

## A MORMON MOTHER

But now I was beginning to wonder: Is God "the same yesterday, today, and forever?"

I can remember so well the relief that I felt when I first realized that the Church had decided to abandon its position. For all of my earlier convictions, a great relief came over me. At that moment I compared my feelings of relief with the experience one has when the first crack of dawn comes after a night of careful vigilance over a sick patient. At such a time daylight is never more welcome; and now the dawn was breaking for the Church. I suppose its leaders may have realized, at last, that if our Church had anything worthwhile for mankind, they had better work with the government of our country rather than against it.

Notes from my diary, October 11, 1890:

*Mother left me when baby was three weeks old. I was comfortably situated, having my new carpets down and all necessary things in my room. Baby had colic, and although my hands were full, I felt thankful for such worthwhile labor.*

November 8, 1890:

*It was Young People's Conference at this stake. My husband was invited. I did not attend meeting, but as Mr. Tanner could not come here in daylight, we visited at Mr. George Parkinson's. Mr. Parkinson blessed the baby, and he was named Myron.*

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bonnet down to hide my face, wet with tears, and it seemed that John would try to comfort me. "We must be reconciled to His will," I imagined him saying, and then I wondered why His will required us to make such a great sacrifice. Of course John's body could not be brought home, so he lies buried at the foot of Mt. Carmel in Haifa, Palestine.

The year 1895, May 18th, my father and Aunt Mary celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. Relatives had come to Farmington from California and Missouri, and from many places between these states. Also the Church Presidency and several of the Twelve Apostles were present. The Social Hall was decorated as never before in its history. Aunt Mary looked lovely in her golden wedding dress, and she enjoyed all attention and honor that could be thought of. My mother in her stately way appeared unmoved. Her home was filled with guests who had come for the celebration.

For the first time in my life, I began to realize that my mother had had an uneven break as a second wife in her polygamous marriage. Perhaps these new thoughts were partly caused by the extra attention Aunt Mary was receiving at that time. It was in such contrast to the obscurity of my own mother's life. But in any case, I looked at the principle of plural marriage from many angles that summer. I was aware now that my mother's early married life must have been humiliating and joyless on many occasions because of her position as a second wife. As a girl I had been proud that my father and

mother had obeyed the highest principle in the Church.

Until now I had never dared to question the propriety of the principle or analyze its ethics. In fact, I had never before looked at it objectively. We were taught that it was Divine, that we should never say anything against it. If one did not approve the principle, it was the advice of the authorities of the Church that nothing be said about it.

Some of the fear of disobeying this counsel of the Church was diminishing. Why be fearful now of analyzing this teaching and practice? Had not the Church put the stamp of disapproval on its practice?

Our religion had made polygamous marriages honorable, hence bearable, and sometimes profitable. Many times I had expressed my gratitude for my noble parents. As a mother, I had great hopes for my children because of what I considered their noble parentage. From a social standpoint, polygamy made some contributions, for I enjoyed Josephine's company, and our children were very companionable. Josephine sometimes brought her little ones to Farmington and we all went to Lagoon with our lunch and a freezer of ice cream, or sometimes we met them at Saltair or Wandamere.

I argued too, that the principle of polygamy was worthwhile because of the noble character traits that it helped to develop. Would Aunt Mary have been so saintly, and my mother so disciplined in self-control had they not adjusted themselves to the requirements that were necessary to make the principle a success



or even durable? Yes, I reasoned, to live the principle successfully was a fine character test. One must be generous, sympathetic, patient, and above all, have self-control. Hence, I argued, there were advantages in polygamy here on this earth as well as reward in the Celestial Kingdom. However, some humiliation could result to children of a polygamous family, if the wives were of different cultural levels. I often felt sorry when one wife was a woman of high standards, and the husband married another wife whose background was decidedly inferior.

Why was I so speculating? Was all this argument necessary to support the principle because it was a never-ending problem that we were struggling with, trying with all our might to recognize in it some good?

