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Sex, Sickness and Statehood: The Influence of Victorian Medical Opinion on Self-Government in Utah

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SEX, SICKNESS AND STATEHOOD: THE INFLUENCE OF VICTORIAN MEDICAL OPINION ON SELF-GOVERNMENT IN UTAH

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Eugene E. Campbell, Committee Chairman

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DEDICATION

To my mother and father,
who taught me how to think--
and that human beings are worth thinking about.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

The study of the history of medicine and public health by professional historians is relatively new. Not that the history of medicine itself presents a new field of study: practitioners of the healing arts have recorded their knowledge of disease patterns, the history of medical practices and the progress of the medical profession since the days of Hippocrates. Any historian entering the field today must do so with a sense of gratitude to these early health practitioners; and especially to the most recent physician-historians who, in the last one hundred years, have begun turning a scholarly and humanistic eye to the development of medical science. The conscientious research and detailed observation of physicians like Fielding H. Garrison, Henry E. Sigerist and Erwin H. Ackerknecht, has laid a firm foundation for our current thoughts on the historical aspects of attempts to cope with the human body's physical frailties.

After firmly establishing my debt to my predecessors I must observe, however, two primary difficulties with many medical histories. The first is that they tend to view medical events in isolation: even when making reference to other scientific achievements, rarely does a

work draw attention to the way in which medical practices, disease patterns or health attitudes reflected or influenced the rest of the ebb and flow of human history. Of course there are exceptions: historians Richard Shryock and John Duffy, among others, have notably explored the interactions of medicine and society. Perhaps I am asking more than can generally be presented in the limited scope of a journal article or book, but too often I find myself asking at the end of a piece the two questions I most wish to hear answered in any historical analysis; "Why?" and "So what?"

The second problem with many medical histories is an obsession with the great man/great event interpretation of historiography. One is constantly reminded of the marvelous discoveries of Pasteur and then left with the inaccurate impression that, after a year or two of token resistance the entire medical world had abandoned all other theories of disease and was busily peering into microscopes. These great men have shown a little more brightly than perhaps an honest appraisal of the facts would merit: I believe that the natural desire of physician-historians to portray an exemplary genealogy has sometimes allowed excitement to outshine accuracy. Fortunately, this problem diminishes daily as more individuals delve into more and different facets of medical history.

As mentioned earlier there have been notable exceptions to the criticism described above. In the last 25 years several physician-historians have thoughtfully and analytically examined many aspects of medical history. We have also benefited from a new interest among professional historians in the field of medicine and public health. Yet there still seems to be some reluctance to draw medicine and health matters into the mainstream of historical analysis, to legitimize inquiry into the influence of these factors on all aspects of life; from art to economics to politics.

Lester Bush, a physician who has contributed very significantly to an understanding of Mormon medical history, is an excellent example of the benefits we all receive from the thorough and exacting work of the modern physician-historian. His articles published most recently in the Autumn 1979 issue of Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, in addition to his article on the death of Brigham Young published in Volume 5 of the Journal of Mormon History give ample evidence of his qualifications as a historian. With the publication of the latest Dialogue I realized, with some dismay, that he and I have been doing duplicate research for quite some time. At first, I admit to a certain amount of distress at seeing many of "my" best primary sources footnoting the paper of another historian, especially only two months before completion

of my own thesis work. Of course, there is no doubt that we have both worked independently, and I am somewhat relieved to receive confirmation of my interpretations from another source.

Much more importantly, though, I have come to realize that Dr. Bush and I approach the same information from two different perspectives. He has excellently, and with great care and precision, outlined the evidence and examples which prove that people outside the Mormon community had a specific view of Mormon health as a consequence of their understanding of the practice of polygamy. He has not, however, (and I must add, probably only due to the limitations of space in a journal article) asked why and with what effect. I hope in my work to answer not only the question of why Mormonism and polygamy was thought to have such dramatic physical effects, but also why so many people were so excited over the issue of polygamy, and what effect that excitement had on relationships between the Mormon and the non-Mormon, or Gentile, world.

Hopefully, this paper will also point out just how much influence attitudes towards health and disease can have on any human society, particularly American Victorian society. Historians, like any other intellectually inclined professionals, sometimes suffer from a mind/body dichotomy which prevents them from realizing the impact

that perceptions about the human body can have on actions or the mind and will. Fear of death, disease and disability; mistrust, guilt or embarrassment about our physical bodies and their functions; hopes, and expectations for our physical well-being; as well as fear and confusion about the relationship of the physical mind to the intellectual mind; when enlarged on a population scale or dominating a society of powerful decision-makers, can have a large impact on all other aspects of that society. Whether or not it decides to go to war, whom it fights, whom it excludes or includes in various categories of classes of that society, its written and unwritten laws and norms; all these things are influenced by the way people feel towards their own physical bodies and the physical bodies of others. If, for example, a nation makes as one of its priorities a constant progression towards civilized perfection, viewing that Utopian land as one populated with near perfect beings of sublime intellect and radiant physical health, then that nation would have to commit itself to preventing the introduction or propagation of any practices or factors which might physically and intellectually degrade and cause to deteriorate the intelligence and health of its citizens.

Nineteenth century America did make that commitment and the dominant and vocal classes did concern themselves with any people or practices which they

suspected might hinder the achievement of their grand plan. In the following thesis we will explore how this came about, why it was so, what effect this had on Mormonism and on Utah, and how it all reflects on medical practices and attitudes in nineteenth century America.

CHAPTER I

Before turning to nineteenth century medicine, its effects on life in Territorial Utah and vice-versa, we will briefly review a few broad historical patterns which will set the stage for our own explorations.

Science as we know it today began its evolution in the seventeenth century. Called the century of genius for its many brilliant individuals such as Galileo and Newton, it was a century in which many thinkers for the first time based their view of the physical world largely upon observed experimentation.[1] In medicine, Harvey defined the true nature of circulation; physicians could at last rely on the accuracy of anatomical texts; and anatomical study led slowly towards an explanation of human physiology. Chemistry and microscopic research further expanded the field of medical knowledge. In medicine as well as science the seventeenth century introduced experimentation and observation as the fundamental tools of knowledge, marking the beginning of the "modern" era.[2]

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[1]R. R. Palmer and Joel Colton, A History of the Modern World (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 295-296.

[2]Erwin H. Ackerknecht, A Short History of Medicine (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1968), pp. 113-129.

Unfortunately, knowledge remained isolated. Individuals might make dramatic progress, thereafter teaching their students what they had learned, but circulation of new ideas was limited.[3] That changed with the widespread popularization of science in the eighteenth century. The Age of Enlightenment permitted fields of study barely opened in the seventeenth century to blossom under the enthusiastic care of communities of progressive intellectuals. European, and to some extent American society looked favorably upon science, and lionized scientists and philosophers at social parties and political gatherings. Meanwhile the scientists and philosophers themselves organized into professional or scholarly societies to exchange ideas, theories and observations.[4] By the death of Newton in 1727, students of science and philosophy were moving rapidly in directions undreamed of one hundred years earlier. Both the physical and the metaphysical worlds seemed in many ways to have turned upside down, revealing for curious eighteenth century minds the fascinating and often baffling underpinnings of structures that could previously only be explained by their most obvious superficial features. Like children exploring the gears and springs of a clock and wondering what their

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[3]Ibid., pp. 128-129.

[4]Palmer and Colton, History of Modern World, pp. 324-326.

relationship was to the mysterious turning hands, or beyond that, to time itself, physicians, philosophers, politicians and scientists alike hoped to find fixed and understandable systems or laws which would neatly explain the daily actions of the human body and virtually everything else in their rapidly expanding world-consciousness.

Scientific knowledge accumulated during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries found application in various fields of endeavor such as agriculture, manufacture and the classification of man's environment. The same also held true to a limited extent in medicine. The emphasis upon finding practical uses for knowledge opened up and popularized schools which taught clinical medicine; that is, disease and medicine as it actually affects the patient under observation in hospital and clinical settings. It is said that in the eighteenth century medicine and medical education finally began to move out of the library and into the laboratory and hospitals. While this new approach to medicine brought slight improvement in some medical practices, the major developments were of greatest value only to laboratory researchers and a few well educated and equipped physicians.[5]

The eighteenth century saw a tremendous growth in medical knowledge itself. Morgagni's text "On the Sites

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[5]Ackerknecht, Short History of Medicine, p. 132.

and Causes of Pathological Diseases" published in 1761 broke new ground by concentrating the focus of illness on specific organs and their pathology, thus undermining the centuries old humoral imbalance concept of disease, at least in theory, if not in practice.[6] Bichat carried this work still further into a careful study of the physiology and pathology of individual tissues.[7] Knowledge of physiology exploded with specific work on such aspects as nerve impulses and their relationship to muscle contraction; studies of blood pressure; coagulation; the action of respiration in the lungs and tissues; and finally in one achievement with direct practical application, Edward Jenner's demonstration of inoculation as an effective tool against smallpox in 1798.[8]

Yet, while making great progress in specifics, actual medical care, with the exception of some control of smallpox, improved very slowly, if at all. The relentless search for one simple system or set of laws which explained all the actions of the human body and thereby gave a key to the control and cure of illness; combined with widespread misunderstanding of many scientific discoveries and the very limited therapeutic tools of the medical

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[6]Ibid., pp. 135-136.

[7]Ibid., p. 148.

[8]Ibid., pp. 135-144.

practitioner ; frustrated the Enlightenment physician's dream of finding new and effective cures for mankind's physical woes. The basic forms of therapy used by the ordinary physician were the same ones that had been used for over a thousand years, namely the "heroic" cures of bleeding, blistering, purging and vomiting. By the close of the eighteenth century these were usually applied in relationship to whatever medical system the practitioner adhered to: they could be used to restore balances in the body if the healer accepted the mechanistic theory of function, or to purify the blood if instead the physician adhered to the laws of chemical fermentation. Almost any one of the many theoretical systems available could be manipulated so as to justify use of traditional practices. In addition to these practices an ineffectual if not dangerous pharmacopia, admonitions for rest or exercise, bizarre variations in diet and aromatic quality of the air, plus occasional "last chance" resorts to surgery, constituted the sole therapeutic resources of even the finest physicians.[9] As far as the practice of medicine and the cure of disease, the high hopes of Enlightenment brought, by the end of the century, only disappointment and disillusion.

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[9]John Duffy, The Healers: The Rise of the Medical Establishment (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1976) pp. 26-88.

At the turn of the nineteenth century there was a brief resurgence of faith in the heroics, brought on by world-wide dissemination of respected American physician Benjamin Rush's belief that he had cured yellow fever victims with massive doses of emetics and purgatives.[10] The eagerness with which the medical establishment, especially in America, leaped to embrace Rush's teachings probably illustrates the desperate hope of medical practitioners to live up to the dreams of Enlightenment. In America, national assurances of republican advancement had also included optimistic views of future American medical superiority.[11] Rush's apparent discovery that the only problem with the traditional cures was that they had not been used with enough force offered hope for a fulfilled dream as well as a healthier future. It was a shortlived hope. As the nineteenth century progressed, the clinical schools of Paris began to build the basic scientific statistical data base necessary for understanding disease processes, and their observation that the heroics of medicine had doubtful and perhaps even dangerous effects on sick individuals affirmed what many physicians, and even more patients, had begun to suspect by the late 1830's.

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[10]Ibid., pp. 89-97.

[11]Richard H. Shryock, Medicine and Society in America (New York: New York University Press, 1960), pp. 44-46.

[12]Duffy, The Healers, pp. 99-101.

Evidence, however, was vague and controversy rife. After all, if one totally abandoned these tools, as poor as they might be, then what was left? Physicians, perhaps even more than Nature, abhor a vacuum, and the desire to intervene in an illness is felt by both the healer and the patient. Also, physicians felt reluctant to depart from tradition, which would mean among other things, admitting past mistakes. Therefore, the four heroic practices continued in use in some form, by some physicians, even into the twentieth century. Some of the most prominent physicians in the country advocated bleeding for specific problems in the 1890's, and physician-historian Fielding Garrison recommended bleeding as late as 1913.[13] Even today many still remember using mustard plasters, a remnant of blistering; and large doses of caster oil as a purgative.

