

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE WIVES OF THE PROPHET.—BROTHER BRIGHAM'S DOMESTIC TROUBLES.

The Wives of the Prophet.—Lucy Decker.—A Mysterious Disappearance.—Lucy's Boys.—Brigham's Wife Clara.—Her Busy Household Work.—About the Girls.—Harriet Cook.—She Expresses Unpleasant Opinions.—Brigham is frightened of Her.—He Keeps out of the Way.—Amelia and the Sweetmeats.—How one of Brigham's Daughters scandalized the Saints.—How Mrs. Twiss Manages the Prophet's house.—the Work a Woman can Do.—Martha Bowker and her silent Work.—Sweet and saintly doings of the Prophet.—Concerning Harriet Barney.—The Wife who "Served Seven Years" for a Husband.—Another English Wife of the Prophet.—The "Young Widow of Nauvoo."

LUCY DECKER was the wife of Isaac Seeley, and had two children before she became a convert to Mormonism, and removed to Nauvoo. The husband had been esteemed a fine young man, and to all appearances they were living quite harmoniously, when Brigham saw her, and fell in love with her. He soon persuaded her that Seeley could never give her an "exaltation" in the eternal world; but that, if she would permit him, he would secure her salvation, and make her a queen in the



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"first resurrection." She was bewildered by the promises, and consented to become "sealed" to him *secretly*.

In some way or other, Seeley found out the true state of affairs, and was exceedingly indignant, and made some very unpleasant threats of vengeance against Brigham Young for breaking up his family. Brigham at once com-

menced endeavoring to turn the tide of public opinion against him, by resorting to his always ready weapon, his tongue, and insinuating things against him; among others, he took care that the impression should get abroad that he had threatened to kill his wife. These reports gained little credence among those who knew him well; yet Brigham, with Joseph to help him, was sure to succeed in his efforts to ruin the men, or to drive him away, so that he should no longer stand in his light, and Seeley suddenly disappeared.

All sorts of rumors were afloat respecting his disappearance; some said he was driven from Nauvoo at the point of the knife; others said he was dead; others, that he left voluntarily, disgusted with the entire proceedings; at all events, he has never appeared to interfere with his wife's later domestic arrangements.

Lucy lives in the "Bee Hive," which is supposed to be Brigham's own particular residence, at least his private office and own sleeping-room are there, and he takes his meals there except his dinner. She has always had the charge of this house, and has always been quite highly valued by her husband on account of her numerous domestic virtues, for she is a superior housekeeper, and even Brigham finds great difficulty in getting a good opportunity to find fault with her. It has been Brigham's custom always to keep the "Bee Hive" for his exclusive use, and none of his wives were allowed there, except Lucy Decker, who had the charge. But after he married Amelia, before her house was finished, he brought her to board there with him, contrary to all precedent; and Lucy Decker was not

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only obliged to cook for them, but to wait upon them at the table, in the capacity of a servant, and Amelia never recog-



nized her in any other way, never speaking to her as an equal, but ordering her about at her caprice, and the husband allowed it. But then it is no uncommon thing in Utah for a man to marry a woman for a servant; it is more economical then to hire them. It saves the wages.

When Lucy Decker's sons, Brigham's children, grew up, they accepted mercantile situations, as he expects all to work, which is certainly all right; but they were not allowed to stay with their mother without paying him the same amount for board that they would have to pay elsewhere. A married daughter

is also allowed to remain with her mother under the same conditions.

She is a short, fleshy woman, with a pleasant, small-featured face, dark eyes and hair, and as practical and matter-of-fact in manner as you please.

She has seven children—Brigham-Heber, Fanny, Ernest, Arthur, Mira, Feramorz, and Clara. Fanny is the plural wife of George Tahtcher, who also numbers her half sister, Luna, among his wives. Herber and Ernest are both married, but have, as yet, but one wife each. They do not seem in a hurry to add to their kingdom.

Clara Decker is the younger sister of Lucy, and was “sealed” to Brigham at the same time. She is a very intelligent, prepossessing woman, and for some time was quite a favorite with her husband. Like her sister, she is short and stout; but she has a very sweet, benevolent face, which truly mirrors her character. She is an indefatigable, but a quiet work-

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er, and the good she does, not only in the Prophet’s household, but out of it, cannot be estimated. In spite of her multitudinous home cares, she finds time to visit the sick and comfort he afflicted, and there is no woman more universally beloved than she.