Many gave up the attempt to live in polygamy when the Manifesto was issued by President Woodruff in 1890. Some girls were glad to go home and shift for themselves, and some men felt a relief and justified themselves in forsaking their families. It is true that I, too, rejoiced, because I did not want anyone to have the miserable experience that had been mine. However, it did not occur to me, for one minute, to give up the struggle of living polygamy. I was happily married, so far as happiness goes in a polygamous marriage.

The methods of practicing polygamy differed in every family. Mr. Tanner was a salaried man. He gave to his wives their allowance and seemed quite indifferent as to how they spent it. I felt it a great privilege to have

this freedom. It seemed to me that polygamy was on a higher level than in my mother's day.

Methods of practicing the principle sometimes changed in the family, as was the case in my father's home. My mother, in her later years, no longer went to the first wife for provisions. President Young also discarded this practice. Mother acquired a new home and surrounded it with lovely lawns and flowers. As the years passed, my mother had sons, who, when they took a load of hay to Salt Lake, returned with a sack of sugar or a piece of furniture. The methods had changed and she was now more satisfactorily provided for, but where was the companionship of her husband?

Such were my thoughts at this time.

True, those who had the integrity to be honest in their purpose, kept the respect of their families and were comparatively successful.

Sometimes, however, the religious motivation was lost sight of in the maze of the practical difficulties involved. Who thinks of eternal glory when there is discord in the family? Too, in the times of difficulty, people are so apt to think that the situation will last forever.

Here is life, with all its weakness of human nature; some are selfish and jealous, many without adequate psychological knowledge or experience to meet even the simpler problems. Perhaps in poor health, and in comparative poverty, one may say that monogamy is heir to these same limitations, which is true. But with three wives in one family there may well be three times the

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problems; and if six, double that, in which case, the attitude is generally "everyone for himself," as was largely the case when my husband in later years married three additional women. This was extreme, but not as much so as polygamous practices by some of the earlier leaders of the Church.



be leaders among professional people. With this anticipation for us, I became located just fifteen miles north of Salt Lake, a favorable position to carry out my plans for the education of my family. On the other hand, my husband, through circumstances that were not anticipated, secured a large farm nearly a thousand miles from home. There he was, struggling with all his might to make the farm a success, and here was I, struggling and just as determined as he, to realize my ambition to have an educated family. This is the picture as one sees it now.

At the beginning of his experiences in Canada I had no intention of opposing my husband; neither had I any idea of using the children for our advantage in a financial way. It never occurred to me that the children were under any obligation to us. I wanted my children to do as well by their own children as I had tried to do by them, and with knowledge increasing and conditions improving, each generation should be ahead of the present or past generation. Thus, I thought, the people of the world evolve in an evolutionary way to higher standards.

I had the attitude of many Mormon women in polygamy. I felt the responsibility of my family, and I developed an independence that women in monogamy never know. A woman in polygamy is compelled by her lone position to make a confidant of her children. How much more is this true when that woman is left entirely alone.

As I have observed monogamy, the husband and

wife rearing a family have a common interest. They are a team working together for the advantages of the children. In polygamy the man's interests are scattered. Too, he may be influenced by members of his other family, or families. He would need to be, almost, a super-human man to help each wife *equally* with the problems of rearing a family, and to resist the biased influence of other family members.

Hence, the wife in polygamy does not feel the security that I imagine monogamous women feel, and a husband could scarcely assume the same responsibility of a plural wife's happiness or welfare as a monogamous marriage makes possible.

The plural wife, in time, becomes conscious of her own power to make decisions. She learns that it takes more than the authority of the leader in a patriarchal marriage to make a successful home.

Once I discussed with Mr. Tanner the condition of being alone so much with the children.

"There are some mighty fine families in this Church reared by the mothers," he said.

That was true. It was not an uncommon thing in the Church, long before the Manifesto, for women to rear their children almost alone. Perhaps they were forced to that position, as was I. I knew that I had his approval to plan with the children, although, at times, the independence thus created on our part appeared to annoy him.

