Manly Virtue: Defining Male Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Mormonism

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Sexuality in antebellum America constituted a set of contradictions. Men should be steely, resolved, and assertive; women ought to be reserved, flighty, and, under the right conditions, sexually explosive. As historian Karen Lystra has observed, "There are no sexual absolutes. Sexual experience is time-bound," a fact that holds true for the Mormon experience as well.[1]

Much scholarship on the history of virtue in America has focused on the feminization of sexual virtue in the mid-nineteenth century. Mary Ryan writes that the Perfectionist community of upstate New York demonstrated how an experimental free-love community eventually came to be the exemplar of feminine domesticity, emphasizing female virginity and restrained sexuality.[2] Indeed, as Barbara Welter argues, women sought to wield sexual abstinence as a weapon in their defense. If they could fend off male advances, then they could be the saviors of male-kind from descending into barbarity and backwardness.[3] Nineteenth-century notions of female sexuality likewise exhibited the complicated relationship women had with their sexual self-identity. While some voices exalted the purity of the female virgin, some physicians encouraged husbands to be proactive in seeking their wives' sexual pleasure.[4] At the same time, other physicians assured insecure men that women would receive happily whatever was given them.[5]

This narrative of the feminization of virtue and sexuality, however, does not address an important trend in Mormon history: the

role and definition of male virtue in the discourse on sexuality. In Mormonism's earliest days, the Saints upheld virtue as an attribute applicable to both sexes. Recognizing that Americans had embraced a new sexual order, the Saints defined and redefined virtue in response to the myriad forces pressing upon them both from within and outside their community.

Virtue in Early America

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the definition of *virtue* underwent radical shifts. Virtue had once been a complex and multilayered attribute, evoking political, social, and personal attributes. Indeed, the word had long been a battleground for a wide array of political, ideological, and theological factions dating back to the Middle Ages. During the founding of the American republic, Alexander Hamilton considered *virtue* to be disciplined self-interest. The political theorist Baron de Montesquieu argued that virtue meant disinterestedness, public-mindedness, and general good government. Daniel Webster and John Stevens thought it to be akin to ambition. Even within a generation, the term found new contextual homes and applications.[6]

In the mid-nineteenth century, Jonathan Swift defined virtue as an inherently masculine characteristic. "Virtue was for this sex design'd," Swift declared, "in mild reproof to womankind." Virtue consisted of education and resolve. "Manly virtue" meant integrity; Swift identified virtue in contrast to personal interest and implored the virtuous man to work in "the council and in the court, where virtue is in least repute." Virtue signified the "godlike ends for which he rose."[7] Jonathan Edwards defined virtue as "benevolence to being in general."[8]

By the early 1830s, the meaning of "virtue" was still more multivalent. In 1828, Samuel Johnson defined virtue as "acting power," or even "one of the orders of the celestial hierarchy," referring to doctrines concerning the chain of being (e.g., "Thrones, dominations, princedoms, virtues, powers").[9] One Ohio paper identified virtue with the pursuit of "justice and truth"—the "very wish to make others happy."[10] Virtuous men and women were said to "increase the happiness of all with whom they have intercourse." It was "the power of self command" that allowed man to overcome "the propensities of animal nature."[11] Some associated virtue with a

work ethic, for "to be idle and virtuous at the same time is a moral impossibility."[12] Tennessee Senator Hugh Lawson said that a "pure and virtuous" political appointee should "thank Congress to take from him every discretionary power which they can take with propriety," for it would "ease him of a labor and a responsibility most unpleasant to a good man."[13] Jesse Torrey, an antebellum moralist, suggested that virtue "consists of a congruity of actions which we can never expect so long as we are distracted by our passions." Virtue called for people to "eat and drink, not to gratify . . . palate[s], but to satisfy nature." Torrey suggested that the virtuous would "look upon the whole world as [their] country."[14]

For women, virtue became even more complex. It called for women to demonstrate multiple, sometimes contradictory attributes at once: intellectual parity coupled with servility, sexual self-regulation, aloofness, and humility.[15] It could be used as a euphemism for virginity but this was only one definition among many—and it was applied to both men and women alike. In his *Moral Essays in Praise of Virtue*, John Scott exhorted his readers to "maintain unblemished and uncorrupted integrity" even "in times of prevailing licentiousness," citing Lot as an exemplar.[16]

Modesty likewise was associated with virtue, both sexual and otherwise. A Connecticut paper opined that "modesty is not only an ornament, but also a guard to virtue . . . a kind of quick and delicate feeling in the soul which makes her shrink and withdraw herself from the thing that has danger in it."[17] Hugh Blair declared that "the characteristics of virtue are modesty and humility"; virtue alone was "the sovereign pilot which steers us into the harbour of true lasting pleasure."[18] Modesty was often characterized as a "kind of shame or bashfulness, proceeding from the sense a man has of his defects, compared with the perfections of him whom he comes before." It made "a man unwilling to be seen" but "fearful to be heard." It "loves not many words, nor, indeed, needs them."[19] Likewise, "a modest woman," a women's magazine declared, "delights to reflect the happiness and prosperity of those to whom she is dear."[20]

Popular writers were also well aware of the dangers that an overly strict adherence to virtue could pose to those who wandered. Author Grace Grafton told an allegory of "a dame called Virtue" who "but over the whole valley shed the influence of her wise laws and sober regulations." When one of her subjects, a young woman, wandered

to explore the enchantments, Virtue had little patience with her. She "stood chilled and rigid, and scarcely opening her lips, motioned sternly with her raised arm to the sinner to depart." The young woman left, hoping to find "transient relief" with the "blandishments of Pleasure and Wantonness." When Virtue discovered that the young woman was embroiled in sin, Virtue "turn[ed] to her friends Modesty and Propriety" to "aid me . . . in chasing this abandoned creature from our own unsullied walls." The woman was cast into hell where "she trod her way to everlasting sorrow." Where were Virtue's advisers, "Faith, Hope, and Charity," Grafton asked? "Faith was at church; Hope dwells too much on the future . . . and as for Charity—she was at home."[21] Left untethered by other attributes, virtue could quickly become the tyrant.

Through the voice of Aspasia, the ancient Milesian woman accused of adultery, Samuel Johnson echoed the concern, noting that her Sultan's piety and "excessive virtue . . . have hurried him on death."[22] Biblical scholar Moses Stuart argued that abolitionists suffered from the "infirmity of excessive virtue" and that if their tactics "are lacking in prudence, in sober foresight, in moderation, in justice . . . then the public suffer far more from these distinguished and excellent men than they would from all the efforts of the *Ledru Rollins* [a French socialist] and the *Red Caps* [an epithet for French revolutionaries for their donning of red hats] who are in the midst of us."[23] One columnist enjoined his readers to be leery of the man "who deals in large principles, and trades wholesale in virtue," for those who were "crazy about public virtue" often "neglect[ed] . . . all inward piety."[24]

