

Sarah M. Pratt: The Shaping of an Apostate

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I am the wife of Orson Pratt . . . I was formerly a member of the Mormon church. . . . I have not been a believer in the Mormon doctrines for thirty years, and am now considered an apostate, I believe (Journal History, 22 Jan. 1875).

SARAH MARINDA BATES PRATT, first wife of Apostle Orson Pratt, is almost always portrayed in Mormon history as a sharp-tongued shrew with a shady past — Hester Prynne's rival for the scarlet letter. Who is the woman behind the rumor?

Sarah, the first daughter and third child of Cyrus Bates and Lydia Harrington Bates's twelve children, was born in the sleepy hamlet of Henderson, New York, on 5 February 1817. During the summer of 1835, when Sarah was eighteen, Mormon missionaries taught the Bates family (Bates and Harrington). Sarah believed the Mormon message and also fell in love with the intense, blue-eyed missionary who delivered it — twenty-four-year-old Apostle Orson Pratt. Orson baptized Sarah on 18 June 1835, four days after he baptized her brother Marcellus and sister Lydia Augusta. Other siblings would be baptized later: Ormus Ephraim on 4 July 1836 and Orissa Angelia, on 14 April 1838 (Bates Family Group Sheet). Though Pratt moved on to proselyte in other areas, he did not forget Sarah. "Went to Brother Bates," he wrote in his 7 June 1836 journal, "found them all well. I was very much enjoyed to see them as I had been absent about 1 yr., and more especially as I had previously formed an acquaintance with their daughter with whom I had held a correspondence by letter and with whom I shortly expected to enter into the sacred bonds of matrimony" (Watson 1975, 82).

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Orson and Sarah were married a month later on 4 July 1836 by Apostle Luke Johnson in the sturdy stone house Sarah's father had built ten years before. After a three-day honeymoon, Orson resumed his missionary duties, leaving Sarah with her family. He returned to Henderson several times before October, when he and Sarah moved to a dollar-a-month apartment in Kirtland, Ohio.

Orson began trading in stoves and ironwear, but a general downturn in the national economy coupled with Kirtland's spiraling land speculation and the fiscal mismanagement of the Kirtland Safety Society destroyed the economic foundation of the Mormon utopia. The couple had few financial resources when Sarah gave birth on 11 July 1837 to Orson Pratt, Jr., the first of her twelve children. In mid-August, when she and the baby were able to travel, the young family moved back to the Bates homestead in New York where Orson worked as a laborer for two months. On 2 October he left Henderson to "labor in the vineyard," filling brief, local missions throughout the winter (Watson 1975, 93). In the spring he moved his family to New York City, where he was appointed branch president.

New York was not destined to be the Pratt home for long. On 8 July 1838 Joseph Smith received a revelation (D&C 118) instructing members of the Quorum of the Twelve to prepare for a mission the following spring "over the great waters." Quorum President Thomas B. Marsh in the 3 August 1838 *Elder's Journal* specifically called Orson Pratt, Wilford Woodruff, John Taylor, and John E. Page to "come immediately to Far West [Missouri], to prepare for a great mission."

Orson put his New York affairs in order and the family started west, but river ice and Sarah's second pregnancy made travel beyond Saint Louis impossible. There, on 17 December, Lydia was born. When the Mississippi ice floes broke up in the spring, Sarah and Orson headed upstream to Quincy, Illinois, a temporary haven for Mormon refugees from Missouri. By mid-May 1839, they were living in a small log cabin with the Wilford Woodruff family at abandoned Fort Des Moines in Montrose, Iowa (Woodruff 1881, 74-75). Two months later they moved across the Mississippi to live in a fourteen-by-sixteen-foot "shanty" that Heber C. Kimball had nearly completed in Nauvoo (Whitney 1945, 262).

The brackish waters of the undrained river bottom lands surrounding Nauvoo produced epidemics of cholera, typhoid, and malaria. Sarah's eight-month-old baby, Lydia, the first of six of her twelve children who would not attain adulthood, died 18 August 1839 and was buried across the Mississippi at Montrose. Eleven days later, grief-stricken Sarah bade Europe-bound Orson goodbye, an act she would perform many times as he fulfilled his missionary callings.

Sarah could have gone with Orson as far as New York where her family, especially her seriously ill father, would have welcomed her. He would die a few weeks later on 3 October at the age of forty-seven. But baby Orson was young, and Church leaders emphasized gathering to Nauvoo. So Sarah remained in the city. Orson left his family little to live on. Years later, Sarah

remembered of the early Nauvoo years, "There was little money then in circulation and people were obliged to be content to earn what would merely keep soul and body together" (S. M. Pratt 1884). To supplement her meager Church rations, she took in sewing.

Joseph Smith had been hiring Sarah for his own family's sewing needs; and in the fall of 1840, he brought John C. Bennett, a newcomer to Mormonism, to Sarah's house, saying Bennett "wanted some sewing done and that [Sarah] should do it for [him]." Sarah said that she "assented and Bennett gave me a great deal of work to do" (Wyl 1886, 61).

Bennett, a Campbellite minister, self-trained lawyer, doctor, thirty-third-degree Mason, brigadier general in the Illinois Invincible Light Dragoons, and Quartermaster General of Illinois, seemed to be a real catch for Mormonism. With the missionary-apostles in Europe and counselor Sidney Rigdon chronically ill, the Church was experiencing a power vacuum. The glib, bombastic, and seemingly aristocratic John C. Bennett ingratiated himself into the inner circles of the Church; he was appointed "Assistant President" of the Church on 8 April 1841. Joseph Smith was so impressed by his new convert that he adopted many of the doctor's personal mannerisms, including his oratorical style, his military dress and bearing, and his habit of using foreign phrases in written communications. Bennett boarded in the Prophet's home, and the two were near-constant companions. William Law, a member of the First Presidency (1841–44) recalled in an 1871 letter that Bennett was "more in the secret confidence of Joseph than perhaps any other man in the city" (Stenhouse 1873, 198).

Loyal, trustworthy men of his own mind were important to Joseph Smith during the early Nauvoo years when he introduced plural marriage to a select group. Polygamy, a criminal act under the 1833 Illinois Anti-bigamy Laws, was so unacceptable to monogamous nineteenth-century society that it could be introduced to the Church only in absolute secrecy. John C. Bennett, Smith's closest confidant during this period, apparently was one of the first individuals to know of the Prophet's plans. At least he knew of several of Smith's earliest polygamous relationships, because later, in his 1842 exposé, he referred in code to seven women who can be identified as plural wives of the Prophet. For example, he correctly wrote that "Miss L***** B*****" (Louisa Beaman), the first of Smith's plural wives, was sealed to him through a marriage ceremony by Joseph Bates Noble — a fact known to only a handful (Bennett 1842–1842a, 256).

Bennett also scathingly declared that he had become a Mormon only to "get behind the curtain, and behold, at my leisure, the secret wires of the fabric and likewise those who moved them" (Bennett 1842a, 7). But in 1940, Smith believed Bennett to be sincerely converted.

Bennett would play a major role in the controversy that would follow Sarah Pratt all her life. Sometime in late 1840 or early 1841, Joseph confided to his friend that he was smitten by the "amiable and accomplished" Sarah Pratt and wanted her for "one of his *spiritual wives*, for the Lord had given her to him as a special favor for his faithfulness" (emphasis in original). Shortly

afterward, the two men took some of Bennett's sewing to Sarah's house. During the visit, as Bennett describes it, Joseph said, "Sister Pratt, the Lord has given you to me as one of my *spiritual wives*. I have the blessings of Jacob granted me, as God granted holy men of old, and as I have long looked upon you with favor, and an earnest desire of connubial bliss, I hope you will not repulse or deny me." "And is that the great secret that I am not to utter," Sarah replied. "Am I called upon to break the marriage covenant, and prove recreant to my lawful husband! *I never will.*" She added, "I care not for the blessings of Jacob. I have one good husband, and that is enough for me." But according to Bennett, the Prophet was persistent. Finally Sarah angrily told him on a subsequent visit, "Joseph, if you ever attempt any thing of the kind with me again, I will make a full disclosure to Mr. Pratt on his return home. Depend upon it, *I will certainly do it.*" "Sister Pratt," the Prophet responded, "I hope you will not expose me, for if I suffer, all must suffer; so do not expose me. Will you promise me that you will not do it?" "If you will never insult me again," Sarah replied, "I will not expose you unless strong circumstances should require it." "If you should tell," the Prophet added, "I will ruin your reputation, *remember that*" (Bennett 1842a, 228–31; emphasis in original).

According to Bennett, Sarah kept her promise. Even Orson did not know of the incident. Later Sarah recalled that "shortly after Joseph made his propositions to me . . . they enraged me so that I refused to accept any help from the tithing house or the bishop." She also added that "Bennett, who was of a sarcastic turn of mind, used to come and tell me about Joseph to tease and irritate me" (Wyl 1886, 61).

Nearly a year after Orson's return to Nauvoo, in mid-July 1841, another incident, according to Bennett, forced Sarah to tell Orson of the Prophet's behavior. If one believes Bennett's account, Joseph kissed Sarah in his counselor's presence. Sarah caused a commotion that apparently roused at least one neighbor, Mary Ettie V. Smith, who lived across the street from the Pratts. She recalled eighteen years later that during the fracas "Sarah ordered the Prophet out of the house, and the Prophet used obscene language to her" declaring that he had found John C. Bennett "in bed with her" (Green 1859, 31).

Bennett recounts (1842a, 231) that when Sarah told her husband of the Prophet's behavior, Orson approached Joseph and told him "never to offer an insult of the like again." Though full details of the confrontation between the two men have not been uncovered, it seems certain from subsequent events that Joseph not only denied Sarah's allegations, but accused her of being Bennett's paramour. Orson believed Sarah, however, a position that caused serious difficulties between him and Joseph Smith.