She has been of great service to her husband in assisting him in the management of his large family, and in addition to her own family of children, she has the care of Margaret Alley’s. She has been as tender and kind to them as to her own, and since their own mother’s sad death they have received an untiring and affectionate maternal care from her. When her husband has taken a new wife, she has often been applied to, to assist him in preparing the house-keeping outfit, which she always does willingly and cheerfully, never manifesting the least jealousy, nor making herself disagreeable in any way. Her grief’s she keeps to herself, and gives a kindly, cheery countenance to her family and the world.

She has long since lost all love for her husband, and although she retains her faith in the underlying principles of her religion, is by no means so blinded by bigotry as not to see its faults. She expresses her opinions rarely, but when she does, they are given decisively, and her husband is not at a loss to understand her meaning. He has a high regard for her services, and I really believe accords her more respect than he does most women. She never appears in public with him, being always too much “engaged” at home.

No one can know Clara Decker without loving her; she has a nature that wins affection spontaneously, and that holds it after it is won. She has three children, all girls—

Nettie, Nabbie, and Lulu. Nettie is married to Henry Snell, and is the only wife. Clara and her children are inmates of the Lion House. She has more rooms than the others, as her family numbers so many members.

The third “wife in plurality” was Harriet Cook, to whom

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the Prophet was sealed at Nauvoo before the church left that place for the west. She was at that time rather a good-looking girl, tall and fair, with blue eyes, but with a sharp nose, that so plainly bespoke her disposition that no one was surprised to hers, not very long after her marriage, that her husband had found he had “caught a Tartar.” She was in my mother’s employ at Nauvoo, and I think there is where the Prophet became enamoured of her. She does not hesitate to say that “Mormonism, polygamy, and the whole of it, is a humbug, and may go to the devil for all her.” Her husband never attempts to argue any theological question with her, but gets out of the way as speedily as possible, letting her abuse religion and him as much as she pleases behind his back.

Brigham, finding her so ungovernable, and being quite unable to exact submission or obedience from her, refused to live with her; and, although she still lives at the “Lion House” with the other wives, avoids her as studiously as possible, and will not even notice her, unless positively compelled to do so.

She has one son, Oscar, whom his father calls a reprobate, and has entirely disowned; a wild headstrong, unruly fellow, now nearly thirty years of age. He speaks of his father as “dad,” and “the old man,” and openly expresses his disgust at his hypocrisy and meanness, which he sees through very clearly. He is no more afraid to speak his mind than his mother, of whose tongue not only Brigham, but the other wives, stand in dread; and when she commences battle they act on the principle that “discretion is the better part of valor,” and leave the field to her.

The son has been married, but his wife has left him.

A few years ago Brigham bought a house at St. George, quite an important Mormon settlement, four hundred miles south of Salt Lake City, intending to settle some one of his wives there. He asked me if I would go, but I declined. He then proposed to one or two others, but they had no

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more of a mind to go than I had. Lucy Bigelow at last decided to try St. George as a residence, and she has remained there ever since. Lucy was married to him when

she was very young, and she has been one of the “Society” wives in the past. She was exceedingly pretty, quite entertaining, and a very graceful dancer. She is not very tall, but has quite a pretty figure, brown hair, blue eyes, and an exceedingly pretty mouth.

Her position as housekeeper at St. George has been no sinecure, for Brigham and Amelia have been in the habit of passing a portion, at least, of the winter there, and Lucy Bigelow’s position there has been very much what Lucy Decker’s was at the Bee Hive—that of servitor, entirely. When Brigham comes she receives no more attention than a housekeeper would; and no one, ignorant of the fact, would ever imagine she has held towards him the position of wife. She does not sit at the table with them, but cooks for them, and looks after their comfort generally.

She is quite a prudent housekeeper, and every year puts up a large quantity of preserves, which Amelia and her party being very fond of, would speedily put out of the way; and when the presidential visits were ended, poor Lucy would have no sweetmeats left for her own use, or to give to her friends when they came to see her. On the occasion of a late visit, she was so annoyed at her treatment, both by Brigham and Amelia—the former being particularly capacious and insolent—that she spoke her mind with such a sudden and startling plainness, that they left the house in a hurry. The Southern wife is to be commended for her spirit. She does not show it often; and probably, had the insults come alone from her husband, she would have borne them quietly, as she has done for nearly thirty years; but she could not endure the same treatment from Amelia, and she very justly rebelled.