Both virtue and modesty had sexual connotations too, especially when employed in a feminine context. Feminine modesty often meant not thinking too highly of one's sexual allure. Mary Wollstonecraft suggested that not only did it signify "purity of mind, which is the effect of chastity" but also "soberness of mind, which teaches a man not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think." Wollstonecraft took particular aim at the prostitutes of London who "trample on virgin bashfulness with a sort of bravado . . . becom[ing] more audaciously lewd than men, however depraved, to whom the sexual quality has not been gratuitously given." Not only were the prostitutes depraved in thought and act; their self-regard was so low that they would be tawdry around sexually unattractive men.[25] Modesty also meant that women avoided spectacles that employed sexual innuendo. A Boston

paper bemoaned that there were "few plays . . . which a woman can see consistently with decency." The theater was always "seasoned" with material "in the prologue or epilogue . . . or in some scandalous farce" that in other contexts would prompt them to "rise with indignation and reckon their reputation ruined."[26]

Making Mormon Virtue

Early Mormon discourse echoed the ongoing complexities of the conversation on virtue. In the Book of Mormon—a volume Mormon prophet Joseph Smith claimed to be an ancient book of records regarding the "inhabitants of the American continent"—the concept is notably absent. The term only appears twice, once in reference to the "virtue" (read: power) of the word of God, and the second, in reference to the "stolen" virtue of raped women (Alma 31:5; Moroni 9:9). Chastity has a clearer meaning in the text; in both instances of the word, it is used to condemn rape and unauthorized polygamy (Jacob 2:28; Moroni 9:9). Yet one of the harshest condemnations of premarital sexuality in Mormon scripture is directed at a young man, Coriantumr, for his sexual dalliances with a prostitute, Isabel—one of the few named women in the Book of Mormon (Alma 39:5).

Mormons generally accepted that Victorian assumptions about gender roles were deeply rooted in Mormon society. In June 1844, Emma Smith wished that she "may not through ambition abuse my body and cause it to become prematurely old and care-worn" and that she would "honor and respect my husband as my head, ever to live in his confidence and by acting in unison with him" hoped that she might someday "overcome that curse which was pronounced upon the daughters of Eve."

Joseph Smith's recorded revelations use the term much more freely but with no greater clarity. One of his earliest declarations called for the Saints to cultivate virtue among a long list of other qualities (D&C 4:6). His revelations repeatedly implore the Saints to "practice virtue and holiness before me" (D&C 38:24, 46:33). In 1839, Smith received a revelation directing, "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly" (D&C 121:45). In Joseph Smith's famed 1844 letter to Chicago news editor John Wentworth, he declared that the Saints believed in being "honest, true, chaste, benevolent and virtuous" and that they sought anything that was "virtuous, lovely, or of good report."[27] In a blessing to Joseph Knight, Smith praised him for being "true, and even hand-

ed, and exemplary and virtuous and kind, never deviating to the right hand nor to the left."[28]

Early Mormon converts tended to see virtue as a kind of salvific or healing power. Sidney Rigdon thought of virtue as supernatural power. When the Church's "second elder" Oliver Cowdery baptized him, Rigdon allegedly reported that "no one could tell what virtue there was in [his] hands for when he took hold of him . . . he felt a shock strike through him."[29] Joseph Noble recalled that when Joseph Smith healed him of an illness, he "felt the healing virtue flowing through every part of my system."[30]

When the Jackson County Saints faced expulsion from the area, some Saints began to broaden their definition of virtue to include law and order alongside sexuality. The Mormons' news editor, W. W. Phelps, said that many of the instigators of mob violence "ought to have been the first to rise in the defence of innocence and virtue."[31] Phelps credited "the over ruling hand of the Father" for the preservation of the Saints rather than "any principle of honor or virtue existing in the hearts of the mob."[32] Virtue was not only innocence; it was also law. And God's nature required that he teach it to his children.

For Phelps, a virtuous man honored and sustained the law; mob members should be brought before the bar of justice to demonstrate that "the law in Geauga County, has lost none of its nerves, neither have the Administrators of justice lost their virtue."[33] Virtue came to be unity of purpose and "a firm course" opposing "personal ambition and tyrannical dispositions" of the marauders. A virtuous legal system meant a reliable one; America's "constitution and laws . . . shall protect us, if they possess any virtue!"[34] Phelps felt disgusted as he was forced to "witness . . . a ruthless soldiery trample down the helpless and defile the virtuous."[35] Someday, Phelps predicted, the county would "inhabited by virtuous citizens who will 'magnify the law and make it honorable.'"[36] Mormon David Redfield also chastised the state legislature for enabling the lawlessness. If they did not pass a law protecting the Saints, he would declare "farewell to the virtue of the State; farewell to her honor and good name, farewell to her Christian virtue, until she shall be peopled by a different race of men."[37] By employing virtue rhetoric, Phelps and Redfield were casting Missouri as a woman who had given herself

up to unrighteous male domination.

Virtue not only cleansed a soul; it also served as a binding agent. In an 1835 hymnal edited by Joseph Smith's wife, one hymn asked that the Lord would "turn all our hearts unto thee / to walk in the paths of virtue and wisdom / to live in the bonds of union and peace." It was central to building up God's kingdom on earth. "I believe in living a virtuous upright and holy life before God and feel it my duty <to> perswad all men in my power to do the same."[38] In Joseph Smith's translation of the Egyptian hieroglyphics associated with the Book of Abraham, he told the story of "three virgins" being offered up as a sacrifice on the altar of the "priest of Elkkener." As women of "royal descent directly from the loins of Ham," Joseph suggested that they were "offered up because of their virtue" in refusing to "bow down to worship gods of wood" or "stone" (Abraham 1:11).

Joseph was a pragmatist in matters of language—using what applied and discarding the same when it did not. Joseph's indistinct usage of the term "virtue" illustrates his tendency to use language with marked fluidity. He had long been skeptical of his own linguistic talent, pleading that the Lord would "deliver us . . . from the little narrow prison almost as it were totel darkness of paper pen and ink and a crooked broken scattered and imperfect language." In 1830, Joseph Smith had offered up a new "translation" of the Bible that claimed to illustrate the essence of the Bible's original authorial intent. In his translation, he rendered the first line of Revelation 1:6 to be: "And hath made us kings and priests unto God, his Father." Yet in his famed Sermon at the Grove in June 1844, he publicly recited the text using the language in the King James Version: "And hath made us kings and priests to God and His Father," a reference which, he believed, proved "the plurality of the Gods."[39] Joseph Smith did not feel women had a special claim to virtuous living. In April 1837, Joseph Smith gave a sermon to a gathering of men that the divine revelations he expected them all to receive were "bound by the principles of virtue and happiness."[40]

Virtue and the Battle for Male Mormon Sexuality

A wide corpus of scholarship has assessed Joseph Smith's establishment of polygamous theology in the Mormon community. Historian Samuel M. Brown has further argued that Joseph Smith's practice of polygamy reflected his efforts to create an "everlasting

community" that could defy death and annihilation.[41] Joseph declared that one of the most important purposes of his religious project was the "welding together of dispensations, and keys, and powers, and glories" (D&C 128:18). One of Joseph Smith's plural wives, Lucy Walker, recalled Joseph Smith promising that polygamy would "form a chain that could never be broken."[42] Or, as Joseph Smith biographer Richard Bushman has interpreted Joseph Smith, he did not "lust for women" as much as he "lusted for kin."[43]

The corpus of literature on antebellum male sexuality illustrates that unresolved paradoxes defined how both men and women understood the masculine sexual impulse. As once-rural men faced the economic realities that the industrial revolution was forcing upon them, they felt impelled to improve their ability to perform sexually in order to compensate for decreased purchasing power. Popular medical texts celebrated the value of sexual self-control. Radicals such as Sylvester Graham and Reverend John Todd argued that sexual activity depleted strength and should be exercised with only the most focused of purposes. Mainstream medical thinkers such as John Ware and Andrew J. Ingersoll encouraged moderation but nevertheless saw sexual activity as a basically moral and God-centered activity. Angus McLaren has argued that "restraint was the mark of the middle-class male."[44] Or, as Charles Rosenberg styled "the Christian gentleman," he was to be an "athlete of continence, not coitus, continuously testing his manliness in the fire of self-denial."[45] Such lofty ideals seldom found root in reality.

