

# CHAPTER V.

## MY FATHER'S PLURAL WIFE— CHILDHOOD IN POLYGAMY.

Childhood in Mormondom.—A striking Contrast.—The Sorrows of my Earliest Years.—How my Mother received Polygamy.—Submitting to the Rod.—Clinging to Love and Home.—Resigning all for Religion.—Strange ways of glorifying God.—The Reward of Faithfulness.—The Prophet Joseph imparts a New Religious Mystery.—The Breaking-up of a Home—Fears of Rebellion.—The Struggle of Faith against Nature.—Seeking Rest, but finding None.—Brigham's "Counsels."—A New Wife Selected.—My Parents enter into Polygamy.—The New Bride, Elizabeth.—The Marriage Ceremony.—My Mother Sealed.—She is to become a Queen.—Domestic Arrangements in Polygamy.—Bearing the Cross.—A First Wife's Sorrows.—"Where does Polygamy Hurt?"—The Mormon Husband; his position and Privileges.

I often wonder if there is a child in Mormondom, born under the blight of polygamy, who knows what it is to have a happy, joyous childhood, rendered more happy and more joyous by the smiling, calm content of the mother in whose arms its tiny infant form lies cradled. I fear the cases are as rare as happy women are.



True, childhood always has a certain careless happiness of its own; that even the saddest surroundings cannot wholly repress; but even this happiness is embittered by the tearful eyes that gaze into trustful baby ones, and the lips that

### 99 RECEIVING THE FIRST PLURAL WIFE.

quiver with pain, as they try to smile back into laughing baby faces.

In the happy homes which I have visited since I

broke the chains that bound me, and came forth a free woman, unshackled in thought and untrammelled in action, although a wanderer on the face of the earth, with no abiding-place where to stay my feet, I have been compelled to contrast the difference between childhood in a monogamic country and in a polygamous one; and when I have seen the mother's face grow almost divine in its radiant content as she smiled down into the face of the little one sheltered so closely in her heart, I have felt my heart throb and ache with jealous anguish for the little ones in Utah, and above all for their weary-hearted mothers, to whom maternity brings no such joy, and added love, and tender care.

I was consecrated to sorrow by the baptism of my mother's tears upon my baby brow. I never remember on her face one such look as I see daily upon mothers' faces now. My baby hands wiped away tears, my baby fingers stroked a cheek furrowed by them, and my baby eyes never saw beyond the mist in hers. I came to her when the greatest misery of her life was about to fall upon her; and that misery came to her, as it came to all the women then, under the guise of religio—something that must be endured "for Christ's sake." And as her religion had brought her nothing but persecution and sacrifice, she submitted to this new trial as to everything that had preceded it, and received polygamy as a cross laid upon her, but which strength would be given her to bear.

She had never questioned any of Joseph Smith's "revelations," and she did not dare do so now, although this one came to her like a sudden and heavy blow, hurting heart and soul, and rendering the thought of life unendurable. Hitherto, although her sufferings had been severe, and her privations many, yet through them all she had been sustained

### 100 LIVING UP TO HIS PRIVILEGES

by her husband's love. That was hers, and together they had shared poverty and tasted plenty. Their sufferings had brought them closer together, and whether in plenty or poverty, they had been happy in each other and in their children, and had made a home, and a cheerful one, wherever they had been, one in which the spirit of love ruled supreme. Now, her religion told her that she was selfish and wicked to try and keep this home and husband. The one must be broken and desolated, and other shared with some one else. "The Lord commanded it." What a blasphemy and satire on Him who is the God of Love, that He should make his children unhappy, and wreck all hopes of peace and content, for His glory! It seems as though this one act of Smith's alone should have opened the eyes of this deluded People, and shown them that their false Prophet was not taught of God, as he pretended, and they so fondly believed, but that he was impelled by the demons of covet-

ousness and lust. But their eyes were blinded, and they could not see; their reason was enthralled, and they did not know it was bound; their wills were obedient to his, and he held them soul and body, and played with them as though they were so many puppets, helpless and lifeless out of his hands.

Being accounted among the specially “faithful,” my parents were among the first to whom polygamy was taught by Joseph Smith himself, and my father was commanded by him to “live up to his privileges,” and to take another wife.

