

THE
MORMONS AT HOME;

With some Incidents of Travel

FROM

MISSOURI TO CALIFORNIA,

1852-3.

IN A SERIES OF LETTERS.

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LETTER VIII.

GREAT SALT LAKE CITY, NOV. 26, 1852.

WE have now had a month's experience of Mormon life. So far, we have been treated with kindness—our landlady improves on further acquaintance—we have access to a well-selected public library. Mr. Livingston, a Gentile merchant, has politely given us the freedom of some choice books, left in his possession by the late Secretary Harris. Among them are a few standard works of fiction—real treasures—and we are hoping to pass the period of our imprisonment agreeably. Yet I fear, with all these appliances, the coming winter is destined to be a tedious one. There is an oppressive sense of seclusion from the active, moving world outside of the Great Basin. The daily news, which has heretofore absorbed so much of our attention, is entirely wanting, and there seems to be but little for us to do except to watch the curious

little world, in the midst of which our present fortunes are cast.

We have made one disagreeable discovery. Polygamy is not only practiced, but openly justified and advocated on religious grounds. We had some rumors of this on the way; but Mr. F. strenuously contended, that it was one of the thousand reports, circulated to the prejudice of the Mormons, by their enemies. I am afraid the other nine hundred and ninety-nine stories will prove to be true. It seems that it was practiced secretly by most of the leaders before they left the States, in obedience to a revelation of their pretended prophet, Smith; but more openly after they came here, and that, finally, during the last summer, they threw off the mask, and preached openly in favor of it, and published the sermons and pretended revelation in their newspaper. Before this period, their missionaries were instructed to deny that any such vile institution existed among them, an injunction which they readily obeyed.

We are unquestionably in the midst of a society of fanatics, who are controlled by a

LETTER IX.

GREAT SALT LAKE CITY, Dec., 1852.

ANOTHER month has brought us into more intimate acquaintance with Mormon society, which we find has two faces—one for the Gentiles and the other for the saints. It will not do here to judge from appearances. A man stopping here for a few days, or even weeks, would be very apt to go away impressed with the idea that it was a prosperous and happy community. He finds a city which has been built up within a brief period; he sees a certain degree of commendable industry; he hears the saints addressing each other as brothers and sisters, seeming to live together in great harmony; and pursues his journey to California or Oregon, without obtaining a glimpse of the “dead men’s bones and rottenness” which lie festering beneath this whited sepulchre. The brief sojourner is so much surprised

at what he sees and hears, that he writes a long letter to one of the New York journals, in which he depicts, in glowing colors, the prosperity and happiness of the saints; and, what is still more wonderful, he makes the discovery, that polygamy has been found to be compatible with domestic harmony.

A closer scrutiny, and, perhaps I may with propriety add, certain facilities, which a man cannot command, is necessary to penetrate the veil that conceals the true deformity of Mormonism from the world. A singular incident bids fair to give us a view of the very bottom of this sink of pollution. Some few weeks after our arrival, a man from Westchester County, N. Y., and who has relatives in our county, called to see us. He was a zealous saint, proved to be an incessant talker, and poured forth a wordy harangue in favor of his system. We marveled at the object of so much noisy rant in so small a congregation; but the secret came out at the close of the interview. It seems that some one, whose name he did not mention, had written to him, that we were both good subjects for conver-

sion, and this was the first installment of the effort in that direction. Mr. F. allowed this proselyting spirit to go away in the full belief that he had made a favorable impression, and was, a few days after, told by one of the Gentiles, that we were regarded as almost on the anxious seat.

This effort has been followed up by a very singular genius in petticoats, who promises to be an unfailing and infallible source of information on all points. Her name is Shearer, and she is familiarly known as "Aunty Shearer." She is, in every respect, a unique specimen of womanhood—tall, stout, bony, square-cornered—with cold, yet eager gray eyes, great volubility, and grim aspect. If she had remained in the States, under certain associations, she would have blossomed out early, as a Woman's Rights champion, or one of the "strong-minded," who have a mission to reform this wicked age. On most points, except that of the Mormon superstition, her ignorance is gross, like darkness; so thick that you can cut it with a knife and dull the edge. She lives hard by, on the next block west, and is

a frequent visitor at our boarding-house. Well, this queer specimen of severe angularity of mind and body thinks me a good subject; and I have found a treasure, or rather a convenient forcing-pump, which yields to every motion of the handle.

She was an early disciple, and I have gathered enough of her history to understand that the prophet, Joseph Smith, completely robbed her, under various plausible pretenses, of her little property, which, of course, was in the line of *his* particular mission; and after keeping her for a time in his family as a sort of domestic drudge, the rogue shipped her off, by a revelation, to sustain herself the best way she could. She has great industry, and struggled bravely through all the troubles of these pseudo saints, and finally floated along in the current of emigration to Salt Lake; and is now gaining a living as a nurse, and, of course, knows all that is going on. It seems she has a husband wandering somewhere about the earth, but his heart proving too hard to be softened by Mormon influence, or from some other cause, she has abandoned him to

his fate. On this point, she manifests some reserve. She bears his name, to be sure, but his existence and whereabouts are mysteries which my profane curiosity has not been permitted fully to penetrate. It is quite probable "thereby hangs a tale." Perhaps this mythic Mr. Shearer may turn up before we leave the valley, or else altogether evaporate.