Joseph Smith's early explorations of polygamy coincided with the increasingly sexualized—and monogamized—definition of virtue for both genders throughout antebellum America. As numerous historians have argued, monogamy had gradually become enshrined in the American national consciousness as a sacred lifestyle, in spite of monogamic sexuality's several contradictions.[46] William Paley's widely read textbook, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy,* stated that "wherever the commerce between the sexes is regulated by marriage . . . [and] can be procured with ease and certainty, there the number of people will increase."[47] In societies with a "vague and promiscuous concubinage," they are "liable to perish by neglect" and "are seldom prepared for, or introduced into situations suited to the raising of families of their own."[48]

In August 1835, Mormon leader Oliver Cowdery penned a document—approved by the body of the church and likely in response to the Alger affair—that eschewed charges of "the crime of fornication" and polygamy which had been leveled against them. Mainstream critics argued that the Saints' economic collectivism also translated to conjugal collectivism: "a community of wives."[49] Heber C. Kimball observed that Joseph introduced the practice to him in order to "test [his] virtue."[50] Yet the word *virtue* continued to be used in a wide variety of contexts. Joseph Smith urged missionaries to England "to perform the great and responsible duties" of missionary work with "virtue, faith, diligence, and charity." Oliver Cowdery associated virtue with Christ's suffering: "Is the[re] efficacy and virtue sufficient," he asked rhetorically, "in the blood of him who groaned on Cavalry's summit to expiate our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness?"[51] Unlike the sexual reformers of his day, Joseph Smith saw virtue not as an end but as a means. "Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly," he exhorted the Saints as he was holed up in Liberty Jail. "Then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presants [sic] of God."[52]

For the Mormon people, the introduction of polygamy forced the Saints to cast virtue as a sexualized quality. Joseph's efforts to implement polygamy came under attack in 1838 when his second-in-command, Oliver Cowdery, suggested that Joseph's union with Fanny Alger was a "dirty, nasty, filthy affair." Joseph responded that he had "intrusted him with many things."[53] Some authors have suggested that Joseph's libido was a widely known—and feared—attribute of the Prophet's makeup. That he exhibited sexually attractive traits is apparent enough. In Joseph Smith's theology, virtue served as the cohesive agent between individuals and families. Though the exact date of his earliest plural marriage has been the topic of some debate, there is evidence that Joseph Smith was thinking seriously about instituting the practice as early as 1831. Between 1833 and 1835, he had an intimate relationship with the servant girl Fanny Alger; whether this relationship was a marriage or merely an extramarital affair has long been a point of dispute. Regardless, the episode sent a shockwave of scandal throughout the community, and Alger left the Saints unceremoniously, never to return. In 1838, Oliver Cowdery, disgusted, sneered that the union was "dirty, filthy, nasty" affair.[54]

The Alger relationship brought the Saints' sexual mores into

stark relief, compelling them to reconsider how they framed their sexuality. As Joseph Smith began to implement a practice that would defy everything the Saints thought they knew about sexual morality, they also began to frame virtue as an increasingly sexualized concept. The Saints' use of virtue served as an outward manifestation of the state of their collective sexuality. Joseph Smith's efforts to radicalize the Saints' marriage system also compelled the Saints to find a means of convincing themselves of their own sexual moderation.

In 1840, Dr. Alfred Woodward passed through Nauvoo and administered phrenological tests to several Nauvoo Saints, including Joseph Smith.[55] Woodward rated Joseph Smith's "amativeness" at a 16.[56] Phrenologist R.H. Collyer identified 16 as a "full"-sized amativeness organ. He suggested that those with a large amativeness organ show " a great partiality to the other sex, when opportunities occur" and find it "difficult to curb its tendencies, except when governed by large moral and intellectual organs." Such a man "is a favorite with them, from his fascinating address and manner."[57] Phrenologist Orson S. Fowler maintained that the "proper exercise" of amativeness was "pure, chaste, and even desirable."[58] Phrenologist and reverend George Weaver thought amativeness to be "a virtue high and holy, a virtue binding upon all men and women to exhibit, a virtue that is the parent of all of many others, and that opens a world of tender and precious delights."[59]

Publicly, William Smith downplayed Joseph Smith's amativeness measurement, placing it at an 11, considered "moderate" by most phrenological standards.[60] Collyer observed that an 11 measurement indicated apathy about the opposite sex: "he will be chaste, and will dislike all kinds of obscene language."[61] Fowler noted that an 11 would be "rather deficient, though not palpably so"; such readings were in fact more common in women.[62] Despite the fact that phrenology had no clear founding in scientific fact, it is striking that William Smith actively sought to desexualize Joseph Smith in the public eye.

Joseph Smith's sexual attractiveness was apparent enough. In later years, Joseph's marriage practices invited attacks from a variety of circles. Even friends thought the worst. When Joseph approached his friend Benjamin Johnson, about marrying Dulcena Johnson, he thought the worst: Joseph intended to "debauch" her.

While no evidence exists to justify Johnson's fears, observers could sense Joseph's sexual appeal and virility.[63] When Joseph Smith proposed plural marriage to Rachel Ivins Grant, she responded tartly that, in spite of her personal respect for Joseph, she would "sooner go to hell as a virtuous woman than to heaven as a whore."[64]

Beginning in 1841, Joseph Smith's political confidante, John C. Bennett, began to seduce several women in the Saints' new settlement of Nauvoo; only a few months earlier, he had assured Joseph that he would "devote my time and energies to the advancement of the cause of truth and virtue."[65] The scandal prompted the Saints to home in on virtue as a euphemism for sexual chastity. Bennett claimed the endorsement of Joseph Smith, prompting Joseph to call for Bennett to testify that Joseph had "never taught any thing in the least contrary to the strictest principles of the Gospel, or of virtue, or of the laws of God, or man, under any occasion either directly or indirectly, in word or deed."[66] In April 1842, Joseph "pronounced a curse upon all adulterers and Fornicators, and unvirtuous persons" who had "used my name to carry on their iniquitous designs."[67]

The dispute over the meaning of virtue continued in fall 1842 when Bennett published *A History of the Saints,* a volume that exploited virtue rhetoric freely to cast Joseph Smith as a sexual predator and a danger to the female community. Indeed, female virtue was one of his volume's enduring themes. Women who resisted Joseph Smith were praised for their "courage and virtue in resisting and repulsing with such signal success the foul miscreants who were tempting her to crime by the most insidious and powerful arts."[68] Another woman received Bennett's accolades when "virtue once more triumphed over the insidious arts and machinations of a malevolent caliph."[69]

In March 1842, Emma Smith and other leading Nauvoo women established the Nauvoo Relief Society, with Joseph's blessing. With Emma Smith as its head, the society promised to provide benevolent service, spiritual uplift, and moral guardianship over Mormon society. Joseph Smith promised that it would be a "select society from all the evils of the world, choice, virtuous, and holy."[70] The Nauvoo Relief Society orchestrated a campaign to uphold Joseph Smith's reputation of sexual virtue. Bennett now cast virtue less as a set of moral principles but as a means of oppression—an "Inquisition"—that the Relief Society used to coerce its members into obe-

dience. The society preyed upon women who had "lapsed from the straight path of virtue," he wrote.[71] The Relief Society interrogated the "poor, terrified female . . . until she confesses the crime she has committed" or even in her "confusion and terror, accuses herself of what she was never guilty of."

