obnoxious to the devoted Mormons, and any evil which may befall such a person is regarded as a judgment from heaven. Kind-hearted and fraternal as the people are, the rulers seem to rejoice in nothing so much as the misery or ill-fortune of any one who has left the church.

It is not strange that spirited, proper-feeling girls should find the society of Gentiles acceptable. There need be no mystery about it. The Mormon boys and young men have heard so much of polygamic preaching, and have had so much of its practice before their eyes, that many of them never can visit the Mormon girls without speaking of it. I have frequently heard sensitive young maidens relate that boys, when visiting, were in the habit of speaking of their “privileges;” telling what they would do when they got married; how they thought that they would take two wives at once, to begin with; how they would live with them afterwards, etc.

Girls of the slightest feeling and intelligence are naturally shocked at this kind of talk, even though it has no practical effect on them. Polygamy
is disagreeable enough in any form, but when made a subject of boasting by silly boys and ignorant men, it is doubly offensive. In Gentile society, the girls are at least spared conversation on such subjects; and, when they are by themselves, they do not fail to remark it to each other. In polygamic Mormonism, woman is a convenience; in a proper Gentile home, woman is a companion, and this comparison is really more apprehended than any immoral conduct. A polygamous wife, who is one of many, who sees her husband only occasionally, and that generally as a favour, cannot well see a Gentile lady at home without comparing situations. It makes them unhappy, and that in a great measure is why the Mormons have been taught to avoid Gentile society.

Writers upon Utah have said that the Mormon women were extremely homely and coarse-looking. This is very unjust, for, doubtless, nowhere is there to be found—taking them as a whole—a more fresh, happy, and good-looking set of girls than among the Mormons. It is only after marriage that many of them lose their elasticity of step, their joyous, happy looks, and that animation of countenance which makes even a homely face look beautiful at times. On some of their faces may be detected a deep melancholy; but, if they can be diverted from their sad thoughts for ever so short a time, they become animated, and even, it may be, beautiful. Add to this secret sorrow which casts a gloom upon their countenances, the little opportunity which they have of cultivating their taste for dress, and it will not be wondered at if the Mormon women are not always very beautiful to a man who is captivated by outward appearances. Many of these women are taught to be satisfied with simple clothing, and it is constantly drummed into their ears that love of dress is a sin in the sight of God. Thus this love of the beautiful, which is a part of woman’s nature, has to be crushed out entirely, and that, too frequently, by her own husband, whose example is entirely opposed to his teaching; for a Mormon, if he can afford it, is very scrupulous in his own dress. Those very men who are most severely economical with their wives, and who think that they should be satisfied with homespun and sunbonnets, are they who are the soonest captivated by an elegantly-dressed and fashionable woman, and often become perfectly infatuated about her.

This has been a cause of much discontent among the women of Utah; for they very justly feel that if they had as fine feathers, they might make just as handsome birds.

I remember, at one of the parties, a lady was very nicely dressed, and one of the principal authorities of the Church said to her, “Sister, don’t you think that you spend too much time and thought on your dress?” She answered, “Do you think so? After all, a person looks a great deal better when they give a little attention to their dress. You, Brother Kimball, look a great deal better since you have worn a coat of broadcloth, cut in the
fashionable style.” He simply answered that it was not his wish to wear other clothes than what he used to, but that his wives insisted upon his doing so. Men in Utah are not guilty of following the advice of their wives, except it be in this one particular; for Brigham himself has said that “it is a disgrace in the sight of heaven for a man to follow his wife.”

In Utah, as well as elsewhere, there are certainly women to be found who never had any good looks to lose, or a sensitive nature to contend with; but it is not true to assert this as a characteristic of the whole community. The women of Utah are like women of their class everywhere.

The construction of the Pacific Railroad, the discovery of the great wealth in the mountains of Utah, and the free expression of the sentiments of thinking men who have outlived and abandoned Mormonism, have given the death-blow to Polygamy. Were there none but Mormons in the Territory, it might have lived on so long as they were willing to remain in poverty; but with prosperity, and the changed circumstances which are ever certain to follow wealth, Polygamy is a doomed institution.

Whatever, in the providence of God, may be the action of Congress toward Utah, if the word of a feeble woman can be listened to, let me respectfully ask the Honourable Senators and Representatives of the United States that, in the abolition of Polygamy, if such should be the decree of the nation, let no compromise be made where subtilty can bind the woman now living in Polygamy to remain in that condition. Legalize, if Congress will, the marriages that have been made, and legitimatize the children born in that wedlock, if such can be done, for the women and children are innocent; but let one proviso ever remain, that any wife living in Polygamy, at the time of the passage of that Act of Congress, shall be then and ever afterwards free to abandon that relationship when her conscience shall so dictate, without legal hindrance, and that she and her children shall be provided for as if she had been his first and legal wife whom the courts of law had separated “for cause.”

I have now completed my task, and am about to lay down my pen. I shall, I know, be condemned by those hymn-singing, devotional women, who, childless and husbandless here, dream of the glories of the world to come, while they never knew the duties, the obligations, the sweet and hallowed sympathies of the world in which they live. In their eyes, I have doubtless committed the “unpardonable sin.” I have written for the suffering and sorrowing women in Polygamy. They will understand me, and to them I appeal. Before the Great Tribunal I will cheerfully meet their verdict.