The rift between Joseph and Orson Pratt became public on 11 May 1842, one day after Sarah had given birth to daughter Celestia Larissa, when Church leaders announced that John C. Bennett would be disfellowshipped. According to Bennett, Orson Pratt refused to sign the announcement because, as he put it, "he knew nothing against him" (Bennett 1842a, 40–41). Perhaps as a

result of this mild resistance, six days later, on 17 May, Joseph Smith wrote to Church Recorder James Sloan, "You will be so good as to permit Bennett to withdraw his name from the Church record, if he desires to do so, and this with the best of feelings towards you and General Bennett" (Bennett 1842a, 40-41). Two days later at a Nauvoo City Council meeting where Bennett turned over the mayorship to the Prophet, Joseph asked Bennett if he had anything against him. The former mayor responded: "I know what I am about, and the heads of the Church know what they are about, I expect. I have no difficulty with the heads of the Church. I publicly avow that any one who has said that I have stated that General Smith has given me authority to hold illicit intercourse with women is a liar in the face of God" (HC 5:38).

Bennett was referring to widely circulated rumors about polygamy or "spiritual wifery," as it was usually called in Nauvoo. Accusations and denials abounded. For example, in mid-January 1842, Martha Brotherton, a young Nauvoo woman, was allegedly approached by Brigham Young in Joseph Smith's private office. "Were it lawful and right," Brotherton reported Young as saying, "could [you] accept of me for your husband and companion? . . . Brother Joseph has had a revelation from God that it is lawful and right for a man to have two wives; for as it was in the days of Abraham, so it shall be in these last days . . . if you will accept of me, I will take you straight to the celestial kingdom." Brigham then left the room and returned ten minutes later with the Prophet. "Just go ahead, and do as Brigham wants you to," Brotherton reported Smith as saying. "I know that this is lawful and right . . . I have the keys of the kingdom, and whatever I bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever I loose on earth is loosed in heaven." Martha noted she begged for time to consider, then left for Saint Louis, where she published her story in the 15 July 1842 *St. Louis Bulletin*.

Hyrum Smith, believing Joseph's public posture that polygamy was not sanctioned, addressed the Saints on 7 April 1842 "in contradiction of a report in circulation about Elders Heber C. Kimball, Brigham Young, himself, and others of the Twelve, alleging that a sister had been shut in a room for several days, and that they had endeavored to induce her to believe in having two wives." Joseph then addressed the group: "There is no person that is acquainted with our principles who would believe such lies" (HC 4:585-86).

Joseph and Hyrum were not the only Smiths denying accusations of polygamy. "A Record of the Organization and Proceedings of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo," in the handwriting of secretary Eliza R. Snow, provides substantial evidence that Emma Smith was using her powerful position as president of the Church's Relief Society to protect the Prophet from scandal and to suppress polygamy. In the organizational minutes, 17 March 1842, Emma remarked that members should not only "seek out and relieve the distressed," but "must deal frankly with each other to watch over the morals and be very careful of the character and reputation of the members of the Institution." Her meaning became clear during the 24 March meeting when she reported, "Clarissa Marvel was accus'd of scandalous falsehoods on the character of Prest. Joseph Smith without the least provocation." Clarissa had lived with

Don Carlos Smith's widow, Agnes Coolbrith Smith, for a year and thought she detected a polygamous relationship between Joseph Smith and his widowed sister-in-law — a relationship John C. Bennett also accused the Prophet of pursuing (Bennett 1842a, 256). After considerable pressure from Emma Smith and others, Clarissa marked an X by the statement: "This is to certify that I never have at any time or place, seen or heard any thing improper or unvirtuous in the conduct or conversation of either President Smith or Mrs. Agnes Smith. I also certify that I never have reported any thing derogatory to the characters of either of them" (Record, 28 Sept. 1842).

During a 30 March Relief Society meeting, Emma discussed the Clarissa Marvel situation again, then read a secret letter to the group from Joseph Smith and other Church leaders to see if the sisters were "good Masons." The letter warned against "iniquitous characters . . . [who] say they have authority from Joseph or the First Presidency." Relief Society sisters were advised

in the name of the Lord, to check & destroy any faith that any innocent person may have in any such characters; for we do not want any one to believe any thing as coming from us, contrary to the old established morals & virtues & scriptural laws, regulating the habits, customs & conduct of society: and all persons pretending to be authorized by us, or having any permit or sanction from us; are & will be liars & base impostors, & you are authorized on the very first affirmation of the kind, to denounce them as such & shun them as the flying fiery serpent, whether they are prophets, Seers, or revelators: Patriarchs, Twelve Apostles, Elders, Priests, Majors, Generals, City Councillors, Aldermen, Marshals, Police, Lord Mayors or the Devil, are alike culpable & shall be damned for such evil practices: and if you yourselves adhere to anything of the kind, you also shall be damned.

The Nauvoo High Council closely investigated charges of polygamy, hearing testimony of several witnesses from May through August 1842. On 20 May, Catherine Fuller Warren, responding to charges of "unchaste and unvirtuous conduct with John C. Bennett," admitted them and also confessed to intercourse with others, including Joseph Smith's younger brother, Apostle William Smith. She rationalized that the men had "taught the doctrine that it was right to have free intercourse with women and that the heads of the church also taught and practised it which things caused her to be led away thinking it to be right" (Hutchins 1977, 33).

Both Bennett and William Smith, members of the Mormon hierarchy, were aware of at least some of the Prophet's polygamous activities and obviously felt entitled to take "spiritual wives" themselves, without Joseph Smith's blessing, encouraging others to do so as well. Their actions were a threat to the secret "Church-sanctioned" plural marriages, however, and endangered both the Church and Joseph Smith's personal relationship with his wife Emma. To diffuse the "spiritual wifery" rumors, charges were brought against Bennett, William Smith, and others. The charges against the Prophet's brother were soon dismissed. Quorum of the Twelve President Lorenzo Snow later referred to William Smith's guilt and the subsequent withdrawal of charges against him,

Brigham Young was once tried to the very utmost by the Prophet, and for a moment his standing in the Church seemed to tremble in the balance. Wm. Smith, one of the

first quorum of apostles in this age had been guilty of adultery and many other sins. The Prophet Joseph instructed Brigham (then the Pres. of the Twelve) to prefer a charge against the sinner, which was done. Before the time set for the trial, however, Emma Smith talked to Joseph and said the charge preferred against William was with a view to injuring the Smith family. After the trial had begun, Joseph entered the room and was given a seat. The testimony of witnesses concerning the culprit's sins was then continued. After a short time Joseph arose filled with wrath and said, "Bro. Brigham, I will not listen to this abuse of my family a minute longer. I will wade in blood up to my knees before I will do it." This was a supreme moment. A rupture between the two greatest men on earth seemed imminent. But Brother Young was equal to the danger, and he instantly said, "Bro. Joseph, I withdraw the charge" (A. Cannon, 9 April 1890).

William was then sent on a mission to Pennsylvania. But Bennett and several lesser-known Nauvoo men were excommunicated, an action which drew attention away from Joseph Smith's own polygamy for a time.

Had Bennett left Nauvoo after withdrawing from the Church, things would have been much easier for Joseph Smith. But the former mayor "intend[ed] to continue with you," as he informed the city council on 19 May. "I hope the time may come when I may be restored to full confidence, fellowship, and my former standing in the church, and that my conduct may be such as to warrant my restoration, and should the time ever come that I may have the opportunity to test my faith, it will then be known whether I am a traitor or true man" (HC 5:38-39).

On the afternoon of 25 May Joseph addressed the Nauvoo Relief Society, directing his comments to Emma. Emma did not like John C. Bennett, believing him unworthy of her husband's trust. "One request to the Pres[iden]t and Society," Smith advised, "hold your tongues about things of no moment — a little tale will set the world on fire. At this time the truth on the guilty should not be told openly — we must use precaution in bringing sinners to justice but in exposing their heinous sins, we draw the indignation of a gentile world upon us (Record, 26 May 1842). Later that evening after listening to John C. Bennett's purported confession of wrongdoing before 100 of his fellow Freemasons, Joseph requested mercy for his friend and former counselor.

Bennett stayed in Nauvoo at the Robert Foster residence until mid-June. Though Smith had opposed exposing Bennett, pressures from his wife and others and testimony being given before the high council apparently caused him to change his mind. On 18 June, the Prophet spoke "his mind concerning the iniquity & wickedness of Gen. John Cook Bennet[t], & exposed him before the public" (Woodruff 2:178). Bennett, who conceivably thought his difficulties with the Prophet were on the mend, was incensed. He left Nauvoo a few days later, claiming he feared for his life, and wrote a 27 June letter to the editor of the *Sangamo Journal* of Springfield, Illinois, promising an exposé of Mormonism. The paper published the letter on 8 July, urging Bennett to "come out NOW. . . . To produce 'documentary evidence,' that the public may form opinions that cannot be gainsaid."

Bennett did not disappoint the reading public. Feisty letters from the flamboyant ex-Mormon soon appeared in the paper. Orson Pratt apparently

initially considered writing a letter also. His brother-in-law, William Allred, married to Sarah's sister Orissa, wrote a 5 July letter to Bennett requesting medical help for his ailing wife, and added, "Mr. Pratt would write, but he is *afraid* to. He wishes to be *perfectly still*, until your second letter comes out — then you may hear" (Bennett 1842a, 45; emphasis in original). Chauncey L. Higbee, a friend of Bennett's, had reported a day earlier in a letter to the doctor that the Pratts were privately saying, "If Smith ever renews the attack on them, they will come out against him, and stand it no longer" (Bennett 1842a, 450). Bennett reported that during a 14 July public speech Joseph spoke of Sarah "in a manner only befitting the lowest and most degraded vagabond in existence" (Bennett 1842a, 225). And visitors to Nauvoo on this date heard the Prophet call Sarah a "[whore] from her mother's breast" (*Sangamo Journal*, 1 Aug. 1842). Bennett's second letter, published on 15 July, exposed the details of the Prophet's polyandrous proposals to Sarah Pratt and urged her to confirm the story.

Orson was thrown into a quandry. As was evidently his habit during personal turmoil, he sought solitude, leaving family members a note that seemed to threaten suicide. When Joseph heard, he "caused the Temple hands and the principle men of the city to make search for him" (Manuscript History, 15 July 1842). Ebenezer Robinson, an editor of the Church-owned *Times and Seasons*, later remembered, "Apostle Pratt had been told Joseph Smith wanted Orson's wife as his own plural wife and John C. Bennett was accused of having committed adultery with his wife. Both men denied these charges. Under these circumstances his mind temporarily gave way, and he wandered away, no one knew where. . . . He was found some five miles below Nauvoo, sitting on a rock on the bank of the Mississippi river" (Robinson 1890, 287).