The consequences of the Relief Society's "Inquisition" to protect virtue? "Many young and beautiful females have thus been ruined eternally." The "Inquisition instantly condemns them" to be none other than a "class set apart and appropriated to the gratification of the vilest appetites of the brutal Priests and Elders of the Mormon Church." When used to undermine Joseph Smith, Bennett thought virtue a worthy attribute; otherwise, he thought it a tool to uphold a "horrid" and "monstrous system." As Bennett portrayed it, the punishment for failing to be virtuous was to be coerced into a life stripped of virtue.[72] Bennett knew well of the Relief Society's capacity to shape public opinion. He feared that the Relief Society "could be the means of a mob forthcoming."[73]

As Bennett's accusations began to gain steam, President Emma Smith hit back, calling upon the women to counteract his charges by launching a campaign to prove the Prophet's sexual virtue. In March 1842, Clarissa Marvel was said to have circulated "scandalous falsehoods on the character of Prest. Joseph Smith, without the least provocation." Emma's counselor, Elizabeth Whitney, moved that one of the sisters "go and labor with her and if possible reform her." When Hannah Markham was commissioned with the task, she resisted, as she was "unacquainted with the circumstances."

Emma took on the task herself, observing that it "should be done in a private manner, with great prudence." But prudence notwithstanding, it was still the duty of the Relief Society to "look into the morals of each other and watch over each other."[74] Bennett and Smith appeared to agree that the Relief Society wielded the power of collective shaming when women gave way to sexual temptation. Emma Smith composed a circular and encouraged the women to "write and send in their productions, out of which, a selection should be made."[75] In August, Relief Society members, along with several of Nauvoo's leading citizens, signed a petition attesting that Joseph Smith was a "good, moral, virtuous, peacable [sic] and patriotic man."[76] That October, Emma Smith alongside men and women from Joseph's inner circles swore that they "know of no system of

marriage being practised in the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" other than marriage between one man and one woman.[77] Joseph Smith implored the Relief Society that "the virtuous should not from self-importance grieve and oppress needlessly those unfortunate ones" who had fallen victim to Bennett's advances. In Joseph Smith's vision, virtue was an essential component of Mormon society. It transcended gendered boundaries. "I love virtue," Joseph Smith declared in August 1842; he also loved "friendship and truth . . . and law."[78] "Stop spreading this spinning street yarn and talking about spiritual wives," he told the Saints, for he would "have nothing but virtue & integrity & uprightness."[79]

By May, Bennett's sins were haunting the Mormon women. When the society met on May 19, Emma declared grimly that "this day was an evil day."[80] The stain of John C. Bennett had soaked into the body of the sisters. President Smith could abide impropriety earlier under the cloak of charity, but "now it is necessary that sin should be expos'd," for "much of this iniquity was practiced by some in authority, pretending to be sanction'd by Joseph Smith."[81] They were likely referring to the testimony of Catherine Fuller, herself recently discovered as one of the women Bennett seduced. She had engaged in sexual intercourse with several other men who also assured her that the act was sanctioned by Church leadership.[82]

In spring 1844 various Relief Society members held meetings in which Emma responded to a provocative editorial by a columnist named Orasmus Bostwick in which he sneered about female sexuality in Nauvoo—that he "could take a half bushel of wheat, obtain his vile purpose, and get what accommodation he wanted with almost any woman" in Nauvoo. Outraged, Emma urged the "whole virtuous female population of the city with one voice [to] declare that the Seducer of female chastity, the Slanderer of Female Character, or the Defamer of the Character of the Heads of the Church" shall be ostracized from the Nauvoo community." "Female virtue," Emma declared, "is a pearl of great price and should glitter in the abodes of men, as in the mansions of bliss, for the glory and honor of him, whose image she bears and whose help meet she is and every attempt of man to seduce that virtue is next to murder, a robbery that cannot be restored." Emma called for "every virtuous woman" to "scourge such tormentors of domestic felicity, with vengeance throughout the world." She "curse[d] the man preys upon

female virtue" and decreed that "*vitare perditoris* [avoid the enemy]" be "written with indelible ink, upon every such villain." The *Nauvoo Neighbor* editor heralded the meetings under the headline: "VIRTUE WILL TRIUMPH."[83]

Many Saints believed that masculine virtue primarily meant sexual self-control, not complete sexual suppression. Mormon news editor W. W. Phelps suggested that Saints allow the "laws of virtue" to regulate their thoughts and actions: "If we must resist all allurements of pleasure, we must refuse to contemplate them." The "sinful indulgences of imagination" would prove to be any man's ruin.[84] While serving a mission in England, Mormon scribe William Clayton felt the struggles that Mormon men faced in living within the sexual strictures given them. In January 1840, Clayton visited a woman named Burgess who was feeling ill. He "anointed her breasts and played with them." A month later, William Clayton felt the pull of lust toward a different woman, Sarah Crooks. He "was much . . . tempted on her account and felt to pray that the Lord would preserve me from impure affections." He felt his "love towards her increase but shall strive against it." He felt "too much to covet her." He prayed that the Lord would "keep me pure and preserve me from doing wrong." Clayton showed increasing familiarity with Crooks, writing that Crooks "washed my head with [rum]" over the ensuing months. [85]

Under most circumstances, Crooks's practice of using rum for bathing was common enough. In 1851, mannerist Sarah J. Hale recorded that "rum or brandy is used by some ladies as cosmetics to wash the face and hair, or as a remedy against colds, &c to bathe the head and feet." Hale thought rum to be a poor method of bathing since it left a "sort of stickiness . . . on the skin after washing in the rum." The residue "closed the pores of the skin, and thus proves really injurious to its healthy action."[86] But however Clayton felt about the rum baths, he found his interactions with Crooks to be stimulating.