In the 1880's and 1890's Germany's research laboratories began to dominate medical innovation and discovery. Earlier discoveries of antiseptic technique by Lister in England and bacterial disease agents by Pasteur in France,

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[13]Ibid., p. 233. Some historians have given the mistaken impression that as faith in the massive use of heroics declined between 1840 and 1865, the practice of blood-letting gradually disappeared: See Leon S. Bryan, "Blood-letting in American Medicine 1830-1892" Bulletin of the History of Medicine Vol 38, No. 6 (Nov-Dec 1964). Actually, although advocacy of the practice of bleeding until the patient fainted declined, a milder form of bleeding was still prescribed by most American physicians as part of their treatment at least until the late 1890's.

enabled researchers in Germany and elsewhere to begin the task of actually improving the human condition through the practical application of medical discoveries: the great increase in surgical procedures which the discovery of anesthesia in the 1840's had provided had been accompanied by a tremendous rise in deaths due to gangrene, septicemia and wound infection.[14] After the introduction of asepsis and antisepsis physical problems could be surgically corrected and patients maintained alive long enough afterwards to realize the benefits of their operation. And with the realization that pathogenic organisms caused many illnesses, attempts could be made to first identify the cause of a specific disease, then try to kill the actual disease organism with drugs or antitoxin, and most hopefully, through immunization, prevent the organism's infestation in the fist place.[15]

Unfortunately, as mentioned before, traditions die hard. In America, many health practitioners refused to believe that a physician could be the cause of death of his own patient simply because he had neglected to wash his hands or boil his instruments. Those who did come to employ the antiseptic or aseptic techniques often did so haphazardly, without real understanding or belief, and

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[14]Duffy, The Healers, pp. 219-220 and 247.

[15]Ackerknecht, Short History of Medicine, pp. 77-85.

with poor results.[16] The problem of changing physicians' concepts of the cause of disease from such things as bad air to bacteria was a great one: until at least ten years into the twentieth century the majority of practicing physicians in the United States had received their education in traditional ways that made no mention, or only passing reference, to antisepsis, asepsis or the bacterial theory of disease. Few licensing or controlling influences existed which could force a physician to learn new material or change old practices.

Let us mention, for a moment, medical education and licensing in nineteenth century America. In the fever of the Jacksonian "era of the Common Man," with its concurrent suspicion of professionalism and authority, all government licensing of medical practitioners vanished. By 1850 only Louisiana, New Jersey and the District of Columbia had any medical licensure, and by the close of the Civil War even those laws were repealed. Most western states and territories made little attempt to enforce licensing laws even when they did exist; therefore, anyone who wished to call him or herself a doctor and start practicing medicine was free to do so.

Medical education began in colonial days as apprenticeships with practicing physicians or trips to

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[16]Duffy, The Healers, pp. 248-249.

medical schools abroad. Gradually American medical schools opened, the first in 1766 at the College of Philadelphia. These schools were designed as courses of lectures to complement the apprenticeship. With the elimination of licensing laws and standards, many practicing physicians began to teach versions of these courses on their own or with colleagues, calling themselves a medical school and awarding diplomas. The nineteenth century physician often found money hard to come by, so these small schools provided a needed and welcome source of income. Competition for medical students intensified as small colleges and universities added medical courses to their curriculums. In order to attract students, most facilities shortened their regular course of study, which had lasted from four-to-six months per year for two or three years: many institutions, later called "diploma mills," offered medical degrees for as little as one six-to-eight week course of lectures. Although the best and most conscientious physicians sought to augment their knowledge by studying in European schools and clinics, most orthodox doctors had little formal education before they began seeing patients on their own.[17]

The term "orthodox" physician as used above applies to those who stayed in the mainstream of medical

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[17]Ibid., pp. 166-179 and 291-294. Also Richard H. Shryock, The Development of Modern Medicine (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947) p. 258.

thought, no matter how muddled it might be, and continued to rely on the heroics in some form as their basic therapeutic regimen. It distinguishes those physicians from the huge number of "irregular" health practitioners who swamped the American medical scene beginning in the 1820's. The success of the irregulars arose directly out of people's lack of confidence in traditional medicine, and Jacksonian suspicion of professionaliam. A popular idea was that everyone should be able to be his or her own physician.[18]

Dr. Samuel Thomson, born in 1769 the son of a poor farmer in rural New Hampshire, witnessed several unpleasant instances involving his own family and the vigorous use of bleeding and purgatives like calomel. As a result he came to regard the supposedly gentler action of roots and herbs as the most efficacious medical treatment. He particularly thought a great deal of the power of an emetic herb, lobelia, even though the action of the herb in humans is often violent and prolonged vomiting. He took out a patent on his herb in 1813, as well as on his system of medicine, which involved the use of "hot" botanicals to dispell the effects of cold on the body. Thomson believed that the effects of cold caused all illnesses. Thomson also advocated dietary reforms, and

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[18]Duffy, The Healers, pp. 109-128

abstinence from alcohol, tea and coffee. In 1822, capitalizing on his new system and spreading the anti-professional gospel, Thomson announced that anyone could become a licensed (licensed by Thomson) practitioner of Thomsonian or Botanic medicine if he were willing to pay twenty dollars for the license and a copy of Thomson's New Guide to Health: or Botanic Family Physician. Although Thomsonianism outraged orthodox practitioners, the method spread throughout the United States. The height of its popularity came with the height of egalitarianism and the height of the practice of heroics in the cholera epidemics of the 1830's. Thomsonianism declined in the 1850's first, because by its very nature there was little to hold practitioners together in any formal system, and secondly because its adherents made the ironic mistake of trying to institutionalize it by starting their own medical schools, thus defeating its anti-professional appeal.[19]

Other irregular sects, such as the hydropaths who cured using various internal and external water treatments; and the Eclectics, who prided themselves on taking the best out of every school and combining it into a system whose basic tenet was "if it sounds good, try it, and if it works, try it again;" thrived in the light of orthodox medicine's helplessness. The most long-lived and the most

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[19]Ibid., pp. 110-112 and Robert T. Divett, "Medicine and the Mormons," Bulletin of the Medical Library Association, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1963) p. 3.

successful of the irregulars was the homeopathic movement. Homeopathy entered the United States from Germany, and the first homeopathic college in America, the Allentown Academy, opened in 1835. The homeopaths, unlike the Thomsonians, were well-educated and their medical colleges included most of the scientific information taught in the better orthodox schools. However, their teachings attacked the large doses of drugs administered by orthodox practitioners, and advocated instead the use of incredibly minute quantities of drugs to effect a cure. They chose drugs for specific illnesses on the theory that "like cures like" - that is, if the taking of a drug in a healthy person elicited a response such as fever in that person, then a minute amount of that drug in a person with fever would cure the problem.

Homeopahy proved so popular and such a threat to orthodox medicine that the American Medical Association was organized in 1847 largely to fight off competition from homeopathic physicians. Homeopathy continued strong throughout the nineteenth century, adapting to significant new medical knowledge towards the end of the century in accordance with its recognition of the importance of scientific study, and in the first decades of the twentieth century many homeopathic schools were quietly absorbed into the mainstream of orthodox medical education.[20]

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[20]Duffy, The Healers, pp. 113-119 and 188; and Shryock, Development, p. 252-258.

Before one makes the mistake of scoffing at the irregular sects because they advocated nonsensical or illogical beliefs, one should remember that although Thomson believed all illness to derive from the effects of cold, most orthodox practitioners firmly believed that most if not all illnesses were merely variations of the one great illness, fever. Even into the late 1880's and early 1890's a typical description of a specific individual's illness might be as follows: after starting as a malarial fever, the disease progressed into the typhus state and finally ended as a typhoid fever; or the fever might settle in the brain to cause brain fever; or the lungs to cause pneumonia; or the abdomen to cause inflammation of the bowels, a name often used to describe a complex of symptoms very similar to those caused by the then-unknown entity appendicitis. It cannot be over-emphasized that nineteenth century orthodox medicine was totally at a loss as to the true cause of most diseases, and instead attributed them, as their ancient Greek predecessors had, to climate, geography, dirt or some other visible phenomenon. Occasionally they came up with the right cause but for the wrong reason. For example, many physicians attributed malaria and yellow fever to nearby swamps and even went so far as to have the swamps drained; but they feared the thick, humid air, not the mosquitoes, so open water barrels remained in the towns to

incubate the disease-carrying insects. Also, sanitarians, who insisted on cleaning up garbage and putting at least some distance between sewage outlets and sources of drinking water certainly helped diminish the severity of some epidemics; but because they did not accept theories of contagion and could not identify microscopic pathogens in superficially clean water, their efforts frequently failed.

Nineteenth century health practitioners coped with several truly terrifying epidemic diseases. The worst scourges were yellow fever, asiatic cholera, and, towards the end of the century, diptheria. Although most prevalent in port cities in the south, New York, Boston and Philadelphia were periodically ravaged by yellow fever epidemics up until the Civil War. High fever, excruciating headache and violent, hemorrhagic vomiting marked the disease, and mortality levels could be high. In the summer of 1793 almost 10% of the population of Philadelphia died as yellow fever swept through that city.[21] Asiatic cholera, which could bring about a quick but agonizing death from convulsive, hemorrhaging diarrhea, devastated urban and rural areas alike in nation-wide epidemics from 1832-1834; 1848-1853 and 1866-1867. Pioneers and prospectors moving west had only the vaguest notions of how to prevent cholera outbreaks, and while some heeded warnings

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[21]Duffy, The Healers, pp. 196-201.

to avoid the pestilence-filled wells along the Platte River, others threw away all their stores of white beans in the hopes that they would thereby diminish their chances of contracting the disease.[22] After the Civil War diptheria epidemics grew in intensity and duration, attacking children and young adolescents, striking in isolated communities or nationwide, causing death by slow suffocation and toxic reaction to poisons in the bloodstream. While other serious and often fatal illnesses threatened Americans, yellow fever, cholera and diptheria epidemics were a particularly grim reminder of the helplessness of contemporary medicine and the frustrating ignorance of medical professionals.

The frustration felt by health practitioners in their attempts to alleviate pain and suffering frequently surfaced in bitter and vociferous quarrels between proponents of various theories and treatments. The crisis of confidence which beset medical practice in the nineteenth century seemed only to heighten the stridency of individual physician's claims to miracle cures, and the angry denunciations of those cures by competing

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[22]George W. Groh, Gold Fever (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1966) p. 92; Howard Stanisbury, Exploration and Survey of the Valley of the Great Salt Lake of Utah (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Granbo and Co., 1852) p. 129. Also, one of the best works on the nineteenth century cholera epidemics: Charles E. Rosenberg, The Cholera Years (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

professionals. As a result of nonexistent licensure, physicians were in abundance and competition was fierce. Public esteem for health practitioners, already low due to suspicion of their remedies and their apparent failure to cope with the prevalent diseases of the day, plummeted in the light of violent discord within the medical ranks. Some physicians even fought duels over their patients. In 1857 an American medical editor wrote: "It has become fashionable to speak of the medical profession as a body of jealous, quarrelsome men, whose chief delight is the annoyance and ridicule of each other."[23] However, sick people still sought out the aid of physicians, and ironically, while frequently declaiming the terrible state of medical affairs and medical practitioners in the country at large, they were defensively loyal to their own physicians, no matter what course of treatment they might recommend. In the face of devastating illness and a frightening lack of knowledge, most individuals still felt they had to trust someone.

We can now see several aspects of Mormon medicine and Utah's medical history in perspective: although it is not the purpose of this paper to address once again the early Mormon fondness for Thomsonian medicine or the antagonism felt by many church members and church leaders towards orthodox practitioners, a few comments

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[23]Shryock, Development, p. 260 and Duffy, The Healers, pp. 184-187.

on these subjects is in order now that they can be seen in the context of a broader medical history. First, we can see that the church's inclination towards Thomsonianism in the 1830's and 1840's, which is evident not only in the respect and admiration accorded Thomsonian practitioners like Levi and Willard Richards but in health codes such as the Word of Wisdom which promoted Thomsonian ideas; that this inclination was not at all remarkable in American society.[24] The anti-professionalism of Thomsonianism probably appealed to the anti-professional spirit of Joseph Smith and his followers who already objected to the professional clergy. They may have been happy to agree with Thomson when he said:

> The nest of college-bird are three,
> Law, Physic and Divinity;
> And while these three remain combined,
> They keep the world oppressed and blind.[25]

However, a great many Americans were in sympathy with that spirit, and at least in the case of the early Mormon church leadership, that did not necessarily imply an unusual or peculiarly exclusive adherence to Thomsonian medical principles or practitioners. In fact, we are

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[24]Divett, "Medicine and the Mormons". Divett seems to think it was unusual. I disagree. Thomson was not the only one around advocating diet and health reforms in the 1830's and 1840's. It was a popular sentiment nationwide; popular with the Mormons too, but hardly exclusively so, as Divett implies.

[25]Rosenberg, Cholera Years, p. 71.

aware of at least six orthodox physicians who practiced in Nauvoo, Illinois, and if the extent of some of their practices appears vague, that is because most health practitioners, especially in the western states and territories, practiced medicine more as a hobby than as a career.[26]

Secondly, contradictory statements from Brigham Young and other early Utah Mormon leaders, which appear alternately to scorn, then approve and even advocate orthodox medical education, also reflect attitudes towards medicine in the United States in general. A close reading of Young's comments on health and medical care, with attention to the chronology of those statements, shows a remarkable harmony with contemporary opinions expressed across the rest of the country; even his exhortations to trust in God and ignore all physicians sounds quite familiar. If Brigham Young was alternately outraged by orthodox medicine's excesses and employing orthodox physicians for his own and his family's care; or contemptuous of the medical profession and advising church members to enter into that profession; he was voicing the ambivalence of America at large.[27]

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[26]Christine Croft Waters, Pioneering Physician in Utah 1847-1900 (unpublished MA thesis, University of Utah, December 1976). Appendix I.