After Orson returned, Joseph called a public meeting. The official account of that gathering simply states that he "gave the public a general outline of John C. Bennett's conduct" (Manuscript History, 15 July 1842). Brigham Young, who was probably present, was more expansive two days later in a 17 July letter to Orson's brother Parley in England:

Br Orson Pratt is in trubble in consequence of his wife, hir feelings are so rougth up that he dos not know whether his wife is wrong, or whether Josephs testimony and others are wrong and due Ly and he decived for 12 years or not; he is all but crazy about matters, you may aske what the matter is concernig Sister P. — it is enoph, and doct, J.C. Bennett could tell all about [the words "it if he" are crossed out] himself & hir — enoph of that — we will not let Br. Orson goe away from us he is to good a man to have a woman destroy him.

On 20 July sworn statements by prominent Nauvoo citizens affirming that Joseph Smith was of "high moral character" and not guilty of any of Bennett's accusations were published in *The Wasp*, a Mormon Nauvoo newspaper. Orson Pratt was one of three prominent Nauvoo citizens who refused to sign the resolution. The other two, Sidney Rigdon and his son-in-law George W. Robinson, were feuding with Joseph Smith over the Prophet's polygamous proposals to Rigdon's daughter Nancy. Like Sarah Pratt, Martha Brotherton and Nancy Rigdon also suffered slanderous attacks because they exposed the

Church's private polygamy posture. *The Wasp*, for example, on 27 August 1842 denounced "John C. Bennett, the pimp and file leader of such mean harlots as Martha H. Brotherton and her predecessors from old Jezebel." Orson Hyde attempted to blacken Nancy Rigdon's character by saying her conduct was "notorious in this city" where she was "regarded generally, little, if any better, than a public prostitute," defending the Prophet's actions toward Nancy as efforts to "reprove and reclaim her if possible" (Hyde 1845, 27-29).

While the city buzzed with rumors of the Prophet's difficulties with the Pratt and Rigdon families, a public meeting was called on 22 July to obtain an "expression of the public mind in reference to the reports gone abroad, calumniating the character of Pres. Joseph Smith." A resolution presented by Wilson Law declared in part: "Having heard that John C. Bennett was circulating many base falsehoods respecting a number of the citizens of Nauvoo, and especially against our worthy and respected Mayor, Joseph Smith, we hereby manifest to the world that so far as we know him to be a good, moral, virtuous, peaceable and patriotic man" (*Times and Seasons* 3 [1 Aug. 1842]: 869). When a vote was taken on the matter, Orson Pratt and "two or three others" voted against the resolution. The minutes of the meeting are brief, but Orson's explanation of his vote caused Joseph Smith to jump to his feet asking, "Have you personally a knowledge of any immoral act in me toward the female sex, or in any other way?" "Personally, toward the female sex," Pratt replied, "I have not." Though Pratt elaborated further, perhaps defending his wife, his comments were not recorded; then William Law, Heber C. Kimball, and Hyrum Smith bore "testimony of the iniquity of those who had calumniated Pres. J. Smith's character." Ironically, Wilson Law, his brother William, and others later became disillusioned with Joseph Smith and exposed the Prophet's involvement in plural marriage in the June 1844 *Nauvoo Expositor*.

As rumors about the Pratts spread throughout Nauvoo, the 29 July *Sangamo Journal* editorialized: "We do not know what course will be pursued by Mr. Pratt. If he sinks under the denunciations and schemes of Joe Smith — if he fails to defend the reputation of himself and of the woman he has vowed to protect before high heaven — he will fix a stain upon his character which he can never wash out, and carry to the grave the pangs caused by 'the gnawings of the worm that never dies.'"

Pratt continued to stand by his wife. Brigham Young recorded that during this period he and other members of the Quorum labored nearly constantly with "Elder Orson Pratt, whose mind became so darkened by the influence and statements of his wife, that he came out in rebellion against Joseph, refusing to believe his testimony or obey his counsel. He said he would believe his wife in preference to the Prophet. Joseph told him if he did believe his wife and follow her suggestions he would go to hell." Even the threat of losing his Quorum membership did not deter Pratt; he responded fearlessly to Brigham Young's hints that his position might be in jeopardy by advising him to ordain Amasa Lyman "in my stead" (Watson 1968, 120-21).

Wilford Woodruff corroborates in his 10 September 1842 diary: "There was a counsel of the 'Twelve' held for four days with Elder Orson Pratt to

labour with him to get him to recall his sayings against Joseph & the Twelve but he persisted in his wicked course & would not recall any of his sayings which were unjust & untrue, The Twelve then rejected him as a member of their quorum & he was cut off from the Twelve. Dr. John Cook Bennet was the ruin of Orson Pratt” (2:187; emphasis in original).

Smith was not directly involved in the excommunication of Orson Pratt on 20 August 1842. The Prophet was walking a tightrope, attempting to restore peace with the Rigdon family while fighting extradition to Missouri as “an accessory to an assault with intent to kill” Missouri’s former governor, Lilburn W. Boggs on 6 May 1842. Fearful of being kidnapped and taken to Missouri, the Prophet went into hiding on 11 August 1842, contemplating escape to the Church timberlands in Wisconsin (HC 5:105–06).

Joseph continued to be infuriated by Pratt, Rigdon, and Robinson’s refusal to certify his “high moral character.” As his brother Hyrum addressed the Saints on 25 August, the Prophet appeared, causing a stir. Taking the stand, he admonished the Twelve and others to “support the character of the prophet, the Lord’s anointed.” He lashed out at “O[rson] Pratt and others of the same class [who] caused trouble by telling stories to people who would betray me, and they must believe these stories because his Wife told him so!” “And as to all that Orson Pratt, Sidney Rigdon, or George W. Robinson can do to prevent me,” the Prophet concluded, “I can kick them off my heels, as many as you can name” (Manuscript History, 29 Aug. 1842).

Smith continued with a plea for volunteers to “disabuse the public mind in relation to these false statements of Dr. J. C. Bennett.” To provide ample ammunition to the 380 elders who volunteered, the Church press printed on 31 August a special edition of *The Wasp* which contained “Affidavits and Certificates, Disproving the Statements and Affidavits contained In John C. Bennett’s Letters.” To discredit Sarah Pratt’s accusations, the publication contained a 23 July 1842 letter allegedly from Stephen A. Goddard, whom Sarah had boarded with in 1840, to Orson Pratt:

. . . considering it a duty upon me I now communicate unto you some things relative to Dr. Bennett and your wife. . . . I took your wife into my house because she was destitute of a house, Oct. 6, 1840, and from the first night, until the last, with the exception of one night, it being nearly a month, the Dr. was there as sure as the night came. . . . One night they took their chairs out of doors and remained there we supposed until 12 o’clock or after; at another time they went over to the house where you now live and came back after dark, or about that time. We went over several times late in the evening while she lived in the house of Dr. Foster, and were most sure to find Dr. Bennett and your wife together, as it were, man and wife.

The special edition also contained a sworn statement from Stephen Goddard’s wife Zeruiah: “I would further state that from my own observation, I am satisfied that their conduct was anything but virtuous, and I know Mrs. Pratt is not a woman of truth, and I believe the statements which Dr. Bennett made concerning Joseph Smith are false, and fabricated for the purpose of covering his own iniquities, and enabling him to practice his base designs on the innocent.”

Years later, when disaffected from the Church, Sarah gave her account of the Goddard incident:

In his endeavors to ruin my character Joseph went so far as to publish an extra-sheet containing affidavits against my reputation. When this sheet was brought to me I discovered to my astonishment the names of two people on it, man and wife, with whom I had boarded for a certain time. . . . I went to their house; the man left the house hurriedly when he saw me coming. I found the wife and said to her rather excitedly: "What does it all mean?" She began to sob. "It is not my fault" said she. "Hyrum Smith came to our house, with the affidavits all written out, and forced us to sign them. '*Joseph and the Church must be saved,*' said he. We saw that resistance was useless, they would have ruined us; so we signed the papers" (Wyl 1886, 62-63; emphasis in original).

The Goddard story had serious problems that even Sarah did not point out. John C. Bennett had been appointed 4 October 1840 to help Joseph Smith draft the Nauvoo Charter and was selected as a delegate to lobby the passage of the bill through the legislature at Springfield, almost a hundred miles away. That Bennett could draft the complicated documents, travel to and from Springfield, and be with Sarah Pratt every night except one during a one-month period, seems highly improbable. In addition, it seems unlikely that if Sarah and Bennett were having an affair they would flaunt their illicit behavior before the Goddards — personal friends of Orson Pratt.

Hancock County Sheriff J. B. Backenstos also provided a sworn affidavit in the 31 August special edition of *The Wasp* testifying that during the winter of 1841-42 he had accused Bennett of "having an illicit intercourse with Mrs. Orson Pratt . . . when said Bennett replied that she made a first rate go." But during that winter Orson was in Nauvoo and Sarah was sick and pregnant with their daughter Celestia; Mormon Backenstos's statement may thus be dismissed as slander.

Joseph Smith, III, in Salt Lake City, quizzed Sarah on these stories in the mid-1870s. According to his account, he asked Sarah: "It has been frequently told that I dare not come to you and ask you about your relations with [my father], for fear you would tell me things which would be unwelcome to me." "You need have no such fear," Sarah reportedly replied to young Joseph, "your father was never guilty of any action or proposal of an improper nature in my house, to me, or in my presence, at any time or place. There is no truth in the reports that have been circulated about him in this regard" (Anderson and Hulmes 1952, 69-71). According to Sarah's account, however, "I saw that [Joseph] was not inclined to believe the truth about his father, so I said to him, 'You pretend to have revelations from the Lord. Why don't you ask the Lord to tell you *what kind of man your father really was?*'" (Wyl 1886, 61; emphasis in original).

Unlike most Mormon dissidents, the Pratts refused to leave Nauvoo. Orson wrote in the 2 September 1842 *Wasp* that, contrary to rumor, he had not "renounced 'Mormonism,' left Nauvoo, &c." He further explained how he was able to believe his wife's accusations against Joseph Smith while remaining in the Church: "The lustre of truth cannot be dimmed by the shadows of error

and falsehood. Neither will the petty difficulties existing among its votaries weaken its influence or destroy its power. Its course is onward to accomplish the purposes of its great Author in relation to the happiness and salvation of the human family.” Pratt wrote again two weeks later in the 26 September *Wasp* that he and Sarah were not “preparing to leave and expose Mormonism” but intended to make “NAUVOO OUR RESIDENCE, AND MORMONISM OUR MOTTO” (emphasis in original).

