



The Women of Mormonism, introduction
Frances E. Willard (1882)

Frances Willard was a white Methodist and president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the largest women's organization in the United States during the 19th century. The organization's membership was predominantly white and Protestant. Under Willard's leadership, the WCTU expanded its advocacy to include not only temperance but also women's suffrage and a range of other social reforms. Here, Willard lends her endorsement to a book by anti-polygamy activist Jennie Anderson Froiseth, an Irish American living in the Utah Territory. Froiseth's book was a polemic based on the experiences of Mormon women, more formally called Latter-day Saints, who had come to oppose their church's practice of "plural marriage"; Froiseth was not Mormon herself. In the introduction she provided for Froiseth's book, Willard likens Mormons to Muslims in the Ottoman empire, and she urges American Christian women to take some kind of "organized action," without specifying what that should be, to liberate their Mormon sisters.

Turkey is doubtless the most debased country on earth; and there, as I was told in Constantinople by an American of twenty years' residence in that capital, a Turkish gentleman (?) who so far forgets himself as to mention his wife in the hearing of ears polite always adds, "I beg your pardon for the allusion." In Syria, I learned from the missionaries that a man never calls himself a father unless he has a son, his daughters being altogether counted out as ciphers until a brother's birth places a significant figure before them, after which they are mentioned as "that boy's sisters."

But America need not go so far for illustrations. Turkey is in our midst. Modern Mohammedanism has its Mecca at Salt Lake, where prophet Heber C. Kimball speaks of his wives as "cows."^a Clearly the Koran was Joseph Smith's model, so closely followed as to exclude even the poor pretension of originality in his foul "revelations." Man was to take his position in the future world according to the zeal with which he had "built up the kingdom," while woman's immortality depended on her conjugal relations here.

When we consider that the country which permits this abomination of desolation to continue is the "bright consummate flower" of Christian civilization; when we remember what o'clock it is in the nineteenth century and that the formula of Utah's monstrous lust is "Live your religion"—

^a Kimball was part of the First Presidency, a three-man council at the top of the Mormon hierarchy. He married 43 women. The claim that Kimball had a habit of jocularly referring to his wives as his "cows" was first made in print in 1857 by a former Mormon named John Hyde Jr. Variations on the claim circulated through subsequent 19th-century publications. Later in *The Women of Mormonism*, Jennie Anderson Froiseth attributes to Kimball the unsourced quotation, "I think no more of taking another wife than I do of buying a cow; and if you want to build up [God's] kingdom, you must take more wives" (30, punctuation emended for readability).

See: John Hyde Jr., *Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs* (New York: W. P. Fetridge & Co., 1857), 57, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/fk20c4sr7t>; Ann Eliza Young, *Wife No. 19; Or, The Story of a Life in Bondage* (Hartford, CT: Dustin, Gilman & Co., 1875), 292, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433082137914>.

we are tempted to change Sojourner Truth's famous words, "Is God dead?" from a question into a heartsick affirmation. [...]

When Brigham Young declared that "if women would not submit to polygamy, they should be eternally damned,"^b and when history shows that women who have resisted have often been murdered, the mystery of the non-resistance policy which they commonly pursue is certainly cleared up. "Starve them and beat them, if necessary, to bring them to submission," said the Mormon apostles; "better crucify the body than let the soul go to perdition."^c [...]

Surely it is time that the Christian women of this nation arouse themselves to organized action against this sum of all curses which can curse the sex not physically strong. To say we have been hitherto indifferent would be a libel on our womanhood no less than our religion; to say that we have been idle would be unjust when we remember [...] the great petitions which have registered, where they were little heeded, the votes of the great army of women whose actual ballot would soon deliver our captive sisters on the blighted frontier.

But the hour demands a deeper, more combined, and far-reaching movement; and the instinct of self-protection, no less than of philanthropy, should warn the wives and mothers of this land that each woman degraded means the potential degradation of all women.

Who will lead us along the path of high endeavor which this thoughtful volume indicates, until the Book of Mormon is burned in the fierce blaze of Christian manhood's indignation and woman's righteous wrath, and the gospel of him who came not only to redeem the world but to restore to woman her lost inheritance, "the equality of equals," is the beloved home religion in every home?

^b Willard is quoting material that appears later in *The Women of Mormonism* (31). Froiseth provides no citation for the Brigham Young quote, but the sentiment can be found in sermons of Young as printed in Mormon publications. In one instance, Young told an audience of men and women that "if any of you will deny the plurality of wives, and continue to do so, I promise that you will be damned." On another occasion, he told women in the congregation: "I want to say to my sisters that if you lift your heels against this revelation [on plural marriage...], you will go to hell."

Brigham Young, sermon, Provo, UT, July 14, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 3 (Liverpool, Eng: Orson Pratt, 1856), 266, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/109>; Brigham Young, sermon, Lehi, UT, August 9, 1874, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 17 (Liverpool, Eng: Albert Carrington, 1875), 159, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/JournalOfDiscourses3/id/6600>.

^c Again, Willard is quoting a line from later in *The Women of Mormonism* (38). The source is an unnamed Mormon woman recalling how, in the late 1850s, women were pressured to accept plural marriage during a period of intensified moral policing within Mormon settlements in Utah. The quotation is the woman's paraphrase of the instruction she says Mormon men received at that time from church leaders.

Source: Frances E. Willard, introduction to *The Women of Mormonism; Or, The Story of Polygamy as Told by the Victims Themselves*, ed. Jennie Anderson Froiseth (Detroit: C. G. G. Paine, 1882), xv-xviii, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/ia.ark:/13960/t8ff44865>. Public domain.

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These edited excerpts from Willard's introduction are intended for *teaching* purposes only. For *research* purposes, you should consult, quote, and cite the source publication listed above.



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