[27]Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 13 (Liverpool: Albert Carrington, 1871) p. 140-142; Vol. 14 (Liverpool: Albert Carrington, 1872) p. 142 and 230; and Vol. 15 (Liverpool: Albert Carrington, 1873) p.225; to

However, although Mormons and non-Mormons alike shared similar attitudes towards irregular and orthodox medical practice, they did find one area in which disagreement over matters of medicine, health and the cause of disease proved disastrous for the Mormon community. For as we view the atmosphere of confusion, frustration and ignorance which surrounds the Victorian medical establishment, sex "rears its ugly head."

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mention only a sampling. Also see Lester E. Bush, Jr., "Brigham Young in Life and Death: A Medical Overview," Journal of Mormon History, Vol. 5 (1978) pp. 79-103.

CHAPTER II

The absence of a coherent and unified approach to the causes of ill-health in the nineteenth century opened the way for a new theory of disease process compatible with contemporary thinking; one which ascribed many unexplained physical conditions to unhealthy sexual activity. As faith in the heroics faded, an explanation of disease surfaced, accompanied by a new system of prevention and treatment which physicians and lay-people alike joined together to promote. There were several important facets of the new health movement, as one of its first advocates, popular reformer Sylvestor Graham described it in his books and pamphlets first published in the 1840's: he explained that the way to treat disease was to alter the total state of the physical body so as to make that body immune to any disease agents, and then to avoid anything which might weaken the body and allow disease to enter. His program involved a strict and nutritious diet, moderate exercise, prudent bathing and "sex hygiene." We remember Graham today as the inventor of the Graham cracker, one of the principle elements of his diet, but we should also know of his insistence that excessive sexual activity led to harmful physical and mental results.

And for Graham, as well as many others, excessive came to mean more than one sexual partner, and more than one act of sexual intercourse or sexual emission a month.[1]

The sexual repressiveness of the Victorian era departed dramatically from previous attitudes towards sexuality. Popular culture in the 17th, 18th and first 50 years of the 19th century included sex as a part of life which brought pleasure and children for the benefit and enjoyment of mankind. Physicians remarking on sexual activity generally encouraged frequent intercourse, as much as 4 or 5 times a week, as a natural and pleasant way of cleansing and exercising the body's functions. Female sexual enjoyment and orgasm was considered natural and wholesome. Although religions preached marital fidelity and condemned fornication, sexual crimes, once committed, required penitence and forgiveness from God but tolerance in society. The robust adventurer risked little physical harm in enjoying his or her passions, except from jealous mates or venereal disease.[2] The manner of infection of both syphilis and gonorrhea was widely understood and contraction of these illnesses

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[1]John S. Haller and Robin M. Haller, The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1974) pp. 96-97. Also, Richard H. Shryock Medicine in America: Historical Essays (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966) pp. 116-124 and Shryock, Development, pp. 255-256.

[2]Haller, Physician and Sexuality, pp. 91-96.

carried little of the social stigma which it carried in the later nineteenth century.[3]

It is hard to understand why attitudes towards sexuality suddenly warped in nineteenth century western culture, but very soon after the close of the Civil War sex became commonly associated with revulsion, guilt, shame, embarrassment and brutality. Doubtless many factors contributed to the change, but personally I believe two major developments account for Victorian sexual apprehensiveness. First, the heightened awareness of biological and evolutionary forces in everyday life; and second, increasing political, racial and social pressures on white, middle-class, male-dominated western society.

Just as backyard physicists and kitchen chemists demonstrated the eighteenth century's fascination with physical science, the bug collections and fossil hunts of the nineteenth century demonstrated that era's excitement over the natural sciences. By the mid nineteenth century the study of biology and natural history consumed an ever-increasing percentage of the time and curiosity of scientifically inclined individuals. The atmosphere of discovery, dissection and classification of the numerous elements of the animal kingdom led more people,

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[3]John Duffy, Epidemics in Colonial America (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1953) pp. 233-235.

professionals and amateurs alike, to wonder about the inter-relationships of living organisms. Charles Darwin was only one of many individuals intrigued by questions of adaptation and evolution, and few who asked those questions could avoid thinking about the implications which certain answers had on the way in which the human species fit into the scheme of things. Fossil remains of sub-human beings discovered in France and Prussia in the 1850's and 1860's, as well as expanding interest in primitive cultures, introduced anthropology as a new scientific field. The study of animal behavior likewise engaged many minds in an uneasy contemplation of the motives behind certain human activities. With the same interest that consumed animal breeders observing physical and behavioral changes in dogs and horses through the intervention of selective breeding programs, people wondered about humans as well; what traits had been accentuated and what traits eliminated in the centuries of breeding undergone by different races and peoples throughout the world? Most Britains and Americans believed that their race had inherited superior intellectual talents and abilities, while less fortunate groups had developed in ways that may have made them physically stronger, but also made them less capable of intellectual advancement.[4] White males

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[4]Haller, Physician and Sexuality, pp. 48-57 and Oscar Handlin, Race and Nationality in American Life (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1948), passim.

dictated, and females accepted, the concurrent belief that man had evolved for maximum skills in reasoning and intellectual expression, while nature had forced women to choose maternal emotions and the physical ability to bear children at the expense of intellectual capacity.[5] However, a disconcerting threat hung over this picture of white male superiority: although Darwin and many other naturalists did not agree, it was still widely accepted, especially in America where Darwin met the most resistance, that some inherited characteristics could be acquired, particularly moral and intellectual traits. This left the way open for individuals to turn back centuries of advancement by neglecting the development of the brain and intellect in men and the emotional and moral purity in women, indulging in animalistic self-gratification, and then passing on to their posterity an increased tendency towards barbarism and a decreased moral and intellectual capacity.[6]

The potential dangers of selfishness and indulgence made it essential to impress upon people the need for intellectual pursuit and physical denial. Inferior races spent their time and energy merely satisfying brutal animal needs. They remained

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[5]Haller, Physician and Sexuality, pp. 57-87.

[6]Ibid., pp. 103-104 and 131-137.

subordinate to the Anglo-American race because they were not concerned with advancing the intellect and spirit. In order to advance the intellect one had to ignore the physical, even revile it, if it threatened to overwhelm intellectual control.[7] Nothing posed such a powerful threat to that intellectual control as the sexual impulse, therefore nothing was as dangerous to the status and advancement of individuals, their children and their society as uncontrolled or indulgent sexual activity. Political pressures in the world rose dramatically in the last half of the nineteenth century in part because of increased communication and trade with non-white and eastern European cultures, and an increased presence of these cultures in western society. When this combined with the growing leisure time of middle class women which afforded them greater opportunities and incentives to expand outside the domestic sphere, it made it necessary for white male supremacy to justify itself and defend the parameters of its domination. They did this in Britain and America by internalizing theories of peculiar destiny: in Britain it was the Empire, on which the sun never set; in America it was the dream of a perfect society.

The dominant Americans of the nineteenth century, the white middle and upper classes, believed that they

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[7]Ibid., p. 273 and passim.

were progressing towards a future utopian society where the ultimate in intellectual, physical, political and religious achievement would be combined. Many, if not most, believed that these goals were not impossibly distant stars to steer by, but attainable goals, reached through the efforts of every individual to live as close to the proposed intellectual and moral ideal of life as possible. Presidents and prophets alike spoke of the importance of the family unit in developing the advanced state of culture desired by so many. They demonstrated that Americans had been given a land of limitless natural resources and wealth, a unique democratic form of government and the special blessings of God upon their prosperity. Joseph Smith and his followers accepted this idea as much as anyone in America. What they had no way of knowing in Illinois in the 1840's and then isolated in Utah in the early 1850's, was the role that sexual practices would play in this great march to the future, and how much Mormon marriage customs and their theological views of sex would place them distinctly out of step with the rest of the American parade.

There is one final, less important way that Victorian attitudes maintained a clear and dramatic difference in the cultures of Anglo-American and non-Anglo-American peoples, which I mention because of its realtionship to an unusual aspect of early Mormon culture.

By enforcing a peculiar, intricate and all-consuming sexual code on themselves, Victorians set themselves apart from the rest of the world as only a bizarre sexual relationship can do. They did not expect or require inferior races to adhere to their strict regimen; indeed, that would have been "unnatural" and would also have closed the distance between them. The constant process of controlling, suppressing and even ignoring physical pleasure and sexual desire which permeated so many levels of Victorian life, made their society a peculiar one, clearly definable and distinct from the rest of world culture. What is interesting about this, in light of our subject, is that the Victorians used their sexual practices in much the same way that polygamy was at times used in Mormon society: to support and enforce their separateness from the rest of the world.

Before going any further we need to point out semantic differences between Victorian and modern understanding. The term "sexual" did not have the same meaning which it carries today, or which it carried before 1850, that is, the physical relationship between a man and a woman that in its ultimate form lead to physically pleasurable sexual intercourse. This is an appropriate definition of the term "sexual" as it is used in the text of this thesis. But as Victorian novelists, purity writers, marriage counselors and medical authorities used the term,

it seldom referred to any exclusively physical relationship, or even to anything physical at all: it often referred to the more platonic interweaving of the spirits and intellects of the opposite sex. "The ideal 'sexual' relationship...involved no physical contact at all," one modern author states.[8] Even when recognizing that physical attraction might be some small part of sexual love, few Victorian authors thought of that as a good thing. One purity writer pointed out that "When a feeling of admiration or pleasure refers to the mind only, it is pure and abstract love; but when it refers to the body, it is animal and resembles what is felt by brutes."[9] Victorian mores taught that the physical aspects of marriage are merely a brute necessity and have nothing at all to do with true sexual love, which is the affection of "congenial association" or, if more fortunate, the "divine adoration" and communion of the soul which the angels enjoy.[10]

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[8]Charles A. Cannon, "The Awesome Power of Sex: The Polemical Campaign Against Mormon Polygamy," Pacific Historical Quarterly Vol. 43 (1974) p. 68.

[9]William A. Alcott, M.D. The Moral Philosophy of Courtship and Marriage (Boston: John P. Jewett and Co., 1860) pp. 38-39.

[10]John H. Beadle, Life in Utah or the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism (Philadelphia: National Publishing Co., 1870) pp. 355-357.

Medical science and health practitioners became deeply involved in Victorian sexual attitudes and practices for four major reasons. First, the state of medicine in nineteenth century America was such that any theory which offered some hope of effectively improving human health and well-being attracted support in the medical community. Second, in light of low public esteem for physicians, the fact that most of the dominant powers of society - the clergy, political and scientific forces - also had suspicions about sex made the prospect of supporting the popular opinion of respected professionals an attractive one. Third, many of the people who practiced or wrote about medicine, whether as a full time job or as a sidelight of some other career, were also dabbling in the current quasi-scientific research into the natural sciences, inclining them to think about the relationship of man to the rest of the living world. Finally, in the atmosphere of guilt and embarrassment over sex that repression created, who else could one turn to for information and guidance on sexual matters but the family physician and the medical authors of marriage manuals? Despite contempt for physicians, most people still assumed that medical doctors knew more about human physiology than any other group. After all, anatomy and physiology were two of the few areas of medical advancement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

What did the medical authorities say about the effects of sexual activity? With only a few exceptions, and most exceptions being simply a matter of degree, family practitioners, marriage manual authors and medical authorities alike answered inquiries into sexual matters with astonishing unanimity. Sex could be indulged in safely only at infrequent intervals and for the purposes of reproduction alone; lust, sexual desire and lascivious enjoyment of the sexual act had to be repressed because those factors all by themselves could lead to physical ruin for oneself and one's posterity; a normal woman should have no sexual desire or physical enjoyment of the sex act; masturbation in either sex was probably the greatest danger of all; and ultimately the only hope for intellectual and moral achievement in either individuals or civilization lay in strict control of all sexual impulses.[11]

Physiological justification for the control of sexual activity came in two forms: the anatomical connection between the brain and reproductive organs, and the more mysterious electrical-magnetic link between them. Physicians drew diagrams pointing out the physical connection of the brain to the testes and ovaries via the spinal cord and the long strings of nervous tissue which

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[11]Handlin, Race and Nationality pp. 151-152; Haller, Physician and Sexuality pp. 91-92; Duffy, Healers pp. 235-236.

extend, like a horse's tail, from the base of the spine to the muscles and organs of the lower abdomen. The similarity in overt consistency and appearance of brain, spinal and nervous tissue with the tissue making up the testes and ovaries also linked these systems in the physicians mind. Indeed, for many it was not hard to believe that the same material which makes up the brain and spinal fluid is contained in seminal fluid; circulating back and forth between the brain and the testicles like the circulation of the blood. Seminal emissions of any kind literally drained the substance of the brain. Some medical authorities strongly advocated this literal explanation of mental debility, while others simply implied that this was probably the case; nevertheless, virtually all Victorian physicians believed that for the dangerous and unsettling effects loss of semen had on the brain, it may as well be true.[12]

Some argued that seminal fluid had marvelous qualities that could improve all the body's health if it was retained in the body. They argued that physical as well as intellectual strength would increase, along with "manly temperament," if semen could be kept in the body and absorbed into the blood stream. Purity writers taught that an entirely healthy life could be lived without one

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[12]Haller, Physician and Sexuality pp. 125, 195-199, 214 and 217.

seminal emission of any kind.[13] One marriage manual physician advised:

> The young man who would secure the highest and best development of his physical and intellectual powers will carefully avoid, as far as possible, all loss of sexual fluid, either in the form of emissions or even in the form of lawful intercourse.[14]

The other connection between the brain and the reproduction organs was more subtle and in some ways more frightening: the release of escape of the mysterious "nervous force," which motivated and energized the brain. This force allowed the brain to keep the rest of the body functioning in an orderly fashion by a careful and controlled extension of the force throughout the body. Orgasm was one of the drains which threatened to weaken or impair that force. "There is a great expenditure of nervous force in a single act of coitus...manifested by the languor, weakness and mental feebleness which occur for sometime afterward."[15] "The frequent and excessive discharges of nervous force may exhaust the cells of the grey matter and render them incapable, for the time being, of functional activity."[16] And while the brain was not

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[13]Ibid., pp. 195-196 and 199-201.