John C. Bennett, humiliated, stripped of his Mormon power base, and accused in *The Wasp Extra*, 17 July 1842, of deviant acts, including “adultery, fornication, embryo infanticide and buggery,” wrote the Pratts and Rigdons on 10 January 1843 for testimony corroborating his accusations towards Joseph Smith. Bennett explained he was collaborating with Missouri authorities to extradite Smith: “We shall try [him] on the Boggs case, when we get him into Missouri,” Bennett wrote. “The war goes bravely on; and, although Smith thinks he is now safe, the enemy is near, even at the door. He has awoke the wrong passenger.” Rigdon, the Nauvoo postmaster, received the letter five days later, read it, and gave it to Pratt (HC 5:250–51).

Bennett underestimated Rigdon’s and Pratt’s loyalty. Though they were angered by Smith’s actions towards Nancy and Sarah, they still believed in Mormonism and neither was willing to conspire in handing the Prophet over to Missouri authorities. Orson immediately took the letter to Smith.¹ Though Joseph was concerned about Bennett’s threats, he was elated at Orson’s allegiance. Two days later on 20 January the Prophet called a meeting of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve to consider Orson’s case. Though a quorum had not been present when Amasa Lyman was voted in earlier, Smith startled the group by announcing that “as there was not a quorum when Orson Pratt’s case came up before that he was still a member — he had not legally been cut off.” Quorum President Brigham Young added that all he personally had against Orson “was when he came home he loved his wife better than David,” a cryptic reference to Joseph Smith. Smith, speaking of Sarah Pratt’s accusations, then turned to Orson. “She lied about me,” the Prophet said. “I never made the offer which she said I did. I will not advise you to break up your family — unless it were asked of me. Then I would council you to get a bill from your wife and marry a virtuous woman — and a new family but if you do not do it [I] shall never throw it in your teeth” (Minutes of the Quorum of the Twelve, 20 Jan. 1843).

¹ While delivering a pro-polygamy speech before an 1878 audience of anti-polygamy members of the RLDS Church, Orson seemingly commented on his 1842 difficulties by saying “he got his information from a wicked source, from those disaffected, but as soon as he learned the truth he was satisfied” (*Millennial Star* 40 [16 Dec. 1878]: 788). One may only speculate what or who he was referring to. Not only were John C. Bennett and Sarah Pratt disaffected at this time, but so were others, including Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Olney, George W. Robinson, Francis Higbee, Chauncey Higbee, Nancy Rigdon, and Martha Brotherton. Though Orson Pratt at no time indicated he did not believe Sarah, John C. Bennett’s 10 January 1843 letter was obviously the turning point in Orson’s recommitment to Joseph Smith — “protecting the Lord’s anointed,” as it was called in Nauvoo.

Was the Prophet being forthright? Or was he attempting to cover his own polygamous behavior? Was Sarah Pratt telling the truth or was she hiding an affair with John C. Bennett?

If Sarah Pratt and John C. Bennett were sexually involved, why is her name never mentioned in the Nauvoo High Council Minutes, which extensively detail John C. Bennett's "spiritual wifery" relationships? Why were charges against her membership not filed by Joseph Smith or anyone else? If the alleged 1840–41 Bennett/Sarah Pratt affair was as public as the Goddard account implies, why did Joseph Smith appoint John C. Bennett assistant president of the Church in April 1841? Why did Smith not link Sarah Pratt's name with Bennett's until *after* he was confronted by Orson Pratt? And what of the January 1841 revelation that declared of John C. Bennett, "I have seen the work he hath done, which I accept if he continue and will crown him with blessings and great glory" (D&C 124:17).

In addition to these important questions, several other married Mormon women, including Mary Elizabeth Rollins, Sarah M. Kimball, Nancy Marinda Johnson, Sylvia P. Sessions, Zina D. and Prescinda Huntington, long after Nauvoo, detailed Joseph Smith's polyandrous proposals to them (Van Wagoner 1985). However, Jane Law's situation resembled most closely Sarah Pratt's difficulties with Joseph Smith. After the Laws had left the Church, William Law, a former counselor in the First Presidency, wrote in his 13 May 1844 diary: "[Joseph] ha[s] lately endeavored to seduce my wife, and ha[s] found her a virtuous woman" (Cook 1982, 65). The Laws elaborated on this in a public meeting shortly thereafter. "The Prophet had made dishonorable proposals to [my] wife . . . under cover of his asserted 'Revelation,'" Law stated. He further explained that Joseph came to the Law home in the middle of the night when William was absent and told Jane that "the Lord had commanded that he should take spiritual wives, to add to his glory." Law then called on his wife to corroborate what he had said. She did so and further explained that Joseph had "asked her to give him half her love; she was at liberty to keep the other half for her husband" (A. Young 1876, 61). Jane refused the Prophet, and according to William Law's 20 January 1887 letter to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Smith then considered the couple apostates. "Jane had been speaking evil of him for a long time . . . slandered him, and lied about him without cause," Law reported Smith as saying. "My wife would not speak evil of . . . anyone . . . without cause," Law asserted. "Joseph is the liar and not she. That Smith admired and lusted after many men's wives and daughters, *is a fact*, but they could not help that. They or most of them considered his admiration an insult, and treated him with scorn. In return for this scorn, he generally managed to blacken their reputations — see the case of . . . Mrs. Pratt, a good, virtuous woman" (emphasis in original).

Some have assumed that Joseph Smith did not intend to marry wives of other men but merely wished to test their virtue or loyalty. In Sarah Pratt's case, for example, the *New York Herald* of 14 September 1877 declared: "It is said that the Prophet admitted to [Pratt] the attempt he made on his wife's

virtue, but that it was only done to see whether she was true to her absent husband." Jedediah Grant, second counselor to Brigham Young and father of Church President Heber J. Grant, commented on such tests in a Utah sermon delivered on 19 February 1854:

When the family organization was revealed from heaven . . . and Joseph began . . . to add to his family, what a quaking there was in Israel. Says one brother to another, "Joseph says all covenants are done away, and none are binding but the new covenants; now suppose Joseph should come and say he wanted your wife, what would you say to that?" "I would tell him to go to hell." This was the spirit of many in the early days of this Church. Did the Prophet Joseph want every man's wife he asked for? He did not . . . the grand object in view was to try the people of God, to see what was in them (JD 2:13-14).

However, with at least some married women, the Prophet's intent went beyond "trying the people." He did secretly marry a few women with living husbands. Under these circumstances, Sarah Pratt's story of Joseph Smith's proposals to her seems plausible. Furthermore, neither Sarah nor Orson retracted their statements or denied them. Though Sarah was apparently not excommunicated during this time and Orson's excommunication was invalidated, one hour after the adjournment of the 20 January 1843 Quorum of the Twelve meeting in which the Prophet denied Sarah's accusations, she and Orson were rebaptized in the Mississippi River by Joseph Smith himself.

By mid-February 1843, Nauvoo seemed tranquil. The Pratts were quiet, and Joseph had temporarily resolved his difficulties with the Rigdon family. The Prophet continued to practice plural marriage, being sealed to at least nine women in the spring and early summer of 1843, but Church leaders, including Joseph Smith, frequently denied they were sanctioning polygamy. Prefabricated stories to protect polygamy were common. Sidney Rigdon, in the 18 June 1845 *Messenger and Advocate*, quoted Parley P. Pratt: "We must lie to support brother Joseph, it is our duty to do so."

In the spring of 1843, Orson Pratt prepared for another mission to New York. His brother Parley, away in England during both the 20 August 1842 Quorum meeting when Orson was excommunicated and the 20 January 1843 meeting when Joseph Smith declared the excommunication invalid, knew of Sarah and Orson's difficulties with Joseph Smith only through Brigham Young. In a 7 May letter to the Pratt's then non-Mormon cousin, John Van Cott, Parley attempted to explain away the controversy:

Bro. Orson Pratt is in the church and always has been & has the confidence of Joseph Smith and all good men who know him. . . . As to Bennett or his book [*The History of the Saints*, 1842] I consider it a little stooping to mention it. It is beneath contempt & would disgrace the society of *hell* & the *Devil*. But it will answer the end of its creation viz: to delude those who have rejected that pure & glorious record the Book of Mormon. There is not such a thing named among the saints as he represents. & his book or name is scarcely mentioned, & never except with a perfect disgust. His object was vengeance on those who exposed his iniquity (Pratt to Van Cott; emphasis in original).

Interestingly, Orson added a postscript to Parley's letter: "J.C. Bennett has published lies concerning myself & family & the people with which I am

connected. . . . His book I have read with the greatest disgust. No candid honest man can or will believe it. He has disgraced himself in eyes of all civilized society who will despise his very name." Sarah later disagreed: "[I] know that the principle statements in John C. Bennett's Book on Mormonism are true" (Statement).

Orson also explained to his cousin that Sarah and their two children were going with him on a mission to "Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and other places in the east." They returned to Nauvoo on 7 November 1843. By early spring Pratt was sent to Washington, D.C., to petition Congress to raise an army of 100,000 to police the western United States. Failing in this effort, he journeyed through New York and New England campaigning for Joseph Smith's U.S. presidential platform.

Orson, along with other campaigners, returned to Nauvoo by early fall in response to news of Joseph and Hyrum Smith's murders on 27 June 1844. After a brief power struggle between Sidney Rigdon and Brigham Young, the Quorum of the Twelve emerged as the governing body of the Church. The group's continued, secret promulgation of polygamy outraged Rigdon. "It is a fact, so well known," he wrote in a letter published in the 15 October 1844 *Messenger and Advocate*,

that the Twelve and their adherents have endeavored to carry on this spiritual wife business . . . and have gone to the most shameful and desparate [sic] lengths to keep it from the public. First, insulting innocent females, and when they resented the insult, these monsters in human shape would assail their characters by lying, and perjuries, with a multitude of desparate [sic] men to help them effect the ruin of those whom they had insulted, and all this to enable them to keep these coorrupt [sic] practices from the view of the world.