By now, Clayton knew well of Joseph Smith's polygamy and had to revise his understanding of sexual virtue. Joseph Smith's system required the Saints to learn how to adapt to a new system of sexual morality and vigilance—to draw stricter parameters for their definitions of "virtue." Crooks complained to Brigham Young concerning

"evil and fals [sic] reports" the Saints were spreading about her. After she began "keeping company" with a certain male Saint—likely William Clayton—she was "much slandered and slighted" when he "began to come to my lodgings." Crooks hinted at the nature of the accusations, writing Brigham Young that she would"leave you to guese [sic] the rest." She insisted that she "never had such a thought in my head neither had [he]." So destructive were the allegations that her friend began "to feel for my welfare [as] it was evident that I was injuring my health."[87]

In 1843 Joseph approached William Clayton and said that "he felt as though [he] was not treating him right and asked if [he] had any familiarity with Emma." Though Emma remained faithful throughout the marriage, her relationship with Joseph was desperately strained by his introduction of the practice of polygamy. When Joseph began to contract marriages with Emma's knowledge, she threatened that if Joseph "would indulge himself she would too." Fearing that Emma would orchestrate a high-profile seduction of Clayton, Joseph warned Clayton that "she was disposed to be revenged on him [Joseph] for some things."[88]

Joseph had directed Clayton himself to take additional wives. Clayton married his wife's sister, Margaret, even though she was still civilly united to her husband. But the practice vexed him. When Margaret's husband learned of the union, Clayton's "heart ache[d] with grief on his and M[argaret]'s account and could almost say O that I had never known h[er]." Clayton struggled to justify the deed in his own mind: "Thou O God knowest the integrity of thy servant. Thou knowest that I have done that which I have understood to be thy will and am still determined to do so and I ask thee in the name of Jesus Christ either to absolutely wean my affections from M[argaret], or give me hers entire and then I am content." He begged to know if had had "done wrong in this thing," and then he would "repent of it and obtain mercy." Right or wrong, he pled for "release . . . from this grievous bondage of feeling."[89]

Other Latter-day Saint men felt the influence that the increasingly sexualized male virtue dialogue, Bennett's philandering, and Joseph's new marriage system had incited. Mormon first counselor, William Law "confessed that he had been guilty of adultery and was not fit to live and had sinned against his own soul, &c."[90] Francis Higbee, also the legal counsel for Orsemus Bostwick, had al-

legedly admitted to contracting a sexually transmitted disease from "a French girl" living in Warsaw. On one occasion, Joseph Smith discovered Francis Higbee with John C. Bennett "on a bed on the floor" engaging in activity "so revolting, corrupt, and disgusting" that the editor of the *Times and Seasons* censored the material from readers. He did not want to "offend the public eye or ear with a repetition of the foulness of their crimes any more."[91]

In spring 1844, a cabal of Joseph Smith's confidantes felt it necessary to reveal not only Joseph Smith's marital practices but also what they claimed was monarchical megalomania. By the critics' account, Joseph felt entitled to sexual liberty. Describing him as drunken with his own "pretensions to righteousness," Joseph's critics alleged that his sexual appetite was unbounded.[92] Drawing on Phelps's and Redfield's conceptualization of the state of Missouri as a female victim of rape, women became the victims in Joseph Smith's wasteland of morality: the seduced's "heart is like some fortress that has been captured, sacked, abandoned, and left desolate." Joseph's sexual appetite had unleashed a "disease" on the Nauvoo community, and the germ needed to be "exposed from the house tops."[93]

They insisted that they believed in the religious principles of Joseph Smith "as originally taught." But as Joseph gained power, he had become corrupted. He sought to "christianize [the] world by political schemes and intrigue."[94] Yet they also claimed that the teachings of the Book of Mormon "sinks deep into the heart of every honest man" when "spoken in truth and virtue."[95]Accusations of immorality abounded against leading Mormonism's leading men. Now haunted by Bennett's promiscuity, Mormon men now had to distinguish that and Joseph Smith's marital practices. Mormon masculinity came to be defined increasingly by sexual self-discipline. When the federal government commissioned a battalion of several hundred men to assist in the war with Mexico, Mormon men defined themselves through their commitment to sexual chastity. Daniel Tyler recalled that the soldiers had a reputation for "sobriety and virtue."[96]

Indeed, polygamy had made the Saints all the more sensitive to the prospects of perceived predatory sexuality. When black musician William McCary married white Lucy Stanton, the daughter of a former stake president, the union sent a shockwave of scan-

dal throughout the community. White Saints hurled epithets at the couple, calling them an "old n---r and his white wife." The white Mormon women gossiped about them. McCary believed that "some of the Sis. sd. that [McCary] is the man that Bro. Brigham tells his family to treat with disrespect." Brigham saw little threat from the man and assured him that "we are all of one blood" and that they "don't care about the color."[97]

After Brigham left Winter Quarters in April 1847, McCary raised suspicion when he began claiming to have prophetic authority and held "meetings of the men and women separately." He also began to practice interracial polygamy. He "had a number of women sealed to him . . . the form of sealing was for the women to bed with him . . . by which they were sealed to the fullest extent." When the practice was revealed, McCary faced probable mob violence; one man "determined to shoot him if he could find him for having tried to kiss his girls." McCary left the camp "on a fast trot to Missouri."[98] The consequences of McCary's dalliances foreshadowed the new kind of sexual morality under which the Saints labored. Virtue had become not only sexualized; it was now a life-and-death matter.

As the Saints ventured across the wilderness, they had begun the awkward transition from the complicated definition of virtue employed by Joseph Smith to the increasingly sexualized definition that polygamy invited. Brigham Young himself walked a hard-to-discern line in defining appropriate boundaries for male sexuality. "One member, Jesse Braley, approached church leadership about his serial sexual encounters, and received a response that revealed the unclear parameters defining male sexuality. He had married Rachel Taylor "according to Gentile law." But she was "sealed to another man" and "got another woman [Polly] to come & live with [him]." Polly was unsatisfied with the union and "wanted to leave me" for a "young man." Unsatisfied with the union, he "saw a woman, Sarah Frazier, [who] took my attention as if I had been acquainted a long time." He felt it "right in having connection with her bef. we were married." Braley claimed that Brigham endorsed the union, so he married Frazier while Polly still lived with them. Polly left Braley shortly afterwards to "liv[e] with a Gentile."

Church leaders had little sympathy. Albert Rockwood chastised him: "If he can't govern one woman, he can't govern another." Bra-

ley's marital failings were a "black mark" against him as he had "so many woman" who were "all bad." Brigham thought the matter to be a clear: "We cov. not to [have] Any thing to do with the daugrs. of Eve unless they [are] given of the L[ord] or the man that holds the keys." [99]

Brigham Young thought himself reasonable. He allowed that if a "man comes to me & sa[y] we want to be sealed & I ave not time to attd. it," he told them to "go & live with each other." He would "bear the sin of it." But Braley had abused his privileges. The definition of manhood was "know[ing] how to use a wife." Brigham had warned the men "not to handle edge tools," but Braley had "handled edge tools with women." When one of the leaders learned of his situation the year prior, he gave Braley a "severe lecture," declaring, "for heaven's sake don't run off a woman to take anot[her]." Young warned that if "the Quo. Of 70 fellowship such conduct . . . they will all go to hell." One leader "wanted to do good to him," but he felt he "must do it by the law of God." The disciplinary council ordered excommunication but only in order to "bring him back again": "make the plaster as big as the sore." Young directed Braley to "receive it like a corrected son."[100] Virtue was the defining aspect of questions surrounding male sexual self-regulation in Winter Quarters. When John D. Lee bragged about his sexual exploits, he told of "frigg[ing]" his wife, Louisa Free, "20 times in one night."

