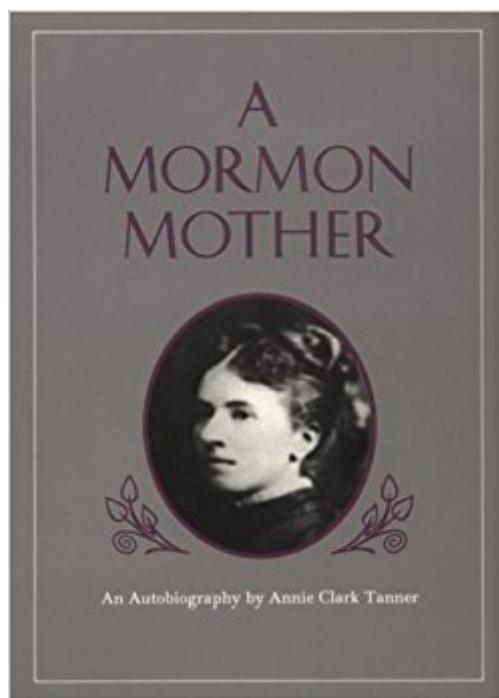


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Mormon Mother: An Autobiography

By Annie Clark Tanner



Synopsis

Book by Tanner, Annie C.

Book Information

Paperback: 382 pages

Publisher: Signature Books (December 12, 1983)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0941214311

ISBN-13: 978-0941214315

Product Dimensions: 8.6 x 6 x 1.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #312,124 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #382 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Mormonism #1921 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Religious #3827 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Women

Customer Reviews

Book by Tanner, Annie C.

This is a wonderfully written story of a girl from the second marriage of an affluent polygamous family. Her father provided her with an excellent education in a time when few women had the opportunity of higher learning. While attending Brigham Young Academy she met her future husband who was a professor there. Annie became Professor J. M. Tanner's second wife in 1883. From the day of her secret wedding Annie rarely saw her husband, except for visits to get her pregnant. Her husband never lived with her and rarely provided her with money. Annie gave birth to 10 children, 2 died early in life. She raised her children in poverty while making the best of every moment, and always trying to provide her children with a formal education. During this time polygamy was outlawed in the USA, so Mr. Tanner moved to Canada and married additional wives. Annie never talks bad about her husband, and always provides a positive picture to her children of their father, (who never deserved the kind words in my opinion).

Annie Clark Tanner's autobiography reveals her experiences as a plural wife of an early educator and the raising of her children. She was an educated and wise woman who shared her views about

the challenges of raising children alone without financial or emotional support. She was ahead of her time in her method for instilling a sense of responsibility in her large family. Not all plural marriages were like hers, but she presents a valid portrayal of many women like her who were the second or third wives.

This book is an interesting account of a woman's life during the late 1800s and early 1900s. If you are interested in this time period, you will enjoy it regardless of whether you are interested in polygamy or Mormonism. There are some odd spots in the writing, including some repetitive passages. These almost led me to give it 4 stars instead of 5. However, the story itself is too important to let some blips in the writing get in the way. I was surprised at how well educated and actually open-minded the individuals in the story were. These were not religious zealots though they lived a very dedicated religious life. If you have read "Escape" or "Stolen Innocence," you need to read this book to get the back story and really begin to understand how religion can get people to practice polygamy. Annie Clark Tanner is a true American pioneer.

When my book club decided to read this book in a very quick time I was in a hurry to find a legible copy. Library let me down, but I was able to order the book which arrived in about three working days, in perfect condition and a wonderful book to read, How could I ask for any more!

Very interesting book about Annie Clark Tanner (mother of O.C. Tanner and nine other children). I really could hardly put it down. And it broke my heart in several places, and I had to have a good cry. I think this must be one of the best books ever written that shows the difficulties and practical realities of polygamy (especially during the time period after the Manifesto making it against LDS church policy, in addition it was illegal). To me it is more authoritative than 10 history books written on the subject. It is not only about polygamy, but even more about the strength, personal sacrifice, and resiliency of Annie Tanner, whose life is in many ways heart breaking, while at the same time a triumph. It would be excellent reading for members of the LDS faith, to better understand their religious roots as well as personal ancestry (even though a small percentage of men were polygamists, some had many wives and many children with each wife, so their family groups on the whole were a much larger percentage of the entire church population. It would also be a very interesting cultural read for someone not LDS. Sidenote... not really about the book, but interesting for those wanting a little more background on polygamy: Although it had limited participation and a limited time, it has had a lasting impact on church population, with many