Though Sarah Pratt may have felt vindicated by Rigdon's published account, her ordeal with polygamy had just begun. On 27 October 1844, she gave birth to her namesake, Sarah Marinda Pratt. Less than a month later, on 22 November, despite misgivings, she permitted Orson to marry his first plural wife — twenty-year-old Charlotte Bishop. For obedience to the "Law of Sarah," Sarah Pratt was sealed to Orson for eternity by Brigham Young on this same date (O. Pratt, "Brief Abstract").

The "Law of Sarah" as outlined in D&C 132:65 explains that a wife who does not consent to give her husband other wives "becomes the transgressor; and he is exempt" from seeking her approval in the future. Women who refused to cooperate had little recourse. As outlined in Orson Pratt's treatise on plural marriage:

When a man who has a wife, teaches her the law of God, as revealed to the ancient patriarchs, and as manifested by new revelation, and she refuses to give her consent for him to marry another according to that law, then, it becomes necessary, for her to state before the President the reasons why she witholds her consent; if her reasons are sufficient and justifiable and the husband is found in the fault, or in transgression, then, he is not permitted to take any step in regard to obtaining another. But if the wife can show no good reason why she refuses to comply with the law which was given unto Sarah of old, then it is lawful for her husband, if permitted by revelation through the prophet, to be married to others without her consent, and he will be justified, and

she will be condemned, because she did not give them unto him, as Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham, and as Rachel and Leah gave Bilhah and Zilpah to their husband, Jacob" (O. Pratt 1854, 41).

President Joseph F. Smith elaborated during the Reed Smoot Hearings:

- A. The condition is that if she does not consent the Lord will destroy her, but I do not know how he will do it.
- Q. Is it not true that . . . if she refuses her consent her husband is exempt from the law which requires her consent?
- A. Yes; he is exempt from the law which requires her consent. She is commanded to consent, but if she does not, then he is exempt from the requirement.
- Q. Then he is at liberty to proceed without her consent, under the law. In other words, her consent amounts to nothing?
- A. It amounts to nothing but her consent (*Proceedings* 1907, 1:201).

Three weeks after Orson's marriage to Charlotte Bishop, on 13 December 1844, Sarah was voted into the Endowment Council, a secret organization also called the Endowment Quorum, the Quorum of the Anointed, Joseph Smith's Prayer Circle, or simply the Quorum. It was primarily organized to teach select men and women how to obtain full salvation with God. A secondary function was to "test" initiates' ability to keep a secret prior to their introduction to plural marriage. The introduction of Freemasonry to Mormonism in 1842 also apparently served this purpose (Quinn 1978, 82-96). Sarah also participated that day in Orson's sealing to Adelia Ann Bishop, Charlotte's eighteen-year-old sister.

Orson's family continued to expand. On 27 March 1845, Sarah witnessed his marriage to twenty-five-year-old Mary Ann Merrill. Four months later, on 26 July 1845, after Orson had left for another mission to New York, nine-month-old Sarah Marinda died and, according to Orson, was "buried on my city lot, opposite my dwelling house, east" (Watson 1975, 5).

Orson was poor in New York, and his four wives were even poorer in Nauvoo. Charlotte, perhaps sensing financial security elsewhere, "married a young man by the name of Tyler," Orson reported in his "Brief Abstract of My Genealogy and Ancestry," and moved to Missouri. The 18 October 1845 *New York Messenger* contained a letter from Orson to the Saints describing

. . . my own circumstances, how that I had labored long, with untiring patience and zeal for the salvation of man; without the opportunity of entering into any kind of business, to acquire even the necessaries of life for my increasing family. Already I perceived myself involved in debt, to the amount of about four hundred dollars, occasioned by borrowing a little money here and there, to bear my expenses from place to place, and to feed and clothe myself and family (O. Pratt 1845).

He then asked readers if "they would with one accord contribute to his relief, by sending through the mail, or otherwise, sufficient to release him from his unpleasant condition." Financial contributions were small and insufficient. However, before returning to Nauvoo in November, Orson obtained Sarah's share of the sale of her family property in Henderson and used it to purchase a carriage and span of horses.

In Nauvoo, the Saints concentrated on obtaining their endowments. Orson and Sarah were endowed in the Nauvoo temple on 12 December 1845 (the day after Orson's return) and were again sealed on 8 January 1846 — a customary step for sealings that had earlier been performed outside the temple. But on 11 January, during an unusual event in the temple, both Orson and Sarah were evicted by vote because of a conflict with Parley P. Pratt. Parley had been secretly sealed to Belinda Marden by Brigham Young on 20 November 1844, and, on 1 January 1846, she gave birth to a son, Nephi. Though Belinda was living in the Pratt home, Parley's legal wife Mary Ann did not know of the sealing. Evidently Sarah Pratt told Mary Ann that the baby's father was Parley, because during the 11 January temple session Parley confronted Sarah, accusing her of "influencing his wife against him, and of ruining and breaking up his family," as well as "being an apostate, and of speaking against the heads of the Church and against him" (Watson 1975, 495). Orson strongly defended his wife as he had done in 1842, and they were both expelled from the temple.

The next day Orson felt conciliatory though justified in his actions. Apparently unaware of his brother's sealing to Belinda Marden, Orson criticized Parley when he wrote Brigham Young on 12 January 1846:

With all the light and knowledge that he has received concerning the law of the priesthood and with all the counsels that he had received from our quorum, if he feels at liberty to go into the city of New York or elsewhere and seduce girls or females and sleep and have connexion with them contrary to the law of God, and the sacred counsels of his brethren, it is something that does not concern me as an individual. And if my quorum and the church can fellowship him, I shall find no fault with him, but leave it between him, the church, and God.²

Orson continued by defending Sarah:

When it comes to that, that my wife cannot come into this holy & consecrated temple to enjoy the meetings and society of the saints, without being attacked by [Parley's] false accusations and hellish lies, and then too in the presence of a large assembly, I feel as though it was too much to be borne. Where is there a person, that was present last evening, that heard my wife say the least thing against him or his family. . . . And yet she was accused by him, before that respectable company, in the most impudent and mailcious [sic] manner of whispering against him all over the temple. Under these circumstances, brethren, I verily supposed that I had a perfect right to say a few words in defense of my much injured family. I therefore accused him of false accusations and lying. It was my belief at that time, that there was no place nor circumstances, in heaven, on earth, or in hell, too sacred to defend the cause of my innocent family when they were publicly attacked in so unjust and insulting manner.

² Orson Hyde also later rebuked Parley P. Pratt in November 1846 for teaching polygamy in England when specifically told not to by Brigham Young. Parley responded to Hyde: "You, Elder Hyde, do not hold the keys of sitting in judgement upon my head, by your dreams, visions, whispering of the Spirit, doubts or fears, or by any other means. This belongs to a united quorum and they can only do it by testimony according to the laws of the Kingdom" (S. F. Pratt 1984, 385).

His letter provides insight into how Church leaders expected him to respond in such situations:

After I learned that it was my duty to stand and hear my family abused in the highest degree without the least provocation, and yet not open my mouth in her defense, I immediately confessed my fault to the counsel, but my confession was rejected. Now brethren, I stand ready and willing to make any further confessions to the counsel, necessary to my restoration from banishment to the enjoyment of your meetings, which you in your wisdom may dictate. And as I frankly & freely confessed the thing pointed out by Prest. as being wrong, namely "*The opening of my mouth*" (Brigham Young Collection; emphasis in original).

The letter was apparently considered sufficient evidence of remorse, and later that afternoon Orson and Sarah were initiated into the "Fulness of the Priesthood," a sealing ordinance received through the second anointing and also referred to as "calling and election made sure," "second endowment," and "higher blessings" (Buerger 1983).

About this time, Orson took his fourth plural wife, Sarah Louise Chandler.

By mid-February the Saints were leaving Nauvoo. Orson recorded in his journal: "Myself & my family consisting of my wife and three small children — the youngest a babe only of three weeks old [Vanson Pratt, born 23 January 1846] and three young ladies who were intending to accompany us across the mountains bid adieu to our comfortable habitation & started in the cold & storm for the ferry." The three ladies were Orson's plural wives ("Report of 3rd Fifty 2nd Ten — Shoal Creek, 1 April 1846," and Watson 1975, 316).

By 17 June the Pratts had reached Council Bluffs, Iowa, where they wintered. Orson prepared to go westward with the first pioneer group and was the first Mormon to enter the Salt Lake Valley. He left Salt Lake on 26 August, arriving at Winter Quarters on 31 October. He found his family changed: Sarah had given birth to a son, Laron Pratt, on 10 July 1847; eighteen days later eighteen-month-old Vanson had died, and Adelia Bishop had given birth to Lucy Adelia, the first of thirty-three children born to his plural wives.

During the long, cold winter of 1847–48, most of the Saints were sick and had only scanty provisions. Orson's families were so poor that "their best meal was frozen turnips and dry buckwheat cakes" (M. Pratt 1891, 12:392). In the spring, Orson was appointed to preside over the European mission, left his plural wives in the care of Sarah's brother, Ormus Bates, and took Sarah and her children to England.

The British Isles were a successful missionary field for Orson, but Sarah found the English people "cold and indifferent" (S. M. Pratt to B. Smith, 17 July 1849). On 13 October 1848, she gave birth to a son, Marlon, who lived only eleven months, and a daughter, Marantha Althera, 21 December 1849. Sarah kept busy with her sewing and with music lessons for Orson, Jr., and Celestia, but she was homesick and disappointed that so few of her friends wrote. She had been in Liverpool almost a year before she received her first letter from Salt Lake City on 17 July 1849 — from her close friend Bathsheba Smith, wife of Apostle George A. Smith. "I should rejoice to be there," Sarah

wrote back the same day and “witness the the [sic] work progress, and likewise to enjoy the society of the saints of God.”

The Pratts remained in Liverpool for two more years. Orson, anxious to see his other wives and children, left for Council Bluffs in the spring of 1850 but would not allow Sarah to accompany him. Irritated, she wrote on 4 April 1850 to Bathsheba Smith:

Mr. Pratt left on the 9th of March for the Bluffs . . . he will return in June, or July, perhaps you may think this is a great trial for me, but I can assure it is no more of a trial, than if he were gone on other business, for I have long since made up my mind that it is no use to fret about those who do not fret about *me*, and I enjoy myself as much as I can considering my poor health, my health is not good. This climate does not agree with me. . . . I am blessed with having children, but could I raise them I should feel that I was more blessed, but the Lord has suffered four of my little ones to be taken in infancy, for what reason I cannot tell. He knows.