At first, the thought of taking a second wife to share his home with the one whom he first loved, who had been the object of his youthful dreams and of his manhood’s devotion; who had stood by him, through every reverse, with the courage, and consideration, and love which only a strong-natured, tender-hearted, earnest-souled woman could show under such circumstances; who was, in every sense, a helpmeet, and above all, the mother of his children—was

#### 101 HOW THE “REVELATION” WAS RECEIVED

hateful to him. It took a long time, too, to overcome his aversion to the new system. He and my mother had many a long, tearful talk over it; and although they received the doctrine, believing that it must be right, they could not for some time make up their minds to put in practice. In the mean time Joseph was assassinated, and for a little time they were bound to carry out Joseph’s revelations, and this one relating to the plural wife system was strongly, though secretly, urged upon the Saints. Both my father and mother were visited by Brigham, and “counseled” in regard to the matter. My mother has often said that the “Revelation” was the most hateful thing in the world to her, and she dreaded and abhorred it, but she was afraid to oppose it, lest she should be found “fighting against the Lord.” The thought that she might be obliged to live in a polygamous relation with another woman filled her with horror and fear; but she was assured by her religious leader, that the feeling was merely the effect of her early training, which she would soon outgrow under the benign influences of the gospel. For several months she struggled with herself over this subject, before she could think patiently of it for even a minute. She wanted to have it made easy and plain to her, for she could not bear to repudiate any of her beloved Prophet’s teachings. She agonized over it day and night; she prayed incessantly to be given the true “spirit” of submission; if it was God’s will, she wanted strength to endure it; and she believed she should have it, for surely the kind and loving Father would not impose upon his children burdens greater than they could bear. She had not learned, as she has since, that the God of the Mormon belief was not the heavenly

Father whose love the Saviour taught, but a jealous God, a cruel, avenging Spirit, who demanded blood-offerings to appease his awakened wrath. He was not the tender Parent, all-wise, all-powerful, and all-loving, whom she revered and adored. There was little

#### 102 ELIZABETH.

use in looking towards her people’s God for help of comfort. Retribution, and justice untempered by mercy, were all He had for His subjects, not children.

During all these months of wavering doubt and untold misery, my father never attempted to influence my mother’s decision in the least; she had her battle to fight, and he his; the end was inevitable for both; but for all this the contest was no less severe. Brigham’s “counseling” began to assume the form of commands, which at last grew so imperative that they were obliged to be obeyed. My mother did not rebel; she looked upon it as duty, and she was determined to do it silently and uncomplainingly, if not willingly and cheerfully. My parents consulted together regarding the choice of the new wife, and fixed upon the person with surprising unanimity. They were each anxious to help and comfort the other in this as they had been in every other emergency of their lives. My father wished, if he must take another wife, to choose one who should be agreeable to my mother, or rather as agreeable as one woman could be to another under such circumstances; and my mother was, for her part, equally determined not to oppose his in his selection. But the opposition was not necessary, as his choice fell upon the very person whom my mother would have selected, had the task rested with her alone.

A short time after my birth, a Miss Elizabeth Taft came, with a younger sister, to live in our house. She was a very pleasant, cheery, affectionate person, and all the family became very much attached to her. Father, mother, children, all quoted “Elizabeth,” and she became almost a part of our very selves. She was thoughtful of my mother, and tender to us little ones, petting us and indulging us in our childish whims, and we, in return, loved her very dearly. She was a good woman in its highest interpretation, and devotedly religious. Naturally enough, seeing her so constantly, both my parents thought of her

#### 103 “SEALED” FOR ALL TIME AND ETERNITY.

as the new wife. If they must enter polygamy, they knew they could do no better than to take her into the family, if she could be induced to consider the subject in the same light. My father made proposals to her, and my mother seconded them. The thought of living in a polygamic relation with

any one was very unpleasant to her, as indeed it is to every true woman; but she desired to live her religion, and believing this to be a part of it, accepted my father's proposal, and became his first plural wife when I was about a year old.

Her parents were in Michigan at the time, and Elizabeth wished to wait until their arrival; but Brigham, who, as a matter of course, was interested in the affair, counseled the marriage to proceed, and of course it was considered right and prudent to obey his counsel; and as he was hurrying forward the endowments in the Nauvoo Temple, preparatory to leaving for the West, the parties most nearly concerned in the matter thought it best to hasten the nuptials.

My mother was to be "sealed" at the same time, as, according to Joseph's Revelation, her former marriage, having been performed in the Gentile form, was not binding. The place of sealing was the Temple; and there, one midwinter day, in the beginning of the year 1846, my mother was sealed to my father for "time and eternity," after which she gave him Elizabeth as his wife according to the Mormon marriage formula. It was with a steady voice and calm composure that she pronounced the words that gave another woman a share in her husband's love; but it was none the less with a heavy, breaking heart. Think of it, wives, who are happy in undivided homes, and in your husbands' unshared love; who should bear his name, and be a mother to his children; that all this should be done "in the

#### 104 BEAUTIES OF THE "CELESTIAL" SYSTEM.

name of the Lord," and without shrinking or complaint on your part. Take this home to yourself, and you will be able to appreciate as never before the horrors of Mormonism.