Polygamy has been a great stumbling block to Aunty Shearer—it was promulgated, however, by the immaculate Joseph, and she has managed to choke it down with a wry face. She is disposed to conceal its effects, and would, if her shrewdness was equal to her zeal; but she has a natural love of gossip, which will find vent in spite of all other considerations. I can always tell when some precious item, in that important branch of saintly domesticity, lies heavy upon her conscience, and have no difficulty in relieving her of the burden. I tell her this is a point very difficult for us to get over. She says, it is not compulsory, and if we join, my husband need not take another wife.

In the early part of the month, one of the

twelve Apostles, Lorenzo Snow, a small, neatly-dressed, dapper-looking man, called on business, in relation to some improvements they desire to make in their Legislative Assembly room. He was accompanied by a tall six-footer, by the name of Cumming, with, to me, a very forbidding countenance. The one looked as if he never did anything wrong—the other, as if he never did anything else. They put on their best manner; and, as their wishes were likely to be complied with, entered readily into general conversation. This Snow, it seems, had lately returned from Europe, spending some time in Italy, the particular field of his efforts, and gave us, in an agreeable manner, much interesting information in reference to the lower classes in that country. He appeared to have some enlarged views, in regard to the development of the agricultural and mineral resources of the Territory, and of the importance of the city we were in, as a half-way house between the East and West. He had a funny way of puckering his mouth in conversation, which I attributed to a feeling of importance derived from his apostleship;

yet he exhibited more polish than any we had seen here, and we were pleased with him. We flattered ourselves that we had found at least one man of sufficient taste and refinement, to say nothing of moral principle, to be free from the degradation of polygamy; but it is not always safe to judge from appearances.

At the first opportunity, I applied to my Mormon dictionary, Aunty Shearer, and was duly enlightened with regard to Elder Snow. He resides near us, in the second house beyond Brother Wakeman's, with six wives, in two little huts, and has twelve children. In the principal hut, the real wife sits at the head of the table, and pours out tea and coffee for the rest of the bevy. The latest acquisition to this highly-favored household, and, of course, the reigning sultana for the time, was the only one of them with whom he condescended to correspond during his absence. Her education, however, had not attained the dignity of an ability to read, and, either because the other inmates of the harem were in like predicament, or that she was unwilling they should see these loving epistles, she took them

to the neighbors to be translated. Like all other Mormon missionaries, he was a beggar; and the story is, that he has been so successful in his mendicity, that the cottages are to give place to a large adobe mansion, which will make a more convenient seraglio.

Such is Elder Snow; and yet he could talk about the works of art in Rome and Paris, with some apparent appreciation of their beauties. Like our other visitors, he expressed a wish that our sojourn might be rendered agreeable, but not a word of invitation to visit his family, or that his *wife* would be happy to see me, which usually forms so pleasant a finale to an agreeable interview. These are interdicted subjects to them all; nor is it strange. These miserable creatures have houses where they stay, and a discordant and disunited association of women and children, but no *families*—there are none of the comforts and delights of home with the polygamist.

It has been a matter of great wonder to me how the women could be induced to consent to polygamous marriages. It is so re-

pugnant to all the instincts and feelings of a true woman, that I could not understand it. The mystery is partly solved. It seems that one part of their ridiculous creed is, that a woman cannot be saved, unless she is sealed or married to a Mormon; and he must be one, too, who will remain steadfast to the end; and, as they are noted for a great number of apostates, it becomes an object with these silly fools to get into the harems of the priests and elders, because it is believed they will not apostatize. Of course, any one with half an eye can see the object of the prophet Smith, in promulgating such a doctrine; and the wonder is, that its transparency is not obvious to all.

I made this discovery by talking with Aunty Shearer, about an old lady by the name of Western—commonly known as “Mother Western”—one of Brigham’s wives. I was marveling why she should marry in her old age, especially as fiftieth or sixtieth wife, when my oracle said “she was only sealed for the sake of salvation.” She further informed me that Brigham had more wives in this way than any-

body knew of—that he did not even know himself, the sealing to him being considered a more certain guarantee for salvation, because he was the reigning prophet, and was sure to remain faithful.

One scarcely knows whether to be amazed most at the profane profligacy of the leaders, or the superstitious credulity of their dupes. The effect of the Mormon creed is, evidently, to gather together a low class of villains, and a still lower class of dupes; and it follows that the latter are easily governed. The only disturbing element is, that the villains may quarrel among themselves; and, so far as I can learn, this has happened on more than one occasion. A further effect will, probably, be, to operate as a Botany Bay to society generally, by relieving it of its superabundance of both classes.

We were awakened on Christmas morning by hearing familiar airs from a brass band parading around in an open carriage. They began thus early to usher in a merry Christmas, by serenading the dignitaries of the Mormon church. Brigham first, then Kimball and