Sarah also confided to Bathsheba in this same letter that in Orson’s absence, some Mormon missionaries had dredged up the controversy of her Nauvoo years:

Some of the American Elders . . . are so richeous [sic] that they have come here, and instead of preaching the gospel as they were sent to do they have left nothing unsaid that they could say to make my character as black as they could. I suppose they were afraid the saints would respect me more than their own *wives*, such for instance as Neils Andrews . . . he had the partner of his quilt with him and I suppose he was afraid I would tell that she was not his first wife, but the Lord knows I have had better business to attend to than to be found traducing the character of my brother, or sister.

When Orson returned to England in July, the family immediately began preparations for the trip to America. The seas were rough during the Atlantic crossing, and, off the coast of Florida, fifteen-month-old Marintha Althera died. The small body was preserved, brought to shore, and buried in Jackson County, Missouri in the same grave with an “old lady by the name of Jane Wild” (Watson 1975, 5). The family continued on to Salt Lake Valley, and on 21 August 1851 on the north side of the Platte River twenty miles below Fort Laramie, Sarah gave birth to a healthy son, Harmel.³

Reaching Salt Lake City, Orson moved Sarah and her family to a lot on the northwest corner of the block immediately south of the temple block, “which had a good house and other improvements upon it” and had been originally settled by Parley P. Pratt.

Four months later, on 19 February 1852, forty-one-year-old Orson Pratt married twenty-two-year-old English convert Marian Ross, who had emigrated

³ Harmel was married to Mary Elizabeth Culin 18 November 1873 by his father and had one daughter, Ada Marinda. Chief clerk of the state prison under his brother Arthur, and clerk of the state board of corrections, “Mr. Pratt was an attorney by profession, was formerly United States Commissioner, and among his many accomplishments were his abilities as a musician and a chess player. He was a genial man of an even temperament, one who would manage to get along in the world, no matter what he ran up against.” He died of a heart attack at the age of fifty-six (Obituary, *Deseret News*, 21 Dec. 1907).

from England with the Pratt family. On 29 August 1852, Orson delivered the first public address supporting polygamy. Two weeks later he was on his way to Washington, D.C., to publish a newspaper advocating plural marriage. Sarah, pregnant with her tenth child, Arthur, remained in Salt Lake City.

In an attempt to revitalize missionary efforts after polygamy became public knowledge, Church leaders sent Orson Pratt back to England in the summer of 1853. As if to emphasize Mormonism's new public polygamy posture, Orson there married twenty-one-year-old Sarah Louise Lewis. Sarah Pratt would not know of Orson's latest wife until his return in the spring of 1854. Orson was promptly dispatched on another mission. He and Brigham Young had not gotten along well since the trouble in Nauvoo. Orson chafed continually under Brigham Young's autocratic rule. His efforts to work a more democratic hierarchy were evident as early as 16 November 1847 when he stated, "I think the decision of 7 men as Superior to the Pres." Brigham replied, "I am the pres of the 12 — the head of the people — I am mouth — I will say as I please, do as I please — If I am right all lift up the right hand. Up — Kimball, Richards, Smith, Woodruff, Benson, Lyman, Phelps, & Bullock. B.Y. those who say Orson is right lift up the right hand. Orson held a hand up. Brigham That is 9 to 1" (Misc. meeting papers; Bergera 1980). Young often dealt with Orson's obstinacy by sending him to distant missions.

When Orson returned from his Eastern States mission in 1855, he lived for a time in Fillmore, Utah, where he served as a member of the territorial legislature and, at forty-four, married a sixteen-year-old Fillmore girl, Juliaet Phelps, on 14 December 1855.

In the spring of 1856, Young sent Orson to preside over the European mission. During the twenty-one months he was absent, Sarah's daughter Herma Ethna was born, and both Orson, Jr., and Celestia were married.⁴ On the 24th of July 1857, Orson took another English wife, twenty-eight-year-old Eliza Crooks.

Back in Salt Lake City in early 1858, Pratt again locked horns with Young. Their disagreements remained unresolved for nearly two years. During this time, Sarah's family struggled against poverty. The two men finally cleared their differences in April 1860, and a few days later Young called Pratt in to "inquire into [his] pecuniary circumstances" and, finding him destitute, provided the family with supplies (Brigham Young Office Journal, 7 April 1860).

⁴ Orson, Sr., reported in the *Millennial Star* 18 (6 Dec. 1856): 784, "Married, in Great Salt Lake City . . . Mr. Orson Pratt, Junior, to Miss Susan Snow, daughter of Zerubabel Snow, formerly a United States Judge for that Territory. Ceremony by President Young . . . the 1st of October, 1856. The age of the bridegroom is about 19 years, that of the bride about 15. May the God of our ancestor Joseph, who was sold into Egypt, bless them, and their generations after them, for ever and ever." Orson, Jr., and Susan would have five children: Arthur Eugene, Ernest, Gertrude Lucille, Ida Josephine, and Herbert Oliver. Orson Pratt, Jr., died 6 December 1903 at the age of sixty-seven. Celestia married returned missionary Albert P. Tyler on 4 January 1858. They had three children, Marinda (Minnie), Florence, and Hermine, before separating about 1880. Tyler, born in New York in 1826, died in the "poor house" in Salt Lake City, 10 Oct. 1889, according to the "Death Record of Salt Lake City" (LDS Genealogical Archives). Celestia died 6 January 1905 at sixty-two.

Two-year-old Liola Menilla Pratt — Sarah's youngest child — died 21 September 1860. Two days later, President Young called Orson on a mission to the eastern United States to help poor converts emigrate to the West. He returned a year later.

Recognizing that President Abraham Lincoln's 19 April 1861 blockade of the South would result in a cotton shortage, Brigham Young visited Mormon settlements in the Virgin River Basin in May 1861 to assess the Church's fledgling cotton industry. During October Conference he called more than 300 men, on Apostle George A. Smith's recommendation, to move to Utah's "Dixie," the Virgin River Basin. Orson Pratt, along with Apostle Erastus Snow, was appointed to co-preside over the mission.

Sarah loved her Salt Lake home with its irrigation ditches, mature trees, and well-groomed gardens, but Orson sold the home to Brigham Young for \$4,000. On 29 October Orson and Sarah, accompanied by Orson Pratt, Jr., their son-in-law, Albert P. Tyler, and their families left the Salt Lake Valley.

After the group reached Toquerville, northeast of St. George, a considerable number of the families, including the Pratts, elected to go upriver to the Rockville vicinity, where they hoped to escape the malaria of the lower Virgin. They were still camped in wagons and tents on Christmas Day 1861 when rain began to fall — rain that seldom stopped for more than a month. Food, clothing, bedding, and fuel were soaked. The Pratts, like most of the settlers, were disillusioned with the venture. Orson hinted as much in a letter to Brigham Young, who responded on 26 February 1862:

You have now seen more or less of that region of our Territory, you have passed a winter there, and of course are able to form some estimate as to how your present mission pleased you, and of the prospects of your usefulness therein . . . should you conclude that you had rather return to this City, with your family and effects, you are hereby given liberty to do so. And should you so conclude, you are welcome to the property in this city I purchased of you at the time of your departure.

Orson, feeling guilty over his previous letter, refused the invitation. "I have no choice in this matter," he replied to Brigham on 11 March 1862, "other than to do your will, and the will of Him whose servants we are. Wherever the Spirit in you suggests that I can be the most useful, it is there I desire to be sent — it is there I can be the most happy, untill [sic] recalled or another field of labor is assigned me." The Pratts had moved to St. George on 1 March, but much to Sarah's disappointment, two more years would pass before she would again see Salt Lake City. Orson returned in early 1863 to escape difficulties with Erastus Snow and to spend time with his other wives and children (Bleak n.d. 175).

St. George was plagued by oppressive summer heat, flies, unreliable water supplies, floods, crop failure, and illness. Sarah had insisted on bringing their organ and her family helped launch theatrics, debates, and a local newspaper. Though by all appearances a good Mormon, according to her own account, Sarah had not believed in Mormonism since Nauvoo, and had been endeavoring after the family first arrived in Salt Lake to "rear my children so that they should never espouse the Mormon faith," while concealing "from my neigh-

bors and from the church authorities the fact that I was thus rearing them” (*New York Herald*, 18 May 1877).⁵ The first fruits of heresy in Sarah Pratt’s children budded in the spring of 1863 when Orson Pratt, Jr., her eldest, was twenty-five. Witty, well-educated, and philosophical like his father, young Orson was not only St. George’s first postmaster and a city alderman but a high councilman and respected musician as well. During a 9 April 1863 trip to St. George, Brigham Young called young Pratt on a mission. Though he initially accepted the call, he changed his mind. “During your recent visit to St. George,” he wrote to Brigham Young on 13 June,

I informed you of the change that had taken place in my religious views, thinking that, in such a case, you would not insist on my undertaking the mission assigned me. You received me kindly and gave me what I have no doubt you considered good fatherly advice. I was much affected during the interview and hastily made a promise which, subsequent reflection convinces me it is not my duty to perform. . . . Should any thing hereafter occur to convince me that my present decision is unwise I shall be ready to revoke it.

Extraordinary missionary that he was, Orson Pratt, Sr., must have felt regret and concern over young Orson’s decision. Refusal to serve a mission in the 1860s was tantamount to apostasy. As Heber C. Kimball of the First Presidency had warned in 1856: “When a man is appointed to take a mission, unless he has a just and honorable reason for not going, if he does not go he will be severed from the Church” (*Journal History*, 24 Feb. 1856).