It was January that my father obeyed the "counsel" of his Prophet and leader, and in March his new wife's parents returned, and were shocked and grieved beyond measure to find their daughter married into polygamy; yet, being strong in faith, and much attached to their church and their religion, submitted without a murmur, like the good Saints they were.

My mother was so quiet and uncomplaining in the position which she had voluntarily assumed, that she was praised by the officious brethren and sisters for submitting with such good grace, and was told by them that great glory awaited her as a reward, and also, as she had so readily made the great sacrifice, she would always be recognized as the first wife, which, among the Mormons, is considered an exceeding great honor. One of the sisters, who was a strong advocate of the new "Celestial" system, said to her:

"You will stand at the head of your husband's kingdom as a queen; no one can ever take your place from you,

but you will be honored to stand by his side through the endless ages of eternity." It was by such nonsensical talk and absurd promises as these that the Mormon leaders tried to make polygamy attractive to the women who were already married, and render them more willing to enter it. Such absurdities may have weight with some women, but they did not affect my mother, nor render the cross she had assumed any more easy to bear. Her husband's undivided love during time was better than royal honors in eternity.

The new wife lived in the family, and to outward appearance everything was unchanged. Only a few of the "very faithful" knew of the new arrangement; it was deemed best to keep it a secret from the majority of the people, to whom polygamy was not a fixed fact, and who were wa-

#### 105 "DON'T YOU BELIEVE IN POLYGAMY?"

ing slightly in the faith on account of it. The time had not yet come to promulgate the doctrine freely, and many left Nauvoo for the West quite ignorant that the system really existed in their midst. I think many of them never would have crossed those endless plains, and sought shelter under the shadow of the Rocky Mountains, had they known what unhappiness awaited them. But unchanged as our family circle was to those outside it, within was unhappiness and bitterness of spirit. It was much harder to endure, even, than my mother had anticipated. Terrible as was the thought, the reality was much more horrible. She thought she had counted the cost; she found she had, in her ignorance, been unable to estimate it. Every hour of her life her heart was torn by some new agony. She was compelled to see many of the tender, wifely little offices, trifles in themselves, that she had been accustomed to perform, done by other hands, and she herself always turned off with the excuse, "You see, dear, you have the children to attend to, and I did not wish to give you trouble." Trouble! As though anything done for him, with a heart full of love, could be accounted as such! That hurt her almost as much as to see another doing what it had always been her delight to do.

As is the custom of men in polygamy, my father fell more easily into the new arrangement, and even found a certain comfort and content in it, and he wondered very much that my mother could not be happy as well. Indeed, he was a little impatient, after a while, that she would not say she was content and satisfied in the new relation.

"I don't understand it," he would say; "you were willing at first. What is the difficulty now? Don't you think Elizabeth a good, true girl?"

"Yes, indeed," was always the reply; for my mother was too just a woman to do even a rival wrong.

"Don't you believe in polygamy, then?" he would ask, determined to get to the bottom of the mystery.

106 THE MORMON MOTHER  
AND HER BABY GIRL.

“Yes, I suppose so. I wish to live *my* religion,” was the dreary reply.

“Well, what is to be done about it?” was the next anxious question.

“O, I don’t know,” my mother would say, in bitter despair; “but I can’t endure this life.”

“And yet you entered in voluntarily. I don’t understand you; you are strangely inconsistent.”

Her remonstrance and his comfort never went beyond this point. There was nothing more to be said. She had protested with unutterable anguish against the life that she felt was false and in direct contradiction to every law of moral right, although she was told to look upon it as “divine;” and the only answer she could get was, “You are inconsistent; you entered the relation voluntarily.” The very truth of this reply silenced her, but it did not make her burdens any lighter or easier to bear.