[14]Ibid., p. 219.

[15]Roberts Bartholow, M.D., Spermatorrhea: Its Causes, Symptoms, Results and Treatment, 4th ed. (New York: William Wood and Co., 1879) pp. 23-25 and 44-50. This is the same author who will be mentioned later as commenting extensively on Mormon physiology.

[16]Ibid., pp. 54-55.

functioning at full capacity, any harmful influence might gain sway over the body, leading to the infestation of disease or degenerative processes.

The medical term for the unhealthy loss of seminal fluid and nervous force was spermatorrhea. The question arose as to what constituted an "unhealthy" loss? Victorian medical authorities agreed that the term did not include the actual act of sexual intercourse. However, they also agreed that frequent intercourse and accompanying lascivious thought could bring on or aggrevate a case. Most physicians agreed that in its most pathologic form it was a loss of seminal fluid without any conscious thought or action of the victim. Only a few practitioners exempted nocturnal emissions from the disease pattern of spermatorrhea, maintaining that they were normal functions of a healthy body and limiting the disease to mucous discharges from the urethra such as we know today would probably be caused by an infectious process like nonspecific urethritis or gonorrhea. However, most medical practitioners and certainly most lay-people saw spermatorrhea as a potentially devastating illness.[17] It was brought on by indulgence in erotic thought, masturbation or frequent intercourse; its symptoms were an uncontrolled discharge of seminal fluid and nervous force

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[17]Ibid., pp. 1-3, 25-27 and 37. Also Haller, Physician and Sexuality pp. 211-214.

in either nocturnal emissions; intermittent or continuous discharge; or as an insidious seepage during ordinary urination.[18] Popular journals, medical articles and newspaper stories, as well as advertisements for patent remedies, portrayed this epidemic disease as a threat to the health and human potential of the nation. They warned men to beware of "reflex nerve excitement." Uncontrolled erections and sexual indulgence weakened the body enabling orgasm and seminal loss to occur without even the knowledge of the patient.[19] Impotence, shrinking sexual organs and mental confusion threatened any man who succumbed to sexual desire. Young men experiencing their first nocturnal emission, or guilty about masturbation, wrote anxious letters to physicians, and medical clinics advertised in the newspapers as specializing in the treatment of spermatorrhea or "loss of manhood." Each young man received a letter in return, usually assuring him that if he didn't submit to treatment right away "his spinal marrow would waste away, his brain would soften, and he would end his days in an insane asylum."[20]

The visible symptoms of spermatorrhea were many: they included a thin, drawn face; sallow complexion; dark

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[18]Haller, Physician and Sexuality pp. 212-214. Also Bartholow, "Spermatorrhea," pp. 5-13 and 33-35.

[19]Bartholow, "Spermatorrhea," pp. 25-27.

[20]Haller, Physician and Sexuality p.214.

spots under the eyes; decreased memory, attention span and cognitive thinking; nervousness; either a coarse and brutal or an effeminate countenance; weak musculature; and diminished virility and fertility. Men with spermatorrhea might have constipation or diarrhea, feel aches and pains all over, be subject to headaches, heart palpitations and rapid breathing; but they would surely find themselves distrubed by "erotic daydreams," animal desires and an inability to think rationally.[21] Although some physicians looked for physical causes of the disease, such as stricture of the urethra or alcohol abuse, far and away the majority of physicians considered the most significant cause to be lascivious desire, gratified in either erotic thoughts, masturbation or lustful sexual intercourse.[22] Treatment of the illness had to be effective because of its dangerous results, and countless numbers of men subjected themselves to such remedies as ice-water enemas; forced dilation of the anus; insertion of wooden cylinders into the rectum for indefinite periods of time to compress the prostate gland and force semen back into the testicles; the wearing of sharp pointed devices on the penis which would alert the patient to any signs of erection; and finally, a very popular treatment,

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[21]Bartholow, "Spermatorrhea," pp. 29-32 and 56-58.

[22]Ibid., p. 14.

cauterization of the urethra, which was also recommended for its "moral" affects because the pain drew the patient's mind away from harmful thoughts, at least for a couple of weeks.[23]

Masturbation invoked the worst prospects of physical and mental deterioration, and the greatest danger of a permanently disabling case of spermatorrhea. Yet, while most physicians conceded that masturbation was the most dangerous practice, differentiation between loss of seminal fluid and nervous force during masturbation and normal coitus was often difficult to make. Sir James Paget, a British medical authority, stated "I believe you may teach positively, that masturbation does neither more nor less harm than sexual intercourse, practiced with the same frequency, in the same condition of general health, and age and circumstances."[24]

How did women suffer for sexual excesses? If they yielded to their own lascivious desires, which in women were far more unnatural and therefore dangerous than in men, they threatened their health by discharges of nervous force and imbalances of the flow of brain substance between the brain and the reproductive organs, just as men did. Few physicians worried about this prospect:

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[23]Ibid., pp. 78-104. Also, Haller, Physician and Sexuality pp. 215-216.

[24]As cited in Bartholow, "Spermatorrhea . . ." pp. 12, 32-33, 44-50.

first, because of their firm belief in the asexuality of most women; and secondly because in a proper marriage relationship intercourse was performed very infrequently and men were instructed to do their reproductive duty as quickly as possible, hopefully in under five minutes, so as to avoid eroticism and any greater loss of energy and seminal fluid than was required for fertilization.[25]

However, women suffered tremendously as passive recipients of their husband's indiscretions. Women acted as repositories for their mate's nervous forces, pulling in and holding those forces like a magnet, and when a man's indulgent and lascivious thoughts or actions created a large amount of negative or corrupting forces in his body, intercourse transferred much of those forces to his wife. She became a "cesspool," collecting the damaging forces her husband's lust created.[26] In this manner she became subject to many debilitating illnesses, lost the sunny countenance of her youth, took on a drawn and listless appearance and slowly wasted away. Insanity, too, could be her fate, as her mental energies--her own nervous forces--were drawn away from the brain to the reproductive areas of her body; and everyone knew that a woman could ill-afford to loose even the smallest amount of her already insignificant brain power.

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[25]Haller, Physician and Sexuality pp. 97-99.

[26]Ibid., pp. 112 and 236.

The children were even more helpless victims. Negative forces or unnatural sexual excitement in a mother, combined with "seminal weakness" in the father brought on by abuse of his reproductive capabilities, produced weak, stupid and sickly off-spring. Many of these children died young. Those that matured, after reaching puberty, were often troubled by abnormal sexual desire and unsteady intellect.[27]

The proper age for marriage was generally considered to be between 21 and 23 years of age for women and 25 to 28 for men. The marriage of youths under the age of 20 was viewed with horror by many physicians, for fear that immature reproductive organs would be damaged and the health of the individual and their offspring be impaired.[28] The advancement of human character and even civilization required strict sexual chastity and restraint during the time when male and female organs developed, or else the animal nature would become overdeveloped and the moral nature would never form properly. It is in adolescence, one late nineteenth century physician stated in an article on the physical appearance of insanity, that the human face can most display the future of its owner:

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[27]Ibid., pp. 131-134. Also, Handlin, Race and Nationality pp. 151-152.

[28]Alcott, Courtship and Marriage pp. 49-60. Also, Haller, Physician and Sexuality pp. 110-111.

whether he or she will travel the high road to nobility or the low road to animal sensuousness.[29]

In the last half of the nineteenth century, every man, woman and child lived with the potential threat that his own sexual feelings, desires or actions, and the actions of those around him, could seriously impair his physical and mental health. Although a few physicians, like Elizabeth Blackwell, decried the obsession with sexual activity and its concurrent unrealistic repressiveness, the clear majority of medical practitioners and advisors seriously undertook the task of educating laypeople as to the very few proper sexual thoughts and actions, and the repercussions of the very many improper ones.[30] All seminal emissions outside of coitus were suspect as indications of the dreadful malady spermatorrhea. Even lawful sexual intercourse, if performed improperly--more than once a month, when pregnancy was not desired, or with thoughts of sexual gratification, enjoyment and physical pleasure--could lead to illness and insanity for every member of the family.

In both men and women, when the very substances and innervating forces of the brain gradually diminished because of sexual activity, the functions of the brain

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[29]Laurent, M.D., "Physiognomy of the Insane," American Journal of Insanity Vol. 20 (October 1863) p. 226.

[30]Haller, Physician and Sexuality pp. 152-154 and 224.

became impaired. The first functions affected were presumably the most recently acquired: the higher functions of morality and civilized thought. With the softening or erosion of those areas of advanced reasoning only the more base animal functions of the individual remained. This could make him or her cruel and vicious, add to lustful desires and create a disastrous downward spiral of more sexual activity leading to more degeneration. In addition, the quality of male and female reproductive organs was so impaired as to pass this lack of moral facilities on to children, who then could not be taught right from wrong: a sort of moral retardation. Sex had little or nothing to do with love or the institution of marriage as the Victorians understood it.[31] "The fear of or guilt over sexuality was so intense as to render unthinkable any suggestion that sexuality might be an important part of marriage."[32] Purity writers wrote of the "prostitution of matrimonial life" which occurred when husbands corrupted their wives first by "amorous looks" and finally with acts designed only for "self-gratification."[33]

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[31]Ibid., pp. 96-97; Alcott, Courtship and Marriage pp. 10-11; and William A. Alcott, The Young Husband (Boston: George W. Light, 1839) pp. 236-237 and 247-254.

[32]Cannon, "Awesome Power," p. 69.

[33]William A. Alcott, The Young Wife; Or Duties of a Woman in the Marriage Relation (New York: Arno Press,

The population of Victorian America firmly believed that sexual gratification was repulsive, shameful, animalistic, unhealthy for individuals and a threat to civilization. And in their midst was an entire society, growing daily in range and population, which preached doctrines throughout the world apparently glorifying the sex act and advocating fearful sexual excesses in an institution it dared to call "celestial marriage."

1972. Originally published Boston: George W. Light, 1837) pp. 101-107. Also Haller, Physician and Sexuality pp. 91-113 and 124-131.

CHAPTER III

From Zane Grey to A. Conan Doyle, the titillating image of polygamous life captivated the readers of Victorian popular literature. Fiction writers described the decline and death of beautiful, previously healthy young girls forced into marriage with lecherous, "dried up" old men or their brutal, animalistic sons.[1] Murder, incest, seduction, torture and orgy appeared in an often thinly veiled erotic context, frequently in a volume which vowed that its sole purpose was to awaken the American people to the danger of the "twin relic of barbarism" which existed in Utah and threatened to spread into other states and territories.[2] One could find similar stories of moral and physical decay in books, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines and even medical journals purporting to be factual, scientific accounts of the inexorable physical and mental effects of polygamy.

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[1]Salt Lake City, The Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 1, No. 9, December 1880, T. B. H. Stenhouse, Expose of Polygamy in Utah: A Lady's Life Among the Mormons (New York, American News Co., 1872), p. 187; Doyle, Arthur Conan, The Sherlock Holmes Reader, "A Study in Scarlet" (reprint) (New York: Berkley Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 3-95. Grey, Zane, Riders of the Purple Sage (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1912).