Perhaps to atone for his son, Orson, Sr., volunteered for a mission (Bleak n.d., 175). Poor harvests in 1863 produced desperate food shortages, and though Orson did not know it at the time he left for Austria on 24 April 1864, leaving his family in St. George evidently pushed Sarah and her children into apostasy. In a rage, perhaps feeling abandoned in a land she hated, Sarah burned most of Orson’s journals, letters, and papers in a backyard bonfire (Kimball, 1919). On 7 May 1864, young Orson resigned his position with the St. George High Council. Erastus Snow, an uncle of Orson, Jr.’s, wife Susan, whom young Orson called a “snake-in-the grass” (Bleak n.d., 175), did not want Orson to resign and “made some feeling remarks” but finally agreed that he “could not conscientiously, and in justice to the cause we are engaged in, refuse to Brother Pratt the liberty to withdraw from the Council as Brother

⁵ Of Sarah’s six children who reached adulthood only Laron, who as a small child lost his hearing during a fever, embraced Mormonism. Endowed 30 March 1867 and married to Ethelwynne Clarissa Brown 27 June 1869 in the Salt Lake Endowment House, he had five children: Laron, Maude, Ethelwynne, Marinda, and Herma. A printer and typesetter at the *Deseret News* for forty-seven years, Laron was assistant superintendent of the first Mormon Deaf Mute Sunday School organized 10 January 1892 in the Salt Lake Nineteenth Ward. He often “sang” in sign language for Church members and for nine years traveled to Ogden each Sunday to teach deaf children the gospel.

In 1894, Laron spoke his first Church sermon. Though his speech was severely affected by his deafness, for ten minutes he “bore a strong testimony of the truth of the Gospel and pointed out to his attentive audience [Brighton Ward] the Divine providence in his behalf in placing him under what most people regarded as an affliction, but in which he realized blessing” (*Deseret Evening News*, 10 Sept. 1894). He died 21 August 1908 at the age of sixty-one.

Pratt's statements of his views, doubting as he does, the divinity of the calling of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the consequent building up of the Church" (Journal History, 8 May 1864).

Young Orson had his religious problems, Sarah's health was poor, and the community inventory of breadstuffs showed only 25¾ pounds per person (Larson 1961, 124). Sarah wrote to Brigham Young 25 July, requesting his

permission and approbation to return to SL City. We have now been here three years nearly. I have tried to do do [sic] the very best I could, my family I know have done the same. Mr. Pratt feels that his duty is abroad among the nations of the earth. He has left us — several years may elapse before he returns — he is laboring for the church.

I desire a common comfortable living with the church. I ask for nothing more. I feel that you are willing I should have this; for, I remember you once said so. I cannot longer live here without suffering more than I feel is my duty to suffer. I cannot see my family suffer without making an effort to relieve them. Orson [Jr.] has tried every means in his power to make a living but every thing fails. People are willing to send to school but cannot or will not pay. He has an offer of a very good situation if he will return to S.L. City. He can make a comfortable living for himself and perhaps assist me some. Albert Tyler and family are now distributors of both food and clothing. He has several hundred dollars due him for work, but cannot collect one cent. Himself and family are nearly all sick. He says he must do something or starve. Both Orson & Albert desire me to write to you upon the subject. We have all suffered much for the common necessities of life the last few months. The Tithing Office afford[ed] little else but molasses this summer. There are other reasons why I wish to make the change; but I would rather tell them to you, than write them.

President Young quickly wrote back on 4 August: "Your son Orson and your son-in-law Albert Tyler, with your families, are hereby given permission, with my hearty appreciation, to move to this City, as soon as you may choose so to do. . . . I expect to be in St. George about the 12th of September, when if you are there, I can give you such instruction or advise [sic] as you may need."

On the afternoon of Sunday, 18 September, apparently responding to public charges, Orson was given the unusual opportunity to explain himself in a church meeting.

Brethren and Sisters, in Salt Lake City I was made a High Councilor, although I was then an unbeliever, as now and continued in the position till I came down here.

In regard to my faith, I wish to say that I have long since seen differently to this people and although I am not in the habit of saying anything in self justification, yet ever since I have been in this Church I have led a godly and upright life; at the same time, I resolved that I would accept nothing that my conscience would not receive. . . .

I came out to the Valleys with my father and we were required to be baptized again, I complied, for all this time I was a believer in Mormonism.⁶ But sometime afterwards, there was much said about the receiving a testimony that unless one had the testimony that Mormonism is true, there was something deficient, I asked myself the question, if I had it but was sensible I had not. . . .

⁶ Sarah, Orson, Jr., and Celestia were rebaptized by Orson, Sr., 22 July 1852 (Salt Lake Stake Record of Baptisms). Orson, Jr., was first endowed 1 March 1852 (Salt Lake Endowment House Records, No. 738, Book A, page 38).

Well, I have come to the conclusion that Joseph Smith was not especially sent by the Lord to establish this work, and I cannot help it, for I could not believe otherwise, even if I knew that I was to suffer for it the next moment (Black n.d., 172–75).

That evening, the St. George High Council excommunicated Orson Pratt, Jr., for “unbelief.” Sarah and her family immediately returned to Salt Lake City.

Orson, Jr., did not mention polygamy as a reason for his disaffection, but all of Sarah’s children evidently despised the practice. Susan Snow Pratt wrote an essay on happiness in her 29 November 1871 journal which likely reflects Orson, Jr.’s feelings: “The indians would say that happiness was found in the hunting grounds with plenty of bows and arrows, and a squaw to carry them. A Mormon who is but little removed from the savage would say owning many wives and children, and holding supreme power over those wives even to the commanding of yards to be put in a dress, or the amount of salt to be put on potatoes.”

Orson Pratt, Sr., remained in Europe for almost three years. He returned to the United States in the summer of 1867 but lingered in the East until fall explaining in a letter to Juliaet on 28 June that he feared Indian attacks. He had received several hundred dollars from English Saints, and with the \$225 Salt Lake merchants H. B. Lawrence, Walker Brothers, and a Brother Mitchell had given him, he purchased dry goods that he hoped would retail for \$1,000 in the valley. Wealthy Salt Lake merchant William S. Godbe also agreed to sell Orson sewing machines on credit for each wife. “You see,” he summarized, “I am laying out plans for my family to sustain themselves as far as possible. This is right.”

By the time Orson arrived home, his marriage with Sarah had disintegrated. He had not seen her since late 1862; and for too many years, she had coped with the deaths of her children and poverty alone. From 1839 to 1868 Orson had been away on Church assignments at least eleven years — 41 percent of the time. Home from England, fifty-seven-year-old Orson courted sixteen-year-old Margaret Graham, who would become his tenth wife on 28 December 1868. At fifty-one, Sarah could no longer bear children and bitterly resented his relationships with women younger than their daughter Celestia. In an 18 May 1877 interview with the *New York Herald*, she lashed out at Orson: “Here was my husband,” she said, “gray headed, taking to his bed young girls in mockery of marriage. Of course there could be no joy for him in such an intercourse except the indulgence of his fanaticism and of something else, perhaps, which I hesitate to mention” (S. M. Pratt, 1877).

She could not have been fully aware of the workings of polygamy when she first went along with it. Few women — or men — were. Ground rules were loosely established but not strictly followed. The pressures to conform to the polygamous social order were not subtle. Sarah reluctantly went along with the system for almost a quarter of a century, as an unidentified son put it in the same interview, “from the earnest, conscientious desire to do what was right as a Mormon, and to please a husband whom she loved with all the strength of

her nature." But she was never truly converted to polygamy and by 1868 had had enough. She told the *New York Herald* reporter:

I don't wish to wrongfully accuse my husband, although we have been hopelessly separated for ten years. I believed, when he decided to enter upon the practice of polygamy, that he did so not from any violence of individual passion, but from sheer fanaticism. He told me that he believed it was his duty to take other women besides myself to wife, and at first he said that this would make no difference in his affection for me, which would continue pure and single as it had ever been. But think of the horror of such an announcement. He took wife after wife until they numbered five, and for a long time they were kept away from me and I was spared from intercourse with them. By and by he told me that he intended to put these five women on an exact equality with me; that he could spend a week with one, a week with another, and so on, and that I should have the sixth week! Then patience forsook me. I told him plainly that I wouldn't endure it. I said, "If you take five weeks with your other women you can take the sixth with them also." Orson responded, "If you don't choose to live with me I don't know that I'm obliged to support you. You may have my permission to go to hell. Stick to it or to starvation."

But Orson had never been a good provider for Sarah; she had nearly starved for most of her marriage. The same unidentified son described Orson to the reporter as

. . . one of the most talented men among the Mormon priests, [but] had been held by Brigham Young in a state of almost disgraceful bondage. He has been repeatedly banished as a missionary to various countries of Europe and the East, and was nearly always, as he is now, in a condition next door to penury. . . . Brigham appears to have been prejudiced against Orson Pratt ever since the troubles at Nauvoo. He avails himself of Pratt's talents, but keeps him a dependent at his feet (*New York Herald*, 18 May 1877).

On 12 March 1868 Sarah moved from the small home in the Seventeenth Ward into the more spacious home where she and Orson had lived before going to St. George (*Journal History*, 26 Nov. 1875). In a 28 May 1868 letter to wife Juliaet in Fillmore, Orson explained,

Sarah has, by brother Young's kindness, been permitted to return to the old homestead, south of the tabernacle; she has the use of the house and half of the lot, without paying any rent. She has rented the other house in the 17th ward for \$15 dollars per month; she also rents part of the house where she now lives to Orson [Jr.] at 15 dollars per month. Laron earns at the printing office about 25 dollars per week. All this enables that part of my family to live very comfortably.

Orson exaggerated their comfort. A 19 September 1869 note from Sarah to Brigham Young survives:

I am out of wood, I have applied to the Bishop several times with no success. Orson [Jr.] has furnished one load but it is so expensive to buy he cannot get for himself and me too this winter, will it not be possible for some wood to be raised from the missionary fund. I have a stove for coal or wood, either will do. I need it immediately. Your Sister in the gospel.

Sarah's relationship with Brigham Young seemed reasonably amicable until the early 1870s. Though Young, in his 26 February 1862 letter, had offered to

return Pratt's city property, he changed his mind after Orson and Sarah separated. However, Sarah refused to move. After a lengthy court battle, the Mormon-controlled Probate Court on 28 November 1873 ruled that "Sarah M. Pratt is not the legal and rightful owner and occupant of the property therein in controversy, but that the said Brigham Young, Senior, is the rightful owner and occupant thereof and entitled to a deed in fee simple thereto." Sarah moved to a rental home in the 19th Ward but appealed her case to the Third District Court, which recognized "the presumptive right of Sarah M. Pratt to a title to the lot in controversy" (*Journal History*, 26 Nov. 1875).