She has three daughters, Dora, Susan, and Toolie. Dora is the only wife of Morley Dunford. She scanda-

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lized the Saints, and aroused the ire of her father, by going quietly off with her lover to the Episcopal clergyman to be



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married. According to Gentile laws she is legally married, but according to Mormon laws she is not securely tied. Still, she seems satisfied. Susie is married to Almy Dunford, and is also an only wife.

One of the most important wives, although by no means the recipient of any of her husband’s attentions, is the housekeeper at the “Lion House,” Mrs. Twiss. She was a young widow living in Nauvoo when Brigham discovered her, and recognizing her useful qualities, had her sealed to him as soon as he could arrange for it. She is not very attractive in personal appearance, having a round face, light blue eyes, low forehead, and sandy hair, which is inclined to curl. In figure she is short and stout. But she is an energetic worker, and as a servant Brigham values her.

She never complains of her position, but she is no better content with it than any other neglected wife in polygamy. She is kind to the other wives, and has an amiable, quiet

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disposition, although she is exceedingly firm and resolute. She has no children of her own, a circumstance which grieves her very much, but she has adopted a son, of whom she is very fond, and who is a very great comfort to this childless, unloved wife.

Martha Bowker is another of the Prophet’s “sickly wives,” of whom he is so fond of sneering; and the fact that she is an invalid is sufficient to preclude her from receiving care or sympathy from her husband. He married her when she was very young, and never has treated her with much consideration. Why he married her, unless it was because he was anxious to “build up his kingdom” as quickly as possible, and so took every available woman he could find, will always remain a mystery. She is plain, but very quiet and sensible. She never interferes with anyone, and worships her husband at a distance. I think it must be true, in his case at least, that “familiarity breeds contempt,” for the wives who have been the favorites stand less in awe of him, have less faith in him, and are less easily deceived by his pretensions than those whom he has neglected, and who do not understand him thoroughly. The less attention a wife has paid her, the greater is her veneration for her husband. Her respect for him seems to increase in proportion to the snubs she receives. Mrs. Bowker Young is by no means accomplished, moderately well educated, and is by no means intellectually brilliant. She says but little, but displays considerable hard common sense when she does speak. She is somewhat of a nonentity in the “Lion House,” where she lives, keeping very much to herself, and not making her presence felt. She has an adopted daughter, but no children of her own.

Among all the wives that Brigham claims, there is

none the superior of Harriet Barney Young, who, in spite of all her personal charms and graces of mind, has never been a favorite with the Prophet. She is too good and noble-minded for him to appreciate. There is too little of the flatterer

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about her. She is tall and stout, but very graceful in every movement. Her eyes are a clear hazel, with a soft, sad expression in them that is almost pathetic. Her hair is light-brown, and her face wears a peculiarly mild, sweet look. She is a person that anyone in trouble would be drawn towards, and would involuntarily rely on and confide in. She is always ready, with the tenderest sympathy, to comfort sorrow and distress; and her acts of kindness, which are very numerous, are always unostentatiously performed. She was married before she met Brigham, and was the mother of three children; but becoming convinced that Mormonism was right, and receiving it, polygamy and all, as a divine religion, given direct from God, she considered it her duty to leave her husband, and cast her lot with this people. She brought up her children with her, determined to bring them up in the true faith, and she was, in every regard, and earnest, conscientious, devout Christian, who would never shirk a duty, no matter how painful it might be, and would never do anything which she considered wrong, no matter how much she might suffer for her persistence in the right.

She loves her husband with all the strength on an earnest devotion, and his careless treatment of her seems to make little difference in the depth of her affection. She knows her life is hopeless, but she cherishes it, nevertheless, and is content to worship with no hope of return. She is a devout Mormon, and all she has seen, heard, and suffered, has not shaken her faith one whit. She believes that "this people" is destined to come up "out of great tribulation," and she accepts her own share without a murmur.

She formerly lived at the Lion House with her children, but latterly she has occupied a cottage near the Tabernacle. She likes this new arrangement infinitely better, as her situation in the large family was particularly trying. Brigham's own children have always been extremely haughty and arrogant to those not of the "royal" blood; and al-

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though Harriet's children were good and amiable, they, as well as their mother, were rendered very unhappy. She supports herself and family now by sewing; but is happier in this than in living in dependence, and receiving favors which are grudgingly bestowed. Her husband in by no means a

frequent visitor at her cottage, but she never reproaches him with neglect.