[2]Robert Joseph Dwyer, The Gentile Comes to Utah (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1941) pp. 194-195.

The revelation of celestial or plural marriage was officially recorded by Joseph Smith in the summer of 1843 in Nauvoo, Illinois. Joseph had been practicing the doctrine for several years himself, and while publicly denying it, he advocated its practice amongst the elite church leadership until his assassination in 1844. Church members migrated to the Salt Lake valley under the direction of Brigham Young who, in the apparent safety and relative isolation of Salt Lake City, publicly announced the doctrine of plural marriage in 1852. Many church members participated in the practice at one time or another, especially church leaders who felt a need to live all the tenets of their faith and set a good example. However, today we know that even at periodic peak levels of plural marriage activity only one-fifth to one-quarter of the population was involved, and many plural marriages contracted in campaigns of religious enthusiasm were later dissolved when reality pressed in upon spiritual zeal. Modern research indicates that although some families derived a great deal of fulfillment from the celestial marriage arrangement, others were confused by the lack of standards and norms by which to govern the new relationships. The doctrine was never very popular and most plural marriages involved only one or two additional wives taken more out of a sense of religious faith or duty than

from romantic desires.[3] Yet non-Mormons commonly believed that most if not all Latter-Day Saints practiced some form of "plural wifery"; and that most marriages or wife-swappings occurred in secret, since they frequently involved shameful practices and the involuntary participation of the bride, and sometimes of the groom as well.[4]

As far as the Victorians were concerned polygamy catered to the lowest desires of men and could produce disastrous effects in the developing Anglo-American race. Descriptions of the originator of polygamy, Josephy Smith, entailed every image of lechery, seduction and depravity readily available. In addition, a phrenologist, in taking a reading of Joseph's head, was said to have found that

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[3]Gustave O. Larson, The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1971, pp. 37-38; Stanley S. Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. 35 (1967), pp. 309-321; Eugene E. Campbell and Bruce L. Campbell, "Divorce Among Mormon Polygamists: Extent and Explanations," Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. 46 No. 1 (1978) pp. 4-23; and also the pioneering work of Kimball Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1954).

[4]Theodore Albert Schroeder, "A Reply to a Defense of Mormons" reprinted from The Truth Seeker (pamphlet found in Library of Congress. No date or publisher.) Almost all of the anti-Mormon literature agreed that most marriages occurred secretly, which was true, in that plural marriages were not publicly recorded. A good example of wife-swapping is the supposedly factual biography Boadicea: Alfred Eva Bell, editor, Boadicea; The Mormon Wife (New York: Arthur R. Orton, 1855). For more information on fictional accounts of Mormonism, see Dennis Leo Lythgoe, The Changing Image of Mormonism in Periodical Literature (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Utah, May 1969).

on a scale of 1 to 12, Joseph ranked 11 in sexual passion or "amativeness."[5] Those who entered Utah to view the Mormons first-hand reported a "marked physiological inferiority...a certain feebleness and emaciation of person is common amongst every class, age and sex; while the countenances of almost all are stamped with a mingled air of imbecility and brutal ferocity."[6] Few people were unaware of the end results of polygamy or the desperate need to eradicate it. One gentile woman, writing from Salt Lake City said:

> Polygamy is utterly at variance with every known principle of law, order or morality; and people who practice it in Utah, if left alone will soon degenerate into mere brutes. Its effects are to destroy the moral and intellectual nature and develop only the animal. It remains to be seen whether the American nation will permit such an institution to be perpetuated within its borders.[7]

A former wife of Brigham Young, Ann Eliza, stated after her divorce from Young that "Incest, murder, suicide, mania and beastiality are the chief beauties of this infamous system."[8] In 1890 a prestigious religious journal repeated the oft-stated view that all Mormon

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[5]Cannon, "Awesome Powers," p. 81 and Beadle, Life in Utah pp. 339-340.

[6]Furby, M.D., "The Effects of Mormonism," The American Journal of Insanity Vol. 20 (January 1864) p. 366-367.

[7]Jennie Anderson Froiseth, Ed., The Woman of Mormonism (Detroit: C. G. G. Paine, 1887) p. 212.

[8]Anne Eliza Young, Life in Mormon Bondage (Philadelphia: Aldine Press Inc., 1908) p. 249.

women degenerated into unsurpassing ugliness, and that Utah contained a higher proportion of lunatics and deaf-mutes than anywhere else in the nation because of polygamy.[9] There are many more accounts such as this one. One protestant minister stated, in an appeal to Congress to legislate against polygamy, that "Wherever polygamy is established...we can have no hope for the race--except the forlorn hope that the institution may be overthrown, or the men who sustain it, destroyed."[10]

Anti-polygamists had no doubts that the violation of physical laws and moral codes would bring definite physical and moral results to the people of Utah.[11] Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Ferris were two of the first anti-polygamists to dwell on this Victorian theme. Benjamin Ferris, appointed secretary of the Utah territory by the federal government, lived in Salt Lake City with his wife during the winter of 1852-53 for six months. Although both were received well (Brigham Young, then Governor of the territory spoke of him as "cooperative" and Ferris wrote home of his "kind reception"), when they returned

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[9]"When Brigham Young was King," American Catholic Quarterly Review (January-October 1890) pp. 298-300.

[10]John Marchmont (pseud.) "An Appeal to the Reverend Clergymen of the United States on Behalf of the Primal Law of God for Mankind," (Philadelphia: Claxton, Rerusen and Hoffelfinger, 1873) p. 8.

[11]Ibid., p. 19; Handlin, Race and Nationality p. 152; and also Cannon, "Awesome Powers," p. 78.

East they wrote and lectured continuously against the Mormons and particularly against polygamy. Mrs. Ferris never felt comfortable in Utah. She came west "prepared to be shocked," aware of polygamy's probable results, and she saw what she expected. She later admitted in a letter to her sister that she gratified her tremendous curiosity by "peeping into doors and windows."[12] Ferris depicted gross licentiousness and sexual promiscuity in the territory. He believed that thousands of prostitute women passed from man to man in secret temple ceremonies. He assumed that all women hated their husband's other wives, breeding a very unhealthy atmosphere, and that all husbands treated wives and children currently out of favor with enough brutality to cause premature aging and death. Children also suffered from neglect and sickness as a result of their parent's promiscuity. Ferris admitted that many individuals he observed appeared normal, healthy and happy, but he was convinced that it was only a disguise his LDS hosts used to conceal the real and revolting consequences of polygamous society.[13]

Ferris and other writers and lecturers depicted both the men who embraced polygamy whole-heartedly and those who went into it reluctantly as suffering equally

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[12]Norman F. Furniss, The Mormon Conflict 1850-1859 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960) pp. 39-40.

[13]Ferris, Utah, pp. 246-264.

from the harmful effects of their excesses. A man described as being "as tender and kind a husband as ever lived" before taking a plural wife, became thereafter a brutish and insensitive animal who threatened to abandon his former wives if they interfered in his attempts to satisfy an ever increasing appetite for new sexual experience. It seemed as if the higher moral and humane functions of his brain drained away as he degenerated into atrophied imbecility. Only the craftiness of a sly animal remained.[14] His lean, weak body and corpse-like face showed the wages of his "sinner's dissipation."[15] Many writers described incest as a relatively common occurrence in the territory, with men in the throes of polygamous excess so reduced as to look on their own daughters and grand-daughters as future wives.[16] Others spoke of the polygamist's deteriorating mind, one at least saying that the mind of Brigham Young frequently wandered, and he was incapable of speaking for a half hour without making lewd references to his love affairs.[17]

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[14]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 1, No. 3, May 1880 and Jennie Anderson Froiseth, ed., The Women of Mormonism (Detroit, Michigan: C. G. G., Paine, 1887) passim.

[15]Furniss, Conflict, pp. 39-40.

[16]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 1 No.1, April 1880; Anne Eliza Young, Life in Mormon Bondage (Philadelphia: Aldine Press, Inc., 1908) p. 249; Stenhouse, Expose pp. 77-80.

[17]Cannon, "Awesome Powers, " p. 80.

The women of polygamy, whether they supported the practice or found themselves forced into it, bore the outward marks of their physical and emotional trials--stooped shoulders, thin and wrinkled faces, poor complexion and darkly circled, dull eyes.[18] The American reader could easily recognize these signs of moral and physical decay. They knew that a woman's clear, white, smooth skin and the luster of her eyes reflected her moral and physical well-being.[19] They were not the "cheerless, crushed and unwomanly mothers of polygamy," as Grover Cleveland referred to them.[20] Polygamous wives were said to suffer from multiple physical problems such as constant headaches, weakness, nervousness, neurasthenia and sleeplessness. They fell victim to numerous unspecified "female disorders" or even more often slipped into insanity.[21] Many women became opium addicts or alcoholics, not only because of depression, but also because of physical and moral deterioration resulting from polygamy.[22] Illnesses ranging from kidney problems to cancer or consumption,

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[18]Anti-Polygamy Standard Vol. 1, No. 12, March 1881.

[19]Haller, Physician and Sexuality pp. 142-143.

[20]Cannon, "Awesome Powers," p. 74.

[21]Stenhouse, Expose, pp. 87-89; Froiseth, Women passim; Young, Bondage p. 127.

[22]Froiseth, Women pp. 209-210.

might be attributed to the practice of plural marriage. Unable to find help from any of the patent remedies widely advertised for relief of her condition, the polygamous wife usually joined, according to one author:

> . . . the many broken-hearted women lying in the dreary Mormon cemeteries, victims of this system of iniquity. . . . Women . . . who could not longer submit to the degradation into which their superstition had led them. . . . The desolation of the lonely nun or the immolation of the Hindoo widow are not a feather in the balance when compared with the sacrifices made by some of these women. . . . Is there not a whole volume of tragedy expressed in these simple words of a wife . . . "They say I am dying of consumption, but it is only my heart that is wasting away."[23]

Authors frequently attributed the cause of a woman's death to a broken heart, at the same time implying that a system which promoted unnatural sexual activity physically damaged women as well as men. This paradox exists throughout the literature, making it difficult to discern, at times, what actually causes harm to the wife: her emotional sorrow or her physical activity? The mistake made here is the assumption that these two elements were separate in the Victorian mind as they are in ours. Actually, a woman's emotional and physical health was so closely intertwined, to the Victorian physician and lay-person, as to be inextricable. Unhappiness or sensuality in the mother made her sick and impaired her

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[23]Anti-Polygamy Standard Vol. 1, No.1, April 1880.

unborn children.[24] Her sadness derived, after all, from sinning against moral law and:

> Transgression of moral law (monogamy) was in this case said to be identical with the pollution of natural or biological law. Sexual sin, because it involved the pollution of the body, was expected to have bodily or physical consequences.[25]

Anti-polygamy writers called into question a polygamist's reproductive ability. Children of polygamous marriages if not dead at birth sickened and died at a young age. Congenital defects such as mental retardation, insanity or physical deformities occurred commonly in such marriages. Most children were female--an obvious sign of weakness. In addition, when these blighted girls reached maturity they were almost always infertile.[26] Often the polygamous family could not produce any children at all. As proof some people pointed out that Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon church, had several polygamous wives, but had not fathered children by any of them.

A Baptist preacher writing home from Salt Lake reported that Mormon children were "an inferior lot."[27]

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[24]Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? pp. 21-24.

[25]Cannon, "Awesome Powers," p.77.

[26]Roberts Bartholow, "The Physiological Aspects of Mormonism and the Climatology and Diseases of Utah and New Mexico," Cincinatti Lancet and Observer, Vol. 10 (1867) pp. 196-197.

[27]Anti-Polygamy Standard Vol. 2, No. 8, November 1881.

A physician, after visiting the city, wrote in an article for a leading medical journal that the "idiotic and the congenitally deformed . . . (are) painfully numerous" among the children.[28] Others returned repeatedly, in their discussions of the effects of polygamy, to the children "cursed from birth" to short, miserable lives. Stupid and sensual, the "precocious sexuality" of those who survived congenital weakness and disease doomed them, not only to ordinary physical and mental disabilities, but also to an amoral existence. They could not be taught right from wrong because they had been born without the higher brain functions which controlled moral and ethical behavior. Uncontrollable as children, those that lived became murderers, addicts and prostitutes.[29] In a pamphlet proclaiming the results of polygamy a minister referred to the plight of Abraham when he took a second wife:

> . . . it brought down on his hoary head at the age of eighty-six years, the terrible retribution of a son who was to be a wild man, an anomalous creature; a human being without human sympathies! Like a carniverous beast, he had love only for his own kind; . . . and his posterity, like himself, were to be the natural enemies of humanity![30]

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[28]Bartholow, "Physiological," pp. 196-197.

[29]Marchmont, "An Appeal," p. 23; Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 1, No. 11, February 1881 and Vol. 1, No. 6, September 1880; and a report to the Surgeon General from then Army Surgeon Roberts Bartholow, written from Utah in 1858 and published in Senate Executive Document 52, 36th Congress, 1st Session, pp. 302-303.