Orson was displeased with the court's ruling. In a tersely worded letter to the editor of the *Deseret Evening News* on 1 December 1875, he wrote, "It is with extreme regret, and deep sorrow, that I witness the attempt of my wife Sarah to procure through the technicalities of the law the property which rightfully and justly belongs to another." Brigham Young did not like the Third District court ruling either, but when he appealed to the Utah Supreme Court, it upheld the ruling (*Deseret Evening News*, 8 July 1876).

In the interval between the Probate Court and the Third District Court hearings, on 4 October 1874, Sarah was excommunicated for "apostasy." Though the *Salt Lake Directory* of 1874 lists her as a "widow" living in 19th ward on "Cross [Apricot] north side between Central and Quince," she was excommunicated from the 14th Ward (Excommunication Record WR-02551R:44; courtesy Stephen F. Pratt).

The following day, her twenty-one-year-old son Arthur, a deputy U.S. marshal, was also excommunicated for "apostasy" (Jenson 1914, 92). In 1882, when asked by a reporter why he was not a Mormon, Arthur replied, "I will tell you why. I am the son of my father's first wife, and had a mother who taught me the evils of the system" (*Anti-Polygamy Standard*, 11 [Feb. 1882]: 81). Author Cornelia Paddock, a long-time friend of Sarah's, wrote in a 3 March 1882 letter to Thomas Gregg, "the wickedness which came to [Sarah's] knowledge in Nauvoo destroyed all her faith in Mormonism, and she brought up her children to detest the system." Arthur's anti-polygamy stand brought him notoriety during the federal government's 1880s campaign against the Mormon Church.⁷

Sarah Pratt also contributed to the anti-polygamy cause. In the elections of 3 August 1874, George Q. Cannon, a member of the First Presidency and a representative of the Mormon-sponsored People's Party, overwhelmingly defeated Liberal candidate Robert Baskin as territorial representative to Congress. Governor George L. Woods, a Liberal sympathizer and foe of Mormonism,

⁷ The most visible of Sarah's anti-polygamy children, Arthur Pratt married Agnes Ellen Caine on 25 December 1872 and had five children: Arthur, Jr., Mrs. Arthur Lennon, Chester, Harmel, and James. He was warden of the Utah Territorial Prison in 1888, when many Mormons were serving time for illegal cohabitation, Salt Lake City Chief of Police from 1894 to 1897, and warden of the Utah State Prison from 1904 to 1917. Noted for his progressive ideas on prison reform, he served as president of the American Prison Congress from 1916 to 1917. A superb chess player, Arthur and his brothers Orson and Harmel, and a friend defeated a reputed world-class player, Herr Zukertort. Arthur died in Salt Lake City, 20 March 1919, at sixty-six.

refused to issue an election certificate. When Wood's successor, moderate Samuel B. Axtell, issued the certificate to Cannon in early 1875, Baskin immediately protested, charging that Cannon was not an American citizen (he was born in England), was a polygamist, and regarded his obligation to the Mormon hierarchy as superior to his allegiance to national law. To support his charges, Baskin obtained the testimony of several prominent anti-polygamy Mormon women, including Heber C. Kimball's granddaughter, Bella Kimball, Emmeline Smith, and Sarah Pratt. In Sarah's deposition, which affirmed that Cannon had violated the 1862 Morrill Anti-bigamy Law, she announced that she was "formerly a member of the Mormon Church. . . . I have not been a believer in the Mormon doctrines for thirty years, and am now considered an apostate, I believe" (Journal History, 22 Jan. 1875).

Sarah's position during the Cannon hearings may also have been politically motivated. In 1870, Orson, Jr., unsuccessfully ran for Salt Lake City Alderman on the Liberal ticket, and Henry W. Lawrence, unsuccessful mayoral candidate on that ticket, would serve as a pall bearer at Sarah's funeral.

Interestingly, in her autumn years, despite her bitterness towards both her husband and the Church, Sarah sent Orson a peace offering. In the fall of 1878, he and Joseph F. Smith were preparing for a mission in the East. Sarah asked Orson to write. A letter dated 18 September 1878, from New York City, was probably the only written communication the couple exchanged in more than a decade:

Dear Wife: As you requested me to write to you, I do so, addressing you, as formerly, under the affectionate title of *wife*. You once permitted me to use this title, with the utmost confidence. You once were one with me in the new and everlasting covenant. You once, professedly, believed in the sealing ordinances, according to the revelation on Marriage for eternity. You, at several times, did put the hands of others into my hand, and did give them to me as wives, immediately before the marriage ceremony was pronounced. Those women I took with all confidence, and with your consent. After several years had elapsed, I proposed to you, to commence living upon principles of greater equality in regard to my attentions: this proposition you positively rejected; and you further said, that if I introduced this equality, you would never live with me again, in time, nor in eternity. This was a hard and greivous trial to me: but believing it my proposition to be, not only right, but a duty, I firmly concluded to follow my convictions, though it should be at the sacrifice of life itself. I have done so, with all the faith and sincerity that I ever had in receiving any religious principle. You doubtless, looked upon the trial as one too great for you to endure, and separated yourself from me, as far as some of the conjugal duties of a wife were concerned. . . . Under the laws of man, you could, at any time have easily obtained a divorce from me, and could have been free to marry another; but you have not sought this, but have preferred to remain still my wife; and as such, I have felt it a duty to still render what little aid I could to you, consistent with circumstances. How long I shall live to contribute my mite to you, is unknown to me. If I should pass away before you, I trust that your children and grandchildren will do all they can for you.

Though Sarah had not sought divorce from Orson, by Mormon standards he could not easily divorce her. George Q. Cannon explained,

For a man to seek a divorce is almost unheard of. The liberty upon this point rests with the woman, and as regards a Separation, if her position should become irksome,

or distasteful to her, even and she should desire a Separation, not only is the man bound to respect the expressal of her wish to that effect, but he is bound to give her and her offspring a proportionate share of his whole property. They are no longer under his yoke; but while he and they live, they have a claim upon him from which he is never completely absolved" (Cannon 1879, 36).

Perhaps Sarah's preoccupation with death prompted her request for the letter: Orson was suffering from diabetes, and she had a rheumatic heart condition. Brigham Young had died the previous year, as had Sarah's closest sister, Orissa, Sarah's twenty-one-year-old daughter Herma, and Herma's infant son.⁸ Whatever Sarah's intent, the letter did not pave the way for a reconciliation.

On 3 October, two months after he had returned from his eastern mission, Orson was again on his way to England. By the time he returned to Salt Lake City in September 1879, diabetes and work had greatly eroded his health. The once powerful orator spoke his last public sermon on 18 September 1881 and he died 3 October at age seventy in the home of his wife Marian Ross in Salt Lake City. Family members gathered for a final farewell; whether Sarah was there is not known nor is her response to Orson's death. She did sell the old Pratt home shortly after Orson's death, however, and thereafter lived with her children (Salt Lake Co. Property Records, Plat A, Block 76, Lot 5).

After her husband's death, Sarah became even more vocally anti-polygamous. In 1884, she told Jennie Anderson Froiseth, a nineteenth century feminist author:

Polygamy is the direst curse with which a people or a nation could be afflicted. . . . It completely demoralizes good men, and makes bad men correspondingly worse. As for the women — well, God help them! First wives it renders desperate, or else heart-broken, mean-spirited creatures; and it almost unsexes some of the other women, but not all of them, for plural wives have their sorrows too. An elder once said to me, "Sister Sarah, you are a regular Satan." I answered him, "There are only two classes of Mormon women, devils and fools" (Froiseth 1884, 38–40).

To an unidentified interviewer in 1884 she related the "workings of Mormonism," which expanded on her Nauvoo difficulties. Joseph Smith approached her in Orson's absence, she said, and told her "she needed the company of some man, and he would stay with her when she wished it; that the sin was wholly in making it known herself to her husband or any one else." Sarah responded "most indignantly" to the proposal, telling him she loved Orson, and "upbraided him sharply for what he had suggested." She added that the Prophet threatened that "if she told of it he had it in his power to ruin her character" ("Workings," 1884).

To *Salt Lake Tribune* editor Wilhelm Wyl in 1886 she accused Joseph Smith of telling her in Nauvoo: "God does not care if we have a good time, if

⁸ Herma (Hermie) Ethna Pratt, who married William F. Belding on 18 February 1874, bore a stillborn child on 10 March 1875 and died on 26 December 1877 of puerperal fever after delivering another son. The baby, Arthur, died of whooping cough six months later. William F. Belding, Jr., their only surviving child, was listed as a beneficiary in the "Final Decree of Distribution" of Orson Pratt's 1890 will settlement.

only other people do not know it." She also added that he threatened her, "If any woman, like me, opposed his wishes, he used to say: 'Be silent, or I shall ruin your character'" (Wyl 1886, 62).

Sarah lived until Christmas Day 1888 when she died of heart failure at age seventy-one. T. Edgar Lyon reported on the basis of a letter from Laron and Ethelwynne Pratt that on her deathbed Sarah said, "If Mormonism is not true then there is no truth on earth" (Lyon 1932, 155). Her funeral, a short, Protestant eulogy conducted by the Reverend J. B. Thrall, was held three days later at her son Arthur's Salt Lake City home at 105 B Street. A long line of carriages escorted the body to the Pratt burial ground in the Salt Lake City Cemetery. In death, Sarah gained what she had been denied in life: no other wife rests beside Orson.

Perhaps history has dealt with Sarah M. Pratt unjustly. Had she lived in a monogamous world, she would likely have been less controversial. But polygamy made her a radical. Her disclosure of plural marriage in Nauvoo was brushed aside as the self-vindication of an unfaithful wife. Corroborative evidence now available, including testimony from other married women that Joseph Smith approached, tends to support Sarah's story. The decision of Church leaders to keep plural marriage hidden until 1852 posed a serious moral dilemma for the few who were aware of its practice. In Nauvoo, protecting the practice of plural marriage from public exposure, especially to hostile gentiles, was a greater virtue than telling the truth. By making public Joseph Smith's overtures and resisting what she considered to be collective infidelity, Sarah Pratt was judged a threat to the safety of the Church and considered to have committed apostasy.

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