She has had one child since her marriage to the Prophet—a son, whose name is Howe.

Eliza Burgess, the wife who is said to have "served seven years" for her husband, is an English woman, a native of Manchester, and came to Nauvoo with her parents among the very earliest of the Mormon emigrants. They had not been long in this country before her parents died, and she was left alone. Mrs. Angell Young took her into the family as a servant, and she came to the Valley with her. She was very attentive and faithful to the Prophet, whom she regarded with the greatest veneration; and when

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he, noticing her devotion, offered to become her "savior," and secure for her "everlasting salvation," the poor girl was completely overcome, and entered her new relation with the most sacred reverence and joy. It is almost painful to see the dumb worship which she accords to her master, and the cavalier manner in which it is received. For a long time she was an inmate of the Lion House, and assisted Mrs. Twiss in the household labors. She has lately been promoted to the position of housekeeper at Provo, where the Prophet has an establishment for the convenience of himself and his party when he is making a tour of the settlements. This wife is faithful to all his interests, and unflinching in her zeal to serve him. The moment she finds that she is in any way necessary to his comfort, she works with a new earnestness. She is honest and upright, and is in every way worthy of the love of a good man. Yet she lives on, starving for the love that is denied her, and "wearying" for a husband who absents himself from her for a year at a

time.

She has one son, Alphilus, a bright young fellow, who is at present a student in the law-school of the Michigan University.

Besides Eliza Burgess, the English wife, Brigham has but one other who is not American. This is Susan Snively, who is a German, and who has been one of his useful wives. She is a woman now considerably past middle age, and carries her nationality very decidedly in her face. She is of medium size, has dark hair, bright eyes, dark complexion, and a stolid, expressionless face. She is decidedly the plainest of the wives, and one of the most capable. Her nature is kindly, and she is a genuinely good woman, quiet and unassuming. She is not the slightest bit assertive, and would remain in a corner unnoticed all her life, unless some one discovered her and brought her out. In her busy days, she was a good housewife—could spin, dye, weave, and knit, and make excellent butter and cheese.

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She was married to Brigham in the early days of polygamy, when she was a young girl; indeed, most of his wives were taken between 1842 and 1847, and she has proved herself a good wife in every sense of the word. She has lived at the farm a great deal; for eight years she was sole mistress there, and a harder worker never lived. She paid special attention to the dairy, making all the butter and cheese for the entire family. She has done a great deal for all the wives and children, and they have not hesitated to call on her for services, so cordially and freely has she given them. The farm was very large, and required many laborers, and these all boarded at the farm-house, and Susan had them to look after, which she did faithfully. Everything that she did was done to promote, as far as possible, the interests of the Prophet and his family.

At last, under such a constant strain of incessant labor, she broke down completely, unable any longer to endure the strain. Her strength failed; her health was destroyed; her once strong constitution undermined, and she was forced to seek refuge in the "Lion House," and take her chances with the numerous family. After she had given all her strength, and the best part of her life, to the service of her "master," she was of no more use to him, and she might live or die, as she saw fit. It mattered nothing to him. She said once to me, "How I should like a drive! and how much good it would do me! We have plenty of carriages, to be sure, yet I am never allowed to ride." Tears trembled in her eyes, and her voice shook as she made her complaint; and I wished it were in my power to gratify her. I did pity her lonely and neglected condition with all my heart.

Her only earthly comfort is an adopted daughter, whom she dearly loves. She never had any children of her

own, and she lavishes all her maternal affection on this attractive young girl, who returns her love, and calls her "mother."

She still clings to her religious faith with a sort of hopeless despair. If that should fail her, she would be desolate

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indeed. She suffers in the present, hoping for a recompense in the future.

Young widows seemed to have abounded in Nauvoo, judging from the number that have been "sealed" to the Prophet and his followers. So many men died in defense of the church, that the wives must, of necessity, fall to someone's care, and the protectors were easily found. Margaret Peirce was another of Brigham's fancies, and was sealed to him soon after the death of her husband. Her health has been very delicate for some years; consequently she is not in favor with her husband. She has one son, Morris, whom she absolutely worships. He is now about twenty years old, but he is still her baby.