[30]Marchmont, "An Appeal," p. 23

One book stated that "unless every law which governs hereditary transmission would be at fault, the next generation of this brood (will) furnish almost innumerable materials for the insane asylum and the scaffold."[31] Many believed that most children of polygamy did not survive infancy and childhood: "A noted polygamist in Salt Lake City," reported the anti-polygamy book Women of Mormonism, "had more than fifty children buried in the cemetery, who had died in early infancy."[32] Federal officer Benjamin Ferris reported:

> The children are subject to a frightful degree of sickness and mortality. This is the combined result of the gross sensuality of the parents, and want of care towards their offspring. . . . Nowhere in New York City can a more filthy, neglected-looking and disorderly rabble of children be found than in the streets of Great Salt Lake City.[33]

Young girls suffered particularly badly. A high incidence of illegitimate births prevailed in Salt Lake City, said the authors of Women of Mormonism, because of the precocious sexual awakening of young girls. A Madame of a Salt Lake brothel told a local newspaper that she turned young LDS girls seeking work in her establishment away by the hundreds.[34]

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[31]Froiseth, Women, p. 211.

[32]Ibid., p. 207.

[33]Ferris, Utah, pp. 247-250.

[34]Froiseth, Women , pp. 197 and 200-201.

Dr. Robert Bartholow agreed that most of the American Women ". . . among the Mormons, are, chiefly, prostitutes from our Eastern cities,"[35] This was one way of explaining a woman's involvement in so threatening a practice, since it was known that prostitutes suffered from degenerative increases in sexual desire. In another account of his experiences in Utah, Bartholow reported to the federal government that licentiousness and sexual desire was so increased in Mormon men that they had discovered ways of "hastening the period" of pre-pubescent girls, which they used to claim sexual maturity in the female children they married.[36]

In an age when young men and women were seen as the forerunners of a superior intellectual and racial well-being, the image of very young brides and grooms, or of children with "precocious sexuality," threatened the evolution of society. A favorite image of the anti-polygamy writers involved thirteen or fourteen year old girls, dragged off to the Endowment House, weeping and shaking with fear, to be married to an old, white-haired lecher who already had several wives.[37] Boys affected by

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[35]Bartholow, "Physiological," p. 195.

[36]C. G. Forshey and Dr. Samuel Cartwright, "Hereditary Descent: or, Depravity of the Offspring of Polygamy Among the Mormons," De Bow's Review, Vol. 30 (New Orleans, 1861) p. 207

[37]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 2, No. 2, March 1881.

the great sexual agitation in their environment became obsessed with unhealthy practices, such as masturbation, at a young age, and also married young. Many individuals agreed with the statement that the "effect of such teaching upon the young is seen in much lewdness and in all the vices which are so readily imbibed and practiced by the young in Utah to a greater extent than anywhere else," and they found that these young people might destroy the entire country's hopes for a more perfect future.[38]

Given that the mental and physical perfection of the white race in western society was one of the major tasks of nineteenth century America, polygamy's apparent sexual liberality threatened progress towards perfection:

> Search out the cause of decay of every perished Republic, and you will find it was licentiousness, or the desecration of the primal law of marriage. . . . The evil effects of this unnatural condition are obvious on the moral character of both men and women, as well as on their material improvement . . . where ever polygamy is established . . . we can have no hope for the race. . . .[39]

Another writer, after visiting Utah, stated:

> As a social system it is a miserable failure, because its tenets are founded on the law of retrogression, which cannot be tolerated in this advancing age . . . the future of our race depends entirely upon the character and position of (men and) women in our country.[40]

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[38]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 1, No. 11, December 1880; Haller, Sexuality, pp. 191-195, 225-226.

[39]Marchmont, "Appeal," pp. 7-8.

[40]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1880.

As long as America tolerated polygamy in her midst, there could be little hope for improving the race because, as medical doctor Samuel Cartwright pointed out:

> . . . polygamy not only blights the physical organism, but the moral nature of the white or Adamic woman, to so great a degree as to render her incapable of breeding any other than abortive specimens of humanity. . . .[41]

In vain did the Mormons argue that their breeding program would produce "physically and intellectually superior" individuals for the American race.[42] Most church leaders shared the Victorian's vision of progression towards a utopian future, and those who were conscious of the biological arguments against polygamy tried to rebut them by pointing out that plural marriage was a positive evolutionary step, because it permitted the finest men to father the most children. Unfortunately, they could not, or chose not to, respond to the argument that no matter how fine a man was when he entered polygamy, the very nature of the institution--its sexual demands and lascivious environment--insured that he would not remain among the finest for long.

The Anti-Polygamy Standard claimed in 1881 that a "leading medical journal" had requested that they write a series of articles "showing the physical, mental and moral

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[41]Forshey and Cartwright, "Hereditary Descent," p. 214.

[42]Ivins, "Notes on Polygamy," p. 317.

results of (polygamy)."[43] Some of the "leading medical journals" had already published articles on the physical effects of polygamy. In 1867 Dr. Robert Bartholow, an army surgeon who visited Utah in the late 1850's, published a paper in the Cincinnati Lancet and Observer reporting that Mormons as a people were undergoing physical deterioration despite the excellent climate of Utah. He attributed this to the practice of polygamy, which subjected them to debilitating diseases and produced genetically poor offspring. He stated that this religious practice had made "Mormon people a congress of lunatics." In his paper, entitled "The Physiological Aspects of Mormonism," he described the typical Mormon as "lean and weak of body, depraved of mind (with). . . the cadaverous face, the sensual countenance, the ill-developed chest, the long feeble legs, and weak muscular system: typical of a hyperactive sex life. He attributed a rapidly diminishing population to lack of male virility and a high infant death rate. The number of defective children born in the community increased each year as well. Only new converts brought in from Europe and Canada prevented the complete and rapid disappearance of Mormonism.[44]

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[43]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1880.

[44]Bartholow, "Physiological," pp. 193-205.

Bartholow and others objected not only to the practice of polygamy but to the whole sexual climate of Utah. Implicit in phrases about "precocious sexuality" and the amoral society of bestial humans was the message that the entire Mormon attitude towards sex was depraved. They objected to the sometimes blunt and open use of the pulpit for counsel on sex related matters. Bartholow observed general authorities of the church counseling their people openly about the most private matters which "were confined among civilized people to medical books." For example, a speech given by the Apostle Heber C. Kimball is cited in several different sources as evidence of the immodesty which caused an unhealthy excitement in the people: in one of the general conferences of the church, Kimball warned the young men that they would become infertile if they insisted on wearing extremely tight pants. Bartholow considered this advice ridiculous and blamed male loss of vigor on the "influence of early sexual excitement and indulgence upon the sexual power of the new Mormon race."[45]

Mormon doctrine ran counter to the prevailing ideas of sexuality espoused from both the pulpit and the medical podium. Most of the Victorian world bemoaned the fall of Adam and Eve as cursing them to the vagaries and whims which their evil form of reproduction required and

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[45]Bartholow, "Physiological," pp. 196-197.

extolled the wisdom of celibacy, or at least, marked sexual restraint.[46] Adam and Eve before the Fall, God, the angels and all other spiritual beings were assumed to be totally asexual.[47] Mormon doctrine taught that sex was an important and eternal part of life, designed by God for the creation of new beings and even for the enjoyment and binding together of men and women in marriage. Parley P. Pratt, in his Key to Theology said "The object of the union of the sexes is the propagation of their species, also for mutual affection . . . mutual comfort and assistance in this world of toil and sorrow. . . ."[48] His brother Orson Pratt, after explaining that sexual love would exist in "the eternal worlds after resurrection" went on to say that people would enjoy the sexual experience even more in their next life.[49] Those who had been married in the specially consecrated temples would be together as husband and wife "for time and all eternity," meaning that after their resurrection they would continue to live in conjugal happiness, adding children to their

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[46]Haller, Physician and Sexuality, passim.

[47]Vern L. Bullough, Sex, Society and History (New York: Science History Publications, 1976) pp. 125-132.

[48]As cited in Cannon, "Awesome Powers," pp. 66-67.

[49]Ibid., pp. 65-66.

family eternally.[50] Another apostle preached in 1885 that:

> The male and female principle is united and both necessary to the accomplishment of the object of their being, and if this be not the case of our Father in Heaven after whose image we are created, then it is an anomaly in nature. But to our minds the idea of a Father suggests that of a Mother: As one of our poets says:
>
> "In the heavens are parents single?
> No; the thought makes reason stare!
> Truth is reason, truth eternal
> Tells me, I've a Mother there."[51]

Suspected activities in the temples themselves caused quite a bit of agitation. Gentile and apostate Mormon descriptions of secret temple ceremonies dwelt on the alleged nudity involved, doubtless touching a sensitive nerve in their readers: ". . . the naked human body seems to have produced an acute anxiety in Victorian readers. The disgust for the naked body reached its peak in the late nineteenth century."[52]

Victorians looked on aghast as Mormons talked about physical sexual relationships between Gods and even a theory that Jesus had been married on earth to Mary and Martha.[53] Anti-Mormon literature routinely included

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[50]Orson Pratt, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 14 (Liverpool: Albert Carrington, 1872) pp. 239-240; Vol. 17 (Liverpool: Albert Carrington, 1875) p. 49.

[51]Erastus Snow, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 26 (Liverpool: Albert Carrington, 1886) p. 214.

[52]Cannon, "Awesome Powers," p. 72 and Bell, Boadicea, P. 62.

[53]Beadle, Life in Utah P. 326-331.

references to the depravity of LDS sexual theology. Perhaps most shocking of all Mormon beliefs was the idea that Jesus was the "literally begotten" son of a male God and a female mortal, Mary.[54] Journalist and author John Beadle reported with horror the "strange and blasphemous" doctrines in which "all the sexual passions exist in full force in the different worlds, and animate the immortal gods as fully as their human offspring."[55] "It is all pure selfishness," he exclaimed in his 1870 book Life in Utah, "mere grossness, sexualism deified, and the domain of the senses made the empire of Universe."[56] The Victorians were not prepared for an affirmative answer to the question "Is there sex after death?"

How did most Mormons feel about sexual activity? Unfortunately, I know of no surveys which give information as to their sexual frequency, anxiety or satisfaction; and few Mormon journals recorded such information. There are occasional glimpses into their world; pictures of hostility or happiness in Mormon homes. One poignant entry in the journal of Agatha Walker McAllister, the second wife of a polygamist who had been imprisoned for that practice after the Edmunds-Tucker Act made "co-habitation"

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[54]Ibid., p. 316; Bell, Boadicea, p. 38, 45, 46, 63; and Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? p. 36-43.

[55]Beadle, Life in Utah pp. 315 and 326-331.

[56]Ibid., pp. 328-331.

illegal, began by speaking of a letter her husband sent to her while he was still in prison:

> I felt so happy about it. (It was) the loveliest love letter. I have it to this day. After 6 months he came home (to his first wife's house). He didn't dare to come to me. I took my little boys down to the temple and met him in Uncle John's office. It was a joyful meeting. He looked funny clean-shaven. He went home and I went to mine, then commenced sneaking again. He wasn't supposed to live with me if he was to obey the law. He got the start on them. We had 10 children after he came out.[57]

The journal of Jonathan Baker shows at least one local church leader both agreeing with some Victorian ideas and dis-agreeing with others. He first gives advice similar to the Victorian opinion of sexual activity:

> President McAllister spoke (at Stake Conference) of some men bringing on premature decay and an early death by the too frequent use of sexual intercourse, showed the folly of a man entailing disease and suffering on his posterity through not governing himself during the time his wife was bearing children or nursing them. . . . He spoke of the baneful effects of the sin of masturbation . . . bringing in some instances of chronic and lifelong debility and insanity. . .[58]

But then he goes on with this qualification, as though to soften his pronouncements:

> He also dwelt on the propriety of gratifying women during pregnancy where it was right and consistent that they might not entail on their offspring unholy desires and appetites . . .[59]

At the very least this was at variance with the adamant

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[57]As cited in Larson, Americanization, p. 50.

[58]As cited in Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? p. 186 and 187.

[59]Ibid.

Victorian belief that any sexual activity whatsoever during pregnancy would have devastating effects on the unborn child. More than that, however, it was official recognition of a wife's right to sexual gratification and, although implying that to leave the wife unsatisfied might lead to "unholy desires" in her child, it does not support the idea that her desire for gratification was unnatural or unusual.