She saw that patient endurance was all that was required of her, and all she could give. Her husband was hers no longer; she herself had given another woman the same right to his care that she had; and now she turned to all that was left her in life that she could call her own—her children. Had it not been for us she would have prayed to die. I was the baby, and she has said that at that time I was the strongest tie which held her to life. If it had not been for me, lying helpless in her arms, she would have taken her life into her own hands, and put an end to it then and there. But she could not endure the thought of leaving me, her only daughter—her baby girl—alone and unshielded by a mother’s care. My brothers, who were quite large boys at that time, she thought would not miss her, nor need her so much; and many a time she has knelt with me clasped fast in her arms, the tears falling on my wondering face, and prayed frantically that we both might die. The thought that she had brought a girl into the world to suffer as she was now suffering, to find her whole life’s happiness

107 “DO YOU THINK I HAVE NO TRIALS?”

made a wreck by the religion which should be a stay and a comfort, drove her almost wild. She had buried one little girl, and I have often heard her thank God that He had taken her to Himself before life became a terrible bitterness and burden. She often says, in referring to her sufferings at that time, and the desperate state she was in, she wonders she did not commit suicide; what kept her from it she cannot tell to this day, unless the thought that these polygamous relations did not end with time, but were carried on

through all eternity.

She had to keep a double guard on her tongue and on her actions. She did not like to vex her husband, and



neither did she wish to grieve the young wife, whose position was no pleasanter than her own. Besides, a husband in polygamy is very sensitive regarding the treatment of the last wife by those who have preceded her, and she knew that no act of hers would escape her husband’s notice, even had she been inclined to ill-treat her rival.

Once, very mildly and kindly, she tried to tell some of her troubles to Elizabeth, and begged her not to add to her sorrow by bestowing so many marks of affection on my father in her presence. The young wife turned on her quickly, and demanded, bitterly—

108 EVEN WORSE THAN I THOUGHT.

“Do you think *I* have no trials?”

“God forgive me, and help us both; *I know you have,*” was my mother’s quick and sympathetic answer.

After all, what could she say or do? She had influenced the girl quite as much as my father had, believing she was only doing what was right, and that the act, hard as it was, would bring its own blessing with it. Instead, it brought what polygamy always does bring—the curse of a wrecked home and a life’s unhappiness.

A gentleman visiting Salt Lake City for the first time once asked me where polygamy hurt the most.

“It hurts all over, body, and soul, mind and heart,” was my reply. “I can’t tell a spot that it does not hurt.”

“It is even worse that I thought,” he replied, with a shudder.

The reply which I gave then I would give again. Never, until a woman ceased to love her husband, can polygamy cease to be anything but a series of cruel stings, alike to pride and conscience.

I have tried to portray a little something of the mis-

ery that fell upon our family by the introduction of polygamy into it, but I have utterly failed to give an adequate idea of it. No pen can possibly depict the heart-breaking sufferings that are endured by women in this relation, and no one can imagine or understand them who has not experienced them. And yet, in spite of all this unhappiness, we were accounted a model family, and were pointed out as the best exponents of the system. "They are so united!" was the admiring verdict. This was due a great deal to my mother's exertions and her conscientiousness. Having taken this new mode as a religious duty, she was determined not to be found wanting in readiness to perform whatever it required of her. A happy, contented spirit she could not give; but she could show patience, long-suffering, and a calm, though by no means cheerful, face and manner.

#### 109 MEN GET THE BEST OF IT.

Then, my father was very just in the treatment of his wives. One did not fare better than the other in any respect. If he purchased an article of wearing apparel for one, he got its counterpart for the other; in every particular they shared alike. His position was by no means an enviable one; still it was preferable to that of either of his wives. Men, as I said before, always get the best of it in polygamy; and always become more easily reconciled to it than do the women. At meetings and all social assemblies, my father appeared with both wives, and they deferred to each other in the most charming way, both of them being too sensible and too proud to show the slightest feeling where it might be commented on. Then, too, in spite of the natural bitterness of feeling between them, there was a mutual respect and regard between them, and each was too just to lay her troubles at the door of the other. Had these two women, with their generous natures and firm principles, met on any other ground, they would not only have "got along" amiably and quietly as they did, but they would have been warm, earnest friends, and the respectful regard would have grown into positive affection. As it was, they had nothing but kind words for each other, my mother, especially, pitying the young wife as she did herself. Elizabeth was still kind to us children, and gained the love which she has held ever since, and which she fully deserved. Still the introduction of polygamy into our midst was not a pleasant thing, and we little ones, even, felt instinctively its baleful influence.

But we were to be diverted from the contemplation of its miseries by a new and absorbing excitement. The Mormon people were again compelled to move, leaving their beautiful new city in the "defiled hands" of the Gentiles; and in the very midst of our first family trouble and unhappiness came the command to seek another Zion, since this could no longer be a shelter for the Saints.