multi-generational members having some ancestors who lived polygamy. There will remain an association with the LDS faith and polygamy. When it was practiced, about 3-5% of the church men had more than one wife (mostly leaders and other prominent men in the LDS community). It was announced to the church in 1852 and discontinued by proclamation in 1890 when "The Manifesto" made it an offense to continue the practice. [...]. Although formerly considered an important tenet of the faith, the LDS church was in danger of losing everything because of polygamy... all real property, imprisoned leadership and anyone else who wanted to live it. It only seems practical that it was something that simply had to come to an end (to the relief of many people back then, and nearly every church member currently living!). It must have been particularly challenging to figure out how to continue managing family relationships after it became illegal and discontinued... people were somewhat left to "fend for themselves" during this time of transition, and not surprisingly many families were abandoned... probably because of the practical desire to avoid being imprisoned as well as the practical difficulties of maintaining multiple households. Most church members never embraced the idea enough to marry more than one woman, including Annie, in hindsight, and I would imagine her husband as well. To think it's about sex is so off the mark... reading about it solidifies the ideals polygamy was built on-- it was much more about faith and duty, a call to increase the population on earth and ones posterity in eternity(note: the Book of Mormon cites "raising up seed" as the only reason why the regular rule of one wife could be circumvented... and only by command, see Jacob 2:27-30)... so many of the women were like single mothers with a husband only there when it was time to make another child. One cannot deny the wonderful family/progeny that came from such an unfulfilling union, a family who brought their mother much joy... and I imagine Annie might have made the same sacrifice again for her children. So many of the responsibilities fell on the women... therefore they became extremely capable, independent, and much more. I can see why the every subsequent generation of the church from those during, immediately after, and so on until now seem to have an increasing distaste for polygamy. Why would you ever want to do it, man or woman, if you did not feel it a duty and calling? Think of the troubles for women acting as a single mother of a large number of children, think of the troubles of a man with responsibility for two to several women and all their children... the heavy responsibility to provide and try to be some kind of father figure to dozens of children... as if it's not overwhelming enough to take care of one large family! I feel plenty busy as a mother of four... sometimes I can hardly wait for Eric to walk through the door and help relieve my burden... the weight of dependence he feels from me and our four children who seem to need constant attention is certainly about all he can take! I have taken some time to reflect and quote below... but I would have liked to make these

observations while reading as I'm sure there is more I would have liked to include. My final analysis is that this book was astounding, and perhaps a good book to have in a library... if you ever feel sorry for yourself or overburdened... go learn from the remarkable woman, Annie Tanner Clark. She managed to be strong and look at things in the most positive light, and she had it much harder than any of us alive today (with few exceptions... at least in the United States). She managed to take the most positive view possible of her life, and though she did not defend polygamy, she did remain a faithful LDS woman. This book also has a great introduction by Sterling McMurrin and a wonderful preface by Obert Tanner. **Observations and Quotes:** It was interesting that Annie was very fair and independent, perhaps for her day a bit feminist minded as a young girl. In an exchange with her father (who was also a polygamist), she asked for a dollar for her mother, and he questioned what it was for. She said, "When I grow up and get married, I won't ask my husband for money." (sidenote, she didn't). Her father: "How will you get it?" to which she said, "...my husband will give me the money without the asking." Annie's understanding/insight into reasons for polygamy... (p23) If one can picture the sociological conditions in Utah Territory when the principle of polygamy was openly endorsed by the Church in 1852, one can better understand the reason for its development. Hundreds of young women came from the overcrowded section in the old country. They were thoroughly converted to the Gospel. To be the wife of a fine leader in Israel was the height of their ambition. Perhaps too, the effect of the increase in numbers it furnished to the Church was considered of some advantage. It must be remembered that the western immigration movement brought to Utah all kinds of people. Concerning some of the men folks, girls comparing their chances for matrimony, often said of a Mormon leader, 'I'd rather have his little finger than the whole of a man outside of the Church.'... Many of the finest characters in Utah and surrounding states owe their existence to this doctrine of the Mormon Church. It is often remarked that all the headaches and heartaches caused by polygamy have, in some measure, been compensated by the fine eugenic results.... Volumes could be written about the struggles of polygamy. Economic conditions had much to do with its success or failure. If a father could provide the needs of a family, there was much more likelihood for contentment. If he could not, which was the usual case, even that had its advantages, In that case, the children must learn to work for means to satisfy their desires and perhaps get their own education. Thus, habits of industry and thrift were developed. Those valuable traits coupled with inherent capacity which may be the result of eugenic mating, accounts in part at least, for the leadership and success observed in the children of a polygamist's family. Then too, as polygamy was a religious principle, a religious training was the rule in a polygamous home. "After her marriage ceremony, Annie, Mr. Tanner, and Jennie (the first wife) boarded a northbound train. She