Kimball Young, in whose book the above journal entry was recorded, states several times that the "puritanic" and "christian" tradition of the Mormons meant that they could not consider sex "a means of personal pleasure" but only a procreative necessity. He admits to having little evidence to support that idea, but later adds that probably few wives "enjoyed an orgasm" since it was assumed that women did not need sexual gratification.[60]

In the first place, it was neither puritanic nor christian tradition that sex within marriage should not be accompanied by physical enjoyment, or that women should be frigid. That was a Victorian idea which had only been in its earliest phases of development during the formation of Mormon doctrine and the exodus west to Utah. Although Mormons in Utah hardly existed in total isolation, still, not until the 1880's did American culture begin to dominate Mormon culture. Besides, Victorianism was very much

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[60]Ibid., p. 14, 175, 180-185 and 290-292.

an upper-and middle-class, Anglo-American phenomena, and a significantly large element of the Mormon population did not fit into that classification. As mentioned before, I really can't know how the Mormon people felt generally or specifically about sexual activity: some probably hated it, some enjoyed it, some were indifferent. But I believe that the attitude towards sex in marriage taken by most of the church leaders and members was essentially a more relaxed and wholesome one than was found in Victorian culture.

Fortunately, although it would be nice to know, it is not necessary that modern historians discover the Mormons to have been a sexually relaxed, active and fun-loving group, to continue this discussion. What is important is that the contemporary reader understand how most Anglo-Americans perceived Mormon sexuality, and further, how those perceptions led to oppressive federal legislation which stripped many Mormons of their franchise; imprisoned them; and threatened the dissolution of their church.

CHAPTER IV

In the early 1880's Mrs. A. G. Paddock published a book entitled The Fate of Madame LaTour, A Tale of Great Salt Lake. In it she described scenes of decadent debauchery among Mormons in Salt Lake City and the horrifying moral and physical results of their evil crime against nature: polygamy. After the success of the first edition, her publishers, yielding to public demand for the book, printed and sold a second edition of over 100,000 copies. Mrs. Paddock, an occasional visitor to the Utah territory, joined the already impressive throng of romance novelists, scholars, physicians, journalists and crusaders who cashed in on the nineteenth century's fascination with pruriencey, its suspicion of Mormonism and its sexual insecurity.[1]

Anti-Mormon writers did more than gain personal wealth, however. They also promoted a picture of life in the remote territory of Utah that fulfilled the warnings of contemporary medical opinion concerning the dire

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[1]Gustave O. Larson, The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood (San Marino, California: Huntington Library, 1971) p. 56 and Dwyer, The Gentile Comes to Utah pp. 197-198.

consequences of excessive sexual indulgence, helping to convince the general public that the citizens of the territory would not be capable of self-government as a state until they stopped the physically and mentally debilitating practive of polygamy. Stripped of discreet Victorian innuendo their question was clear: Did the American people wish to grant political equality to the hopelessly sick and insane? More than that, did not the American Congress have a responsibility to use all the legal powers at its disposal to stop the practice of polygamy, which threatened the health of individual citizens and the progress of society?

The previous chapter explored ways in which popular literature and anti-Mormon polemics, as well as scientific papers, associated the Mormon practice of polygamy with the physical degeneracy and disease which Victorians assumed would be the logical consequence of aberrant sexual activity. I will continue with an explanation of how circulation of those ideas influenced Federal action against polygamy and Utah statehood.

Hostile denunciations of Mormonism and polygamy, which dwelt on the moral and physical evils of the practice, appeared in innumerable pamphlets and sermons; national magazine articles; and at least 45 of the 50 novels published about Mormonism in the nineteenth century. Maria Ward's Female Life Among the Mormons

sold 40,000 copies within weeks of its 1885 publication, was translated into four languages, and reprinted, with different titles, as late as 1913.[2] Although many authors published for the remunerative gain which such titillating stories could bring, the motives of the writers are not as important as the effects of their work: they helped to stir up the American people against the Mormons largely by picturing them as physically repulsive, intellectually blighted and morally savage due to their obsession with sexual matters.

Victorians reacted with horror to anti-Mormon stories and easily believed that most women, and even some of the men, remained in Utah only out of fear for their lives. Few questioned the absolute power of Brigham Young and the lecherous, depraved leadership of his church. An army of bestial, uncivilized murderers stood ready to kill or torture anyone who stood in the way of their lust for more women and power.[3] The missionary efforts of the church promised that no one in the United States could be sure that someday one of his or her loved ones might not be seduced or kidnapped into the Mormon religion.[4]

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[2]Cannon, "Awesome Power," pp. 63 and 71.

[3]Bell, Boadicea, pp. 49 and 54-55; and N. W. Green, Mormonism: Its Rise, Progress and Present Condition (Hartford: Belknap and Bliss, 1870) pp. 28-88, 161-163 and 180.

[4]Bell, Boadicea, p. 82

Some non-Mormon residents of Utah felt a particular need to alert the rest of the world to the evils of polygamy. In 1878 two hundred gentile women organized the Anti-Polygamy Society and two years later began printing The Anti-Polygamy Standard.[5] Published in Salt Lake City, the newspaper claimed that it had subscribers in every state and territory who supported all efforts to suppress the threat of uncontrolled sexuality.[6] The Standard reported that without federal assistance in this noble cause, polygamy would spread throughout the territories, and even into the states. Its editors announced political meetings all over the country, many sponsored by church groups, featuring special speakers on the subject of Utah's plural marriage practices. They applauded mass meetings in such places as Watertown and Rochester, New York, New Jersey and Boston, all condemning polygamy and urging Congress to take some action against it. They also reminded the public that as long as Utah remained a territory, the federal government controlled legislation and enforcement, but painted a grim picture of spreading degeneration should Utah's citizens gain control of a state government. In 1882 the paper's editors remarked:

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[5]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1880; and Larson, Gustave O., "An Industrial Home for Polygamous Wives," Utah Historical Quarterly Vol. 38 (1970), pp. 263-264.

[6]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 2, No. 1, April 1881.

> If Utah were a state and polygamy an institution recognized and defended by state laws, it might be hard to say how to abolish it. But Utah is a territory, and as such wholly and always under the jurisdition of Congress. Its people and their institutions are subject to the control of Congress. No laws are in force there except such as Congress has sanctioned.[7]

This message reached the halls of Congress from many different sources. One Philadelphia pamphleteer wrote, in 1873:

> The citizens of Utah, as soon as the Territory becomes a State, will be entitled to the rights of citizenship in every other State, and thus the way will be opened and prepared for this system of licentiousness to gather strength and reach its victims, even here, in this holy city, bearing the name of Washington, and boasting the guardianship of the Congress of the United States.[8]

Congressman Gooch explained the beauty of the territorial system, in which the federal government says to the citizen:

> . . . we will aid you in your Government until you reach a certain point of maturity; and when we believe that you are capable of governing yourselves . . . we will then let you elect your own rulers, and pass your own laws . . . if you establish institutions in harmony with our institutions, , we will not interfere with you. . . .[9]

Hoping to rid themselves of the annoying federally appointed territorial officers and judges, who were

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[7]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 2, No. 11, March 1882.

[8]Marchmont, "An Appeal," pp. 3-4

[9]Daniel W. Gooch, "Polygamy in Utah" (reprint of a speech of the Hon. Daniel W. Gooch of Massachusetts delivered in the House of Representatives April 4, 1860, no publisher given).

often strongly anti-Mormon and more often of dubious character and competence, the primarily LDS population convened a constitutional convention and petitioned Congress for admission into the Union as a state, in 1850 and 1856, and again in 1862, 1872, 1882 and 1887. Congress emphatically rejected all these requests. As Utah became more insistent about its right to self-government, pointing out that the sparsely populated territory of Nevada had been a state since 1861, popular sentiment against Mormonism rose to a fever pitch. In February of 1882, for example, the Woman's Central Organization for the Suppression of Polygamy of the City of Brooklyn sent Congress a petition with over 9,000 signatures asking for some kind of legislation against polygamy and Mormonism. The signatures on that petition included the President and faculty of Rutgers College and the professors of the Theological Seminary at Brunswick, New Jersey.[10] Senator Robinson of Massachusetts introduced a petition on the floor of Contress with 3,000 signatures, including most of the state legislature of Massachusetts, which said in part:

> . . . considering polygamy . . . a foul blot on our national purity and a crime against the laws of God, (we) humbly petition your honorable bodies to enact

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[10] Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 3, No. 1, April 1881.

> and enforce such laws in Utah . . . as will destroy it from our Christian Civilization.[11]

The governing bodies of many religious organizations, including the Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist and Catholic churches drafted and sent petitions to Congress requesting quick legislative action to suppress polygamy. The Newark Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in New Jersey upheld the idea of religious liberty but resolved that "liberty of conscience does not include the right to destroy the very foundation of Christian civilization. . . "[12] The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of New Jersey:

> . . . contemplates with increasing alarm the existence of the institution of Mormonism within our national territory. We are especially concerned at the rapid extension of this vicious system and at the likelihood of the speedy application of Utah for admission into the Union of States. (We view this) not simply as a great evil to all citizens in Utah, but as a power threatening domestic and social virtue. . . .[13]

The Cincinnati Methodist conference spoke more bluntly: "(Mormonism) is a preconcerted infernal scheme, partly mercenary, partly political, chiefly licentious."[14]

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[11]Congressional Globe, House of Representatives, Forty-seventh Congress, First Session, March 16, 1882.

[12]Congressional Globe, House of Representatives, Forty-seventh Congress, First Session, March 13, 1882; and Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 1, No. 8, November 1880.

[13]Congressional Globe, House of Representatives, Forty-seventh Congress, First Session, March 13, 1882.

[14]Young, Isn't One Wife Enough?, p. 4.

One congressional representative considered these and other petitions clear evidence of a "great popular clamor for the passage . . . of some very rigorous and severe bill for the suppression of Mormonism."[15]

Ironically, Brigham Young and most church leaders in Utah never suspected that the 1852 announcement confirming the church practice of polygamy would have such a devastating effect on their plans for self-government. All through the 1850's and 1860's Brigham Young preached the imminence of statehood for Utah and completely failed to understand why everyone in the East seemed so violently disturbed by Mormon marriage practices. Dr. Willard Richards, a Thomsonian physician with no orthodox training, wrote to the territory's elected representative to Congress in 1852: ". . . don't fear tis none of their business how many wives we've got; let them howl, they'll feel better when they get through and from present signs they will soon have something else than attend to our kitchens and bedrooms."[16] Utah's representative, Dr. John M. Bernhisel, was much less convinced that the problem of polygamy would soon be forgotten. Bernhisel, an orthodoxly trained physician who graduated from the

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[15]Congressional Globe, Senate, Forty-seventh Congress, First Session, February 16, 1882, p. 1202.

[16]Gwynn W. Barrett, John M. Bernhisel: Mormon Elder in Congress (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1968), pp. 104, 134 and 150.

University of Pennsylvania Medical School in 1827, feared from the beginning what the doctrine of plural marriage might mean to Utah's hopes for statehood:

> The publication of this work . . . will cause a tremendous sensation, not only throughout the United States, but throughout all Christendom. . . . Not one in a thousand will be convinced that the "Doctrine" is at all consistent with chastity, or even morality, much less that it is a pure and righteous one. . . . [17]

Bernhisel, a very faithful Latter-Day Saint, had himself taken several polygamous wives while living in Nauvoo. However, he never lived with more than two of them, and very quickly settled down to a monogamous life. He apparently considered the doctrine of plural marriage primarily a spiritual exercise, and, in fact, felt distinctly repulsed by the idea of cohabitating with more than one wife. He was a loyal advocate for the church as long as he served in Washington and throughout his life in Utah, however, he always felt uncomfortable defending polygamy. He also appears to have accepted at least some of the Victorian doctrine concerning sex: out of almost 900 books Bernhisel chose for shipment to the new territorial library, he considered Sylvester Graham's Lectures to Young Men important enough to order two copies. Only one other book received that distinction.[18]

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[17]Ibid., p. 105.

[18]John M. Bernhisel Collection, folder 12, Church Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Bernhisel, the only orthodoxly trained physician in the church leadership in 1852 was apparently the only one who correctly appraised public reaction to the doctrine of plural marriage. Another orthodox physician, Robert D. Foster, left the church in 1844 after almost four years in Nauvoo and a position as surgeon general of the Nauvoo Legion, chiefly because of his objections to plural marriage.[19] Dr. Bernhisel spent much of his congressional career trying to convince church authorities in Utah to down-play the subject.[20] He pled in vain; his constituents could not understand why the doctrine of polygamy prevented them, as Brigham Young stated, from getting those ". . . infernal, dirty, sneaking, rotten-hearted pot-house politicians out of the territory. . ."[21]

As far as Congress was concerned, the "pot house politicians" would remain in Utah as long as necessary to subdue the Mormon population. In fact, not only did Congress refuse to grant statehood to Utah, but it also passed legislation which crippled the activities of the church and drove many members into hiding or prison. In 1882 the Edmunds Act passed Congress, and later, in 1887

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[19]Juanita Brooks, (ed.), The Diary of Hosea Stout, Vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964) p. 56.

[20]Barrett, Bernhisel, pp. 59-62.