For Brigham, Lee's sin was "lov[ing] his women too much & frigg[ing] them too much."[101] Women were naturally attracted to men, so it was appropriate for a man to "enjoy a woman all you can to overflowing."[102] Young anticipated that women were naturally drawn to male power and privilege. When one man was found to be publicly living with a woman other than his wife, he acknowledged his error. Young exonerated him: "I know," he told the council, "that the woman has pressed herself upon him & r[eceive]d by the permission of his wife." With this knowledge, the council "forgave" him in short order.[103] Yet men too had an obligation to provide it. When John Benbow's wife, Agnes Taylor Benbow, left him over his sexual performance issues (due to prolonged disease), Young expressed measured sympathy for Agnes, noting for "a woman to be in such a sit[uation] of impotency, it is death to her." Brigham himself "wd. not live 3 weeks in such a situation."[104]

Unlike prevailing Victorian attitudes, Brigham Young at no time

associated "virtue" primarily with sexual abstinence. Young never was a speaker terribly interested in semantic exactness. He admitted it: "I feel it sometimes very difficult indeed to word my thoughts as they exist in my own mind." This, he felt, he explained the "many apparent differences in sentiment which may exist among the Saints." Likewise, Young applied the concept of virtue in unconventional ways. Virtue, Young argued, was merely "do[ing] the will of our Father in Heaven." It "embraces all good" and "branches out into every avenue of mortal life, passes through the ranks of the sanctified in heaven, and makes its thrones in the breast of the Deity."[105] "You say, 'I want an explanation upon virtue,'" Brigham Young told an audience. "I wish I could so give it to you, that you could understand it when I am done talking." If the Saints would "learn the will of God, keep His commandments and do his will," then they would be a virtuous people. God would make us "pure and holy, and fit for the society of angels and Himself." The Saints could then be "virtuous . . . in the highest sense."[106]

Virtue Systematized

But the sexual order continued to loom over virtue rhetoric; it pulled the Saints back even when they tried to cast it in a new light. Manly virtue had come to be a role largely based on the man's stewardship over women and their chastity. In 1851, Howard Egan killed James Monroe when Monroe tried to seduce his wife, Nancy Redding Egan. When Egan was brought before a federal court, his attorney George A. Smith defended him, since the "act was in accordance with the established principles of justice known in these mountains." Every man, Smith warned, "knew the style of old Israel, that the nearest relation would be at his heels to fulfill the requirements of justice." The adulterer, James Monroe, was but "a hyena that entered his sheets, seduced his wife, and introduced a monster into his family." While Smith acknowledged that Egan's actions were extreme, at least it could be said that "the law, the genius, the spirit, and the institutions" of the Mormon people strove to "preserv[e] inviolate, in perfect innocence, the chastity of the entire female sex." Meanwhile, non-Mormon governments "only value it by a *few dimes*." They were "corrupt institutions, which prostitute and destroy the female character and race."[107]

Outside observers did not doubt the Mormon fierce commit-

ment to male virtue, and Mormon men appeared to be proud of it. John Jacques of the *Millennial Star* complained that Benjamin Ferris's account of Utah Mormonism was entirely devoid of "a single open, manly testimony of virtue." He approvingly reprinted a *New York Herald* article observing that "adultery and illicit intercourse will be punished with death by the Mormon code. "Drones," as the *Millennial Star* styled them, "whether male or female—must be driven from the hive."[108] Jacques further quoted federal judge L. H. Read, observing that "the men are jealous of all interference in their domestic affairs . . . seduction and adultery, if discovered, are apt to be punished by death of the offender."[109] In 1856, Brigham Young echoed the rage that informed the judgment of male adulterers: "Suppose you found your brother in bed with your wife, and put a javelin through both of them, you would be justified, and they would atone for their sins, and be received into the kingdom of God."[110] When Ioannes Gennaidos, a late-nineteenth-century Greek author, criticized the British government for backing Turkey during the Greco-Turkish war, he suggested that "Brigham Young is an angel of modesty and a model of decorum when compared to 'Mohammedan butchers.'"[111]

For all the anger that informed men to take up arms against sexual predators, the discourse never exhibited the eloquence of Mormon rhetoric on female chastity. In Mormon Nauvoo, Emma urgently warned (likely using the voice of W.W. Phelps, Joseph Smith's ghostwriter) that when women lost their virtue, "ruin ensues, reproach and shame/And one false step bedims her fame/In vain the loss she may deplore/In vain review her life before/With tears she must in anguish be/Till God says, 'set that captive free.'"[112]

Even the non-Mormon *Valley Tan* agreed, observing that a woman's "blush is the sign which nature hangs out to show where chastity and honor dwells." The non-Mormon press accused the Saints of not trusting their women enough. "Men talk and write here about the seductions of their 'wives, sisters, and daughters' with a publicity and boldness that elsewhere would not be permitted." By non-Mormon accounts, Mormons treated every man as a suspected adulterer: "If a young man makes a polite bow to a lady here, or offers any of the civilities which in more civilized regions are deemed the index of a gentleman, his motives are at once suspected, and from the housetops the community are cautioned to be on their guard, lest some innocent

woman fall victim to his blandishments and wiles."[113] The reward of male libertines was unceremonious condemnation and possibly death.

By contrast, promiscuous women who placed an undue emphasis on their appearance were cast as property, albeit beautiful property. In one anecdote told by the *Deseret News*, a father and son find themselves courting the same woman. They soon discover, however, that she had been seeing yet another man. "She is a coquette," the father declared. "She is, by Jupiter," the son responded. After learning that she was in fact a married woman, the father and son reconciled. The *Deseret News* ended the story by noting that in this "court of love . . . the parties have the satisfaction of seeing the property in dispute pass gradually and effectually into the hands of a third person."[114] Indeed, the *Deseret News* went further, noting that women who placed intensive emphasis on their looks were but "haughty, vain, coquettes [that] . . . might be placed within glass cases and shown off to much advantage but [who] in the capacity of wife, mother, affairs of family, and the real duties of woman [are] . . . wholly unprepared."[115] When Orson Pratt announced the doctrine of plural marriage in an August 1852 conference, he had to address the obvious concerns from the outset. Plural marriage was not a doctrine created to "gratify the carnal lusts and feelings of man." On the contrary, polygamy became a way of institutionalizing male sexuality into a system of domestic accountability. Orson Pratt said wryly that the same men who called polygamy an "awful thing" were those who were likely to "go into a brothel and there debauch themselves in the lowest haunts of degradation all the days of their lives."[116]

From 1852 onward, Mormon polygamy expanded from Joseph's vision of an eternal kinship community fostered through polygamy to become an entrenched social system. Mormon men practiced polygamy openly, and women learned to adjust to the new system. Various living arrangements were devised for the new family structures. Some families cohabited, with the wives sharing space, cooperating in meals, and assisting one another in child-rearing. Other wealthier—and less-congenial—family units established networks of houses in which the various wives lived.[117]

When the Saints publicly embraced polygamy, they were forced to redefine the sexual discourse. Top Mormon leaders had been seeking to practice polygamy inconspicuously for over a decade. A week before apostle Orson Pratt's official announcement, Brigham

Young's confidante W. W. Phelps wrote a letter to a convert living in British India named Mizra Khan. Khan was enthusiastic about the Mormon message but worried that his nine wives would not be welcome in America. Phelps told Khan that the Western world trailed behind the "heathen and pagan nations" in its celebration of polygamy and commitment to following "the patterns set by the fathers of the faithful and nobility of the Lord." The custom "continues as good for the virtue of creation." Phelps now used the term "virtue" to describe the procreative act within polygamy, not merely to describe the absence of sexual activity.[118]