got off alone and went to her family's home alone. She sat down to a glass of bread and milk... the thought came, "Well, this is my wedding supper." ... as she recalled some of the beautiful gowns and gatherings celebrated for other weddings... "I was conscious of the obscurity of my own first evening after marriage... what a contrast... no one will ever congratulate me." Then you can really feel her sadness when her appointment with her husband 2 weeks later is trumped by other concerns. It doesn't get more anti-climatic than that! Then she says, "In time I learned to steel myself against disappointment of his failure to come. However, I learned to dearly love my husband, and I wondered later if anyone was a more ardent lover than myself." Because of the change in both secular and religious laws at the time, Annie and many others who had cast their lot with polygamy lived in hiding and on the run for many years. The blasted Canadian farm... cause for so much frustration! Especially heartbreaking: "One Sunday morning as my husband and I stood on the front porch of our home together, he informed me that he would not come to Farmington to see us any more. There had been no previous differences between us except the children's education to which no reference had recently been made, so the statement was a great shock to me at the time. Inwardly, I felt impelled to persuade him otherwise, and I was sure he had expected me to. I nevertheless controlled myself and made no response to his far-reaching decision. My silence at the moment was not an easy thing. Yet, I am aware now that the years of the preceding struggle to live polygamy had all helped to steel me for whatever may come. I thought in those few moments before he departed: 'I'll be equal to whatever must come,' though I did not for a moment suppose that he intended to contribute no more to our support." Imagine poor Annie having to go it all alone, taking care of and trying to get educated 8 children, aged 8-24! She was poor, she often skipped meals while she made sure her children had to eat. When offered money, she said that it was her inheritance to give and not to receive. One of those times I just had to cry (they were so needy!); "The little boys picked up coal off the railroad tracks and at the place where it was unloaded from the cars into wagons. Obert, who was eight years old that winter, saw some coal on the ground at the Commercial Store where much of it was stored and sold to customers. So he took his little express wagon up there for coal. But the coal was on store property. He was asked to come inside, where from the window, the County Jail was in full view. 'That is where boys go who steal,' said the store manager to the surprised boy. I give this illustration to show how adults misunderstand the motives of a child. I did not know the little fellow had gone up there. I was so humiliated about our condition that I made no explanation." As Annie looks back on her life and records it for her posterity (I believe it was written in the year before she died), she has this to say (page 333, 335): "This is a story that ends like those of the storybook-- 'happily ever after.' My philosophy is the art of living

each day as fully and completely as opportunity will allow.... it is the little things that bring the joy of living--- work well done; the visit of a friend; leisure to read and to write; a book review [!]; a ride in the country; some little improvement in the surroundings; something new; or a trip occasionally. To be able to accomplish and enjoy the common things are the greatest sources of happiness. ""It is but a small part that the average person contributes to improve mankind. My life has been simple, full of love, devotion, and service for my family. I might have thought mine a hard row to hoe had not the plants I cultivated responded so magnificently to the culture I gave them, made possible by our beloved America" And finally... these memorized lines that were a signpost to Annie close the book: We shape ourselves, the joy and fearOf which the coming life is made; And fill our future atmosphereWith sunshine or with shade. The tissue of the life to beWe weave with colors all our own; And in the field of destinyWe reap as we have sown.

I could hardly put this book down. This is a heartbreakin, but inspiring story of a woman in a polygamous marriage in the LDS faith. She felt abandoned and alone much of her life, yet she had no bitterness. Her son, Obert, describes her story as tragic in the introduction. He describes tragic as someone who faces the difficult circumstances of one's life with forbearance and faith, going forward in spite of tremendous difficulties. She certainly is that person. The way she lived her life has inspired me to live my life with greater forbearance and faith.

Annie Clark Tanner was an admirable person. When I completed reading this book I had a strong desire to call one of her children, if any are still alive. I appreciated the support and understanding she received from her children as they became adults. They had a wonderful mother. I am amazed at all she went through for her husband, without bitterness. However, she was open about her feelings, which let me know that she was "real". Thank you Annie, for writing about your life and sharing your experiences.

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