Women left to shift for themselves almost alone, or



even to carry the whole responsibility of rearing a large family, are made capable by what is forced upon them. I established my first little home in Franklin, unaided, and I broke it up alone. I supervised the building of our big home. I moved to Provo with four young children while my husband was in Canada, and I moved from there alone. Naturally, these experiences give one a confidence in their own judgment and a certain independence in attitude. Yet, my husband said once, "It is not capability that a man admires most in a woman." As I thought of it then he had little admiration for my ability.

At one time, I had been a good follower. Now I began to have opinions of my own. No doubt this change came as a result of experience. I became disillusioned, too, as to the superiority of man's judgment over woman's.

My husband's interests were many. His other homes, as I have said, were sixteen miles from mine. His law office was also in Salt Lake, and he traveled for the Church through Utah and the adjoining states, and even into Canada and Mexico. When he came to my home, he was more like a guest. I didn't expect him to take the responsibility of the details in our family. I felt equal to my tremendous responsibility, and it hurt me to realize that my husband had a critical attitude toward me, both before and after our separation. There were times when it was almost impossible to keep from trying to make explanations to him. Yet I honestly had no apologies to make; so, it seemed that without some real

humiliation on my part, our case, for a reconciliation, was hopeless.

Mr. Tanner was very determined with his plans. He assumed to know without discussion just what should be done, although he never concerned himself with the details of completing a proposal. Our family had increased and I was conscious that our methods of dealing with the children were different. Our motives, too, were far apart. It was my objective to see that each child had the opportunity to develop to his fullest capacity; his aim was to have help on the farm. It was well that we separated before we discussed these differences. Both of us have been saved a lot of unhappy memories.

Companionship between husband and wife in polygamy could not be so close as in monogamy. There was more independence on both sides in polygamy. To illustrate: If things do not go just right for the husband in one home, he could go to another. The wife whom he leaves behind is, of course, brokenhearted. She would frequently blame herself and resolve never to have that experience repeated. But she may, nevertheless, be aware of a great weakness on the part of her husband.

It is needless to observe that monogamous marriages are by far the more successful. They give security and confidence, and these are the requirements for happiness.

Security and confidence are more akin to love in marriage than freedom and independence. Though as "love filleth the law" there can be freedom and a degree of independence in monogamy as well.

People sometimes become so adjusted to a handicap that they do not welcome a release from the handicap. That is how it was with some of the polygamists when the government persecuted the Mormons. It takes time and suffering to uproot a deep-seated social condition, especially when the state of happiness in the next world depends on the endurance of the social conditions, with all of its handicaps of happiness, in this life.

To illustrate this point, a poor girl living in plural marriage, was doing domestic work for a family of a monogamous marriage. This girl took satisfaction in her humble position and expressed it one time by saying to her employer, "I do your scrubbing and cleaning *now*, but in eternity you may be *my* servant."

In some respects, that such marital unions extended to the end of this life, was the greatest wonder. Reflecting upon numerous cases I have known, nearly all of them were broken before the last years of old age. Although, if the husband died in middle age, his wives were commonly loyal to each other to the end. It would be difficult, however, for those of my generation, now living to find successful cases of polygamous marriages surviving into the very last years of a long life.

This fact, it seems to me, is a profound observation upon the sociological study of polygamy. The material bonds in a monogamous union may well be strengthened in the declining years. Polygamous bonds, in contrast, are severed in an overwhelming number of cases. To illustrate: I recently attended a friend's funeral.



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Over eighty years old, he was survived by three wives, and, of course, many children. His second wife, herself a mother of a large family, who is now in her seventies, observed without apparent resentment, yet with some sadness: "Well, I had buried him years ago." So it was with me.

And now, Mr. Tanner was proposing that we interest ourselves again in Canada. Kneland was the financier of the family, and he thought we had better take his father's suggestion; so Lois and Obert, the day he graduated from the eighth grade, left for Canada.