Now facing several sexual prospects, masculine virtue suggested sexual self-control within marriage rather than the attributes celebrated by Joseph Smith, W. W. Phelps, and others. An incident that reveals Mormon attitudes about male sexuality is the 1859 murder of Phillip Scott Key, Jr. (son of "The Star-Spangled Banner" author, Francis Scott Key) by Republican operative Dan Sickles when Sickles discovered that Key was having an affair with his wife. National sentiment was strongly in favor of Sickles; one member of the jury pool reportedly said that he had "a fixed opinion on all such cases" and if "justify[ing] the act would make him an impartial juror, he could be one." Sickles' attorney, John Graham, argued that Sickles' actions were justified, for woman as the "weaker vessel" needed the "strong arm of her husband" to "restrain her within the paths of rectitude." The non-Mormon newspaper *The Valley Tan* found Graham's arguments disgusting, insisting that there was "no fortress so impregnable as the citadel of a virtuous woman's heart." Female chastity had the power to "make a strong man quail and become as an infant."[119]

But the *Deseret News* placed the responsibility for the promotion of sexual propriety squarely on men. After presenting a detailed account of Sickles' murder trial, the *Deseret News* also included the story of a man who took vengeance on his wife's seducer by "walk[ing] coolly up to his betrayer and, at one stroke, severing his right ear from his head" and "put[ting] it in his pocket." Ignoring the Howard Egan incident of years earlier, the *Deseret News* associated sexual immorality as well as vengeance with urban living: "Are the legion of brothels that rear their dingy and their gorgeous fronts in all of the larger cities of the States becoming insufficient for the tide of sensuality and corruption "Men of the world" ought to "look to

[their] firesides and homes . . . for the darkened specters of moral as well as political corruption"; they threatened to "bring downfall and desolation in their course."[120]

Some women celebrated polygamy as being a method for corralling the male libido. Parley P. Pratt's plural wife Belinda believed that polygamy cultivated a virtuous marriage. Sexual "indulgence," Pratt argued, "should not be merely for pleasure, or wanton desire, but mainly for the purpose of procreation."[121] Pregnancy was a sacred time for women: "During nature's process in the formation and growth of embryo . . . her heart should be pure, her thoughts and affections chaste, her mind calm, her passions without excitement."[122] If a man attempted to engage in sexual intercourse with a pregnant wife, she argued, "he would sin both against his own body, against the body of his wife, and against the laws of procreation."[123] Men had been commanded not to "take liberties with any woman except his own." Thus depriving "wealthy men" from having the "inducement to keep a mistress in secret," polygamy allowed men to have an honorable sexual outlet and for women to be the "honorable wives of virtuous men"—essentially who had kept themselves clean from sexual impropriety.[124] Polygamy did not foster sexual licentiousness, Belinda Pratt insisted; if anything, it promoted an environment that allowed men to seek out their sexual needs in healthy ways.

In the late 1860s, the growth of industry in territorial Utah further called upon Mormon men to embrace the doctrine of masculine sexual virtue. Separated from their homes, industrial workers had cut the ties that existed with their family farms and domestic units. Free to explore their sexual identity, young men could indulge in sexual activity away from the watchful eye of their home community. A *Deseret News* editorial eschewing modern Christianity observed with typical bitterness that the Saints would rather "be heathen and behave ourselves" than submit to urban America's "pious, virtuous, Christendom" that tolerated "dancing girls" who were "selected for their . . . looseness of morals."[125] The influx of foreign laborers frightened Mormon men: "You can form some estimate of what the result would be to our cities and settlements of 5,000 or 6,000 Irish, German, and other laborers crowding through our peaceful vales."[126] Mormon men felt retrenchment was necessary, and that the only way to save Mormon men from the increasingly

depraved environment was through the teaching of virtue.

In the new environment, the Mormon press was unsparing in its condemnation of unleashed male sexuality. Men deserved no free pass in sexual matters. "Women," George Q. Cannon observed, "in their yearning after the other sex and in their desire for maternity, will do anything to gratify their instinct." It was the "instinct of their nature" that drove them to inappropriate sexuality and therefore they "are not held accountable to the same extent as men are." But men, Cannon continued, "are strong" and "the head of woman, and God will hold him responsible for the use of the influence he exercises over the opposite sex." The procreative power is a "godlike power," he cried, "but how it is abused!" In polygamist Utah, "our young live virtuously until they marry . . . we have fewer unvirtuous boys and girls in our midst than any other community within the range of my knowledge."[127] A *Deseret News* editorial opined: "Why ought moral purity to be any more a feminine than a masculine virtue, and why should not a fall from it hurt a man as much as it does a woman?" Sexual double standards were a "doctrine of damnation" that "breeds lewdness and corruption." It "rots the foundation of manliness and honor." Indeed, the *Deseret News* associated its support for granting women the vote with its consistency in applying the sexual standard: "That movement holds men and women to an equal, high, and spotless morality before God and the world." Suffrage "is a protest against one code of morals for one sex and another for the other."[128] As historian Kathryn Daynes has observed, Mormons did not indulge the sexual double standard "that countenanced men's sexual dalliances but demanded chastity of women."[129]

A generation later, Cannon's disgust with male promiscuity had only increased: "Why, it is not considered very discreditable for a man to be unvirtuous. It is esteemed as the privilege of the sex, and the female sex themselves almost accept it as a natural consequence of man's organization." This doctrine, Cannon said, echoing his earlier concerns, "is damnable, and it will ruin any people that practice it. Let us set our faces against it, and teach our sons and daughters that virtue ought to be esteemed by them as more valuable than life. A young man who will defile himself is unworthy to be the spouse of a virtuous girl." He would "rather see my daughter buried than go to the arms of such a creature."[130]

Fearful of the impact that outsider, non-Mormon male laborers would have on Mormon sexuality, Mormon leaders grew increasingly vigilant of possible sexual impropriety, wherever it might surface—particularly in the imported sexual culture of non-Mormons entering the territory alongside the transcontinental railroad. As orthodox Christians had done for centuries, Mormon leaders took aim at cultural forms such as the waltz, pointing out the close bodily contact and twirling motions that were sure to excite sexual passions. In 1835, author James Mercer Garnett (*nom de plume:* Oliver Oldschool) denounced the waltz for "exhibiting to the gaze of a numerous company of both sexes, the female form in every variety of position and attitude into which activity of body and suppleness of limb can throw it . . . no modest woman ever beheld it for the first time, without the burning blush of shame and confusion." They were "licentious innovations" that corrupted the youth; a respectable man "may choose a waltzing partner for *a dance*," but "most of them decline inviting her to be a partner *for life*."[131] Following suit faithfully, the *Deseret News* published a piece in 1855 by Washington Irving claiming that the waltz gave men an avenue to take subtle sexual liberties: "The dancers . . . are continually changing their relative positions—now the gentleman, I assure you madam, meaning no harm in the world, carelessly flings his arms around the lady's neck with an air of celestial imprudence." After dancing for long enough, the couple would "find their arms entwined in a thousand seducing mischievous curves." "Closer and closer they approach each other" until they are "overcome with ecstatic fatigue."[132]

By the late 1860s, round dances had become routine in Utah. The *Salt Lake Herald* printed a joke in which a married woman was asked to waltz; she responded: "No, I thank you, sir; I get enough hugging at home."[133] The *Salt Lake Tribune* thought the waltz to be a way lustful Mormon leaders could seduce new brides; one account told of a bishop who "expressed himself highly displeased with round dances." When the youth protested, the bishop allegedly offered to teach them. "He got on the floor with a one hundred and eighty three pound blonde; the band struck up the Blue Danube, and away they slid. It was only a matter of moments before the girl's "cheek . . . rested on the shoulder of that man of God."[134] Waltzing, the *Tribune* believed, made it all too easy for marriage-hungry Mormon men to land their next wife.

For Mormons, virtue served as the self-regulatory mechanism that allowed polygamy to run smoothly. Providing secure environments for women would de-incentive the need to turn to prostitution. Marriage—even in the plural—allowed women to express their "natural purity" and the "talents and abilities with which she is endowed for her own benefit and advantage." The "heart-rending, terrible sight" of the "fallen woman will cease to exist." Even more, the *Deseret News* warned ominously: "lascivious men" who "seek her destruction" would suffer a "swift and condign punishment." Church leaders acknowledged that sexual attraction was an inherent part of man's existence. But the new order demanded new solutions. Apostle Erastus Snow approved of the sex drive, though with some reservation: "These affections and loves that are planted in us are the nobler qualities that originate from God. They stimulate us to the performance of our duties; to multiplying and replenishing the earth to assume the responsibilities of families, and rear them up for God . . . Every instinct in us is for a wise purpose in God when properly regulated and restrained, and guided by the Holy Spirit and kept within its proper legitimate bounds." The "lusts and desires of the flesh," he assured the Saints, "are not of themselves unmitigated evils."[136] In 1882, George Q. Cannon wrote that Deity "provided a system of polygamy that where this excess prevailed it might be met on a legitimate principle, and thus . . . while the demands of nature might be met, decency and propriety might be exhibited in all relations of life."[137]

Mormon leaders believed that men had stronger sexual appetites than women; polygamy seemed to assure them of that. Now presented with several sexual outlets, virtue came to be understood as a man's ability to navigate a complex web of conjugal relations. John Jacques argued that "virtue is proverbially fostered and promoted by marriage" whereas "vice is indubitably encouraged and strengthened . . . by unnatural [monogamous] restrictions upon marriage."[138] In 1883, Joseph F. Smith claimed that plural marriage could never be compared to the "sexual crimes and iniquities of the world." Plural marriage was "virtuous, pure, and honorable" and promoted "life, purity, innocence, vitality, health, increase and longevity." Worldly systems "engender[ed] disease, disappointment, misery and premature death."[139] An 1884 publication attributed the destruction of Book of Mormon civilizations to a loss of its

"strength of purpose, integrity, and manly virtue." It is likely that Jacques was referring to the Nephites' participation in cannibalistic rapes in the final chapters of the text (Moroni 9:9) in which Nephite peoples took many women as war captives and then "depriv[ed] them of that which was most dear and precious above all things, which is chastity and virtue."[140] Jacques did not see the rapes as the theft of female virtue; he saw it as the grotesque degradation of male virtue.

As the Saints dismantled the structure of polygamy, the idea of manly virtue endured, indeed, flourished. From the Utah penitentiary, Lorenzo Snow waxed eloquent about Apostle Willard Snow's character: "It gives a key no mortal made/Yet has it pow'r to mortals aid/'Cause we, though mortals, clearly see/By it, high virtue dwells in thee/What's in thy heart—integrity:/No virtue told, is more sublime/Then this that's shown as truly thine."[141]

Far more common than Snow's remarks were injunctions for young people to cultivate virtuous thought and actions. Gone were the days when it was personified by an aging grandmotherly figure. Virtue became not a sign of sage wisdom but youthful virility watched under close vigilance. "Guard your virtue," Apostle Mathias F. Cowley implored the youth, "esteem it as dearer than the blood which flows in your veins." God had "placed a premium upon honor and chastity, and he or she who loses that gem loses something that cannot be restored in this life, if it can in the life to come."[142] In Manti, the *Manti Messenger* warned that if parents "want your boys and girls to be honest and virtuous men and women, keep them off the streets as much as possible, especially after night. The boy or girl who is allowed to roam the streets at night is an exception if he or she does not learn something that will prove a detriment to their character." At the very least, "the finger of scorn will be pointed at them," regardless of "how virtuous they may be."[143] Virtue was not old, cold, and haggard; it became the sign of a sexually capable young man or woman committed to living according to the Mormon principles of premarital chastity.

Conclusion

In Mormonism's formative days, virtue could be employed in a variety of contexts.Once polygamy had become a signature mark of Mormonism, the Saints used it to provide an alternative defi-

nition of manly virtue that could address what they felt were the sexual ills facing men in the mid- to-late-nineteenth century. The Mormon re-appropriation and re-definition of "manly" virtue allowed the Saints to cast polygamy as a solution to America's social ills, not merely as the social innovation of a peculiar people in the mountains.

But lived practice controlled the contours of Mormon discourse. The ongoing practice of polygamy sexualized virtue rhetoric in Mormon societies, leaving behind the original language that Joseph Smith and Brigham Young had employed. Mormon men came to see themselves not as sexually powerful but sexually weak—a weakness that could only be buttressed by providing men sexual access.

At the turn of the twentieth century, manly virtue had traveled a winding road in Mormon thought, originating in amorphous ideas about law, order, and refinement and coming out as a deeply sexualized attribute. Over the course of nineteenth-century Mormonism, the ideals of manly virtue had shifted in response to the prevailing cultural trends from both within and outside the Mormon community. The Saints paid a heavy price for their social system and the narrower definition of virtue that accompanied it. Though Paley's monogamic ethos ultimately won the day, the Mormons' redefinition of virtue as sexual self-regulation rather than sexual abstinence demonstrated the strong influence of polygamy not only on Mormon lifestyle but also on Mormon rhetoric. Indeed, it served as the interpretive lens through which abstinence culture can be viewed from Joseph Smith through the present day. However it was expressed, nineteenth-century Mormons agreed on this truth: virtue knew no gender.

Notes

1. Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 58.

2. Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

3. Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 12 (Summer 1966): 151–74. See also Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780–1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 98.

4. John D'Emilio and Esetelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 66–71.

5. Angus McLaren, *Impotence: A Cultural History* (Chicago: University

of Chicago Press, 2007), 101–4.

6. Jane E. Calvert, "Shades of Virtue," unpublished manuscript in author's possession.

7. Jonathan Swift, "The Birth of Manly Virtue," in *The Complete Works of Jonathan Swift,* 2 vols. (London: Bell and Daldy, 1869), 2:565.

8. Jonathan Edwards, "The Nature of True Virtue," in *The Works of President Edwards: With a Memoir of His Life,* 10 vols. (New York: S. Converse, 1829), 3:94.

9. Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (Heidelberg: Joseph Engelman, 1828), 536. See also John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* in *The Poetical Works of John Milton: With Notes of Various Authors*, 2 vols. (Oxford: W. Baxter, 1824), 2:222.

10. "The Pleasure of Virtue," *Scioto Gazette* [Chillicothe, Ohio], October 21, 1835, 1.

11. Ibid.

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