[21]Ibid., p. 124.

the even more repressive Edmunds-Tucker Act became law. The Edmunds Act, dramatically more severe than any previously enacted legislation concerning polygamy and the Mormon church, won widespread applause in the Senate galleries at its passage and produced a general demand for vigorous enforcement.[22] It not only pronounced cohabitation with more than one woman a crime punishable by a three-hundred dollar fine and six months in jail, but it went on to disenfranchise all guilty persons and prohibit them from serving as jurors or running for public office. The Act declared vacant all elective or appointive offices in the territory, and provided for a five member commission appointed by the President. The Utah Commission was charged with administering the new law, and supervising voter eligibility and elections. This commission interpreted the Edmunds Act to mean that anyone who approved of polygamy or refused to denounce its practice, was ineligible to vote or hold public office. This eliminated virtually any believing Mormon. In its first year the Utah Commission reported that it had successfully prevented more than 12,000 men and women from registering to vote.[23]

The Edmunds-Tucker Act which followed five years later added the following to existing legislation: it

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[22]Congressional Globe, Senate, Forty-seventh Congress, First Session, February 16, 1882, p. 1217.

[23]Larson, Americanization, p. 100.

dissolved the Corporation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and confiscated all its property except meeting houses; it prohibited any further church financed immigration into the Utah territory; it abolished women's suffrage, which had been permitted in the territory since 1870; it disinherited children of polygamous marriages; it provided for a "test oath" to prohibit anyone supporting polygamy from voting, serving on a jury or in law enforcement; and finally, the act gave the federal government control over schools, courts and local government.

The church had little hope for relief from these oppressive laws. Legal authorities and congressional representatives who spoke against the two acts on constitutional grounds, still agreed about the danger of polygamy and the need for its elimination.[24] Even George Q. Cannon, Mormon apostle, made little effort to justify polygamy, but tried instead to argue Constitutional protection for religious practice. He asked for "reason and persuasion" instead of "coercion" in dealing with plural marriage in Utah.[25] Those attempting to regulate

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[24]Congressional Globe, House of Representatives, Forty-seventh Congress, First Session, March 13, 1882, p. 1858; and Congressional Globe, Senate, Forty-seventh Congress, First Session, February 16, 1882, p. 1196.

[25]George Q. Cannon, "A Review of the Decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in the Case of George Reynolds vs. the United States" (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Printing, 1879).

polygamy through legislation believed that the government had a special responsibility to regulate the marriage state because ". . . human passions, whether excited by mere lust or by religious fanaticism, must be controlled by positive law."[26] Mr. Williams of the House of Representatives said:

> Secret vice, however prevalent and deplorable, can never be a justification for the flagrant and open violation of public morals and public laws. . . . I would act against the anomalies and embarrassment of an abnormal condition of society. . . ."[27]

On the Senate side Mr. Vest proclaimed that with polygamy ". . . the destruction of both body and soul is monstrous. . . ."[28] Mr. Morgan stated: "This bane of all civil society . . . must overwhelm that western country, beautiful as it is, with the pall of destruction and despair."[29]

The Supreme Court ruled both laws constitutional and encouraged strict enforcement, while in gratitude to Senator Edmunds for his efforts against polygamy, the Women's Home Mission Society of the Ogden, Utah, Methodist

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[26]Beadle, Life in Utah, pp. 6-8 and 356.

[27]Congressional Globe, House of Representatives, Forty-seventh Congress, First Session, March 13, 1882, p. 1875.

[28]Congressional Globe, Senate, Forty-seventh Congress, First Session, February 16, 1882, p. 1201.

[29]Congressional Globe, Senate, Forty-seventh Congress, First Session, February 16, 1882, p. 1199.

Church presented his wife with a silk quilt commemorating the passage of the Edmunds Act. [30]

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Of course, Victorian attitudes towards excessive sexual activity and its physical effects on individuals and society were not the only forces at work promoting anti-Mormon legislation. The polemic literature against the church included attacks on the political aspects of Mormonism and the theocratic nature of government in Utah, as well as on polygamy. One Victorian author, amidst a typical declaration of Mormon sexual crimes, included several accounts of Mormon treason: he quotes Brigham Young as saying that soon the church will "throw off the allegiance to the General Government, and raise the standard of a Mormon theocracy."[31] Young goes on to say that many high government officials will soon be servants of the Saints, after the second coming of Christ, and that ". . . the President of the United States will be glad to black (my) boots. . ." when the time comes.[32] The church's political power, like polygamy, was perceived by many as a genuine threat to America; and the Mormon population

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[30] Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 3, No. 1, April 1882.

[31] Green, Mormonism: Its Rise, p. 345.

[32] Ibid., pp. 155-157 and 216.

fully capable of seceding from the Union and reigning tyranically in the western territories. [33]

Outraged citizens protesting against the un-American alliance of church and state, petitioned the federal government to deny statehood to Utah and to intervene in Utah's domestic affairs so as to protect the rights of the gentile minority. The Edmunds Act and Edmunds-Tucker Act not only weakened the practice of plural marriage but Mormon political power as well, through disenfranchisement and disbarment from public office. Some writers apparently feared Mormon political desires more than their sexual desires, but most saw both issues as two sides of the same coin. The same Senator Vest who spoke of polygamy as "the destruction of body and soul" also stated:

> The difficulty is not because a man has one, two, three, four, five or ten wives or more; it arises not merely upon the morality or the virtue of that peculiar proceeding; but it is because he had a government at war with the spirit and theory of the government under which we live; he has a government there that bids defiance and stands not in awe of the laws passed by the Congress of the United States . . . the theory of our Government is that Church and State shall not be commingled, shall not be made to run together. . . .[34]

Yet Vest instantly goes on to relate the above words to polygamy: "(it) would not do in this country to shield a

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[33]Ibid., passim.

[34]Congressional Globe, Senate, Forty-seventh Congress, First Session, February 15, 1882, p. 1159.

man under his religion to perpetrate these crimes which the civilized world denounces."[35]

Klaus Hansen, in his landmark work Quest for Empire, reveals how the question of theocracy burned in the minds of those who feared its alien influence in America. He also illustrates the way in which those fearing theocracy used anti-polygamy sentiment to further their own efforts to break up the church's power. However, he maintains that polygamy was not a primary concern of those attacking the church, that indeed, church leaders themselves put forth polygamy as a foil to be attacked so that they could deflect attention away from their political activities.[36] In his preface he states:

> Polygamy . . . lured several generations of historians . . . into believing that its theory and practice provided the major key to an understanding of the Mormon question. Not all disciples of Clio succumbed to this point of view; . . . the idea of a political Kingdom of God, promulgated by a secret "Council of Fifty" is by far the most important key to an understanding of the Mormon past. . . . The polygamy conflict . . . was merely that part of the iceberg visible above the troubled waters of Mormon history. Some church leaders, for example . . . subtly invited assualts on the "relic of barbarism" in order to shield an institution of infinitely greater significance for Mormon history, the political kingdom of God.

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[35]Ibid.

[36]Klaus J. Hansen, Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1970) p. 186.

> When (Wilford Woodruff ended) the practice of polygamy, he did so apparently to save not only the church but also the kingdom of God. . . .[37]

I do not deny that much of what Hansen says is true; that the practice of plural marriage was eminently visible and therefore an easy target, while the Council of Fifty hid their activities, permitting the gentiles only conjecture about the actual political machinations of the church. It is also apparent from Hansen's work that, at least into the 1870's, the political arm of the church controlled most of Utah's civil government. However, I disagree with his conspiratorial view of history, which accuses past historians of having been deceived into believing that most people attacked polygamy because they objected to it. It is easy enough to say that appearances can be deceiving and far more difficult to prove that deception has taken place.

The beauty of conspiracy theories is that lack of evidence also makes them difficult to disprove. However, the very fact that polygamy could be so effectively used to stir up anger against the Mormons illustrates that it was a genuine concern among the population of Victorian America. My work thus far demonstrates the deep and genuine fears which many Victorians could and did have about sexual matters, and the ways in which those fears worked against Mormonism and polygamy. Hansen certainly

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[37]Ibid., preface.

bears the burden of proof for his theory, and, in my view neither his reasoning nor his evidence substantiates it; while significant evidence exists showing that most Americans found polygamy a revolting practice, and wanted it stopped. That they also found Mormon politics abhorrent is not surprising, for, among other things, the Victorian picture of Mormon racial inferiority and sensual degradation fit in very neatly with charges of theocratic dictatorship. Many writers portrayed the Mormon "emperor," Brigham Young, lolling about his kingdom, exercising absolute and murderous power, taking concubines for himself and his leaders, defying all other authorities; in short, fulfilling every expectation of primitive barbarism which the Victorian might expect from a degenerating race. The question of which came first--political or physical corruption--is not important because, like the chicken and the egg, they were perceived as two parts of the same process.

I must further point out the weakness of sources Hansen cites to support his theory. Where is any real evidence that Mormon leaders "invited" attacks on polygamy, except for the inflammatory public statements they made? Such a conspiracy is difficult to visualize. I believe instead that Mormon leaders made those statements, first, in the confidence of their isolation and their ignorance of the reaction of Victorian America to polygamy (as

explained earlier); and later, spurred on by the growing gentile threat to Mormonism, out of a desire to impress their people with a knowledge of their uniqueness, to set them apart from the non-Mormons. Also, it is human nature to speak angrily, even self-righteously, when being attacked. The vitriolic attacks on polygamy and polygamists, couched in insulting language and more insulting innuendo doubtless inspired responses from church leaders consisting of a great deal of emotion and not very much reason.

One of Hansen's strongest comments in defense of his position is the following:

> Historians have been aware for some time that the popular belief according to which polygamy was the primary reason for the persecutions of the Mormons after the Civil War is incorrect, and that polygamy was largely a convenient excuse to strike at the political influence of the Mormon hierarchy.[38]

He sites three sources to support this allegation. Of these three, I was able to review two, the third being an unpublished doctoral dissertation unavailable to me at the time. In my opinion the sources do not adequately support Hansen's statement. The first source, Robert J. Dwyer's 1941 book The Gentile Comes to Utah, does say in at least three different places that polygamy was "exploited" by Utah gentiles jealous of Mormon political domination, and used to inflame passions against the

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[38]Ibid., p. 171.

Mormons. Dwyer demonstrates that the gentiles hoped to improve their position in the territory by fighting the huge Mormon majority with the best tool they had, American hostility towards the practice of polygamy.[39] Dwyer emphasized political objections to Mormonism, but not to the exclusion or even diminution of polygamy's role in anti-Mormon sentiment. In fact, he repeatedly points out the genuine objections which many gentiles, both in and out of Utah, had to the practice of polygamy, as distinct from political practices.[40]

The second available source, an article by Richard Poll entitled "The Mormon Question Enters National Politics, 1850-1856," is primarily concerned with the use of polygamy in the federal elections of 1854 and 1856 as a "red herring" issue; designed to lead popular sovereignty away from a simple pro-slavery stand in the minds of voters. In so far as it shows the concern of the American people about polygamy and the fact that political leaders used that concern for their own advantage, it supports part of Hansen's idea. It does not support it very steadily, however: Poll does not mention the

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[39]Robert J. Dwyer, The Gentile Comes to Utah (Washington: Catholic Univeristy Press, 1941) pp. 22-23 and 97.

[40]Ibid., pp vi, 12, 33, 43-45, 74-77, 117-120, 183-184 and 190-214.

political aspirations of Mormonism or imply any insignificance of genuine anti-polygamy sentiment.[41]

Public outrage against polygamy proved a convenient tool for several groups. Protestant ministers manipulated the issue to steer their flocks away from the new religion's theology and gain government support for the suppression of Mormonism in general. This doesn't mean, however, that they had no genuine fears of polygamy's consequences.[42] For example, in 1886 protestant representatives pursuaded the federal government to give substantial funding to help in the building and operation of "The Industrial Christian Home Association of Utah," ostensibly a shelter for run-a-way polygamous wives and their children. In point of fact it served very few run-a-ways and may have been meant more as a base for proselyting than as a tool for attacking polygamy.[43] However, evidence indicates that the founders of the Home, in addition to their evangelical activities, sincerely believed that the polygamous system of marriage contained so much barbarism and danger that countless women would

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[41]Richard D. Poll, "The Mormon Question Enters National Politics, 1850-1856," Utah Historical Quarterly Vol. 25 (1957) pp. 117-131.

[42]Anonymous citizen of Massachusetts, "The Mormon Problem: A Letter to the Massachusetts Members of Congress on Plural Marriage: Its Morality and Lawfulness" (Boston: James Campbell, 1882) p. 9.

[43]Larson, "An Industrial Home," p. 265.

seek to use the Home's services.[44] Another anti-Mormon, Frederick T. Dubois, believed that political Mormonism threatened America far more than polygamy, but he was willing to use the "universal detestation of polygamy," as he put it, to help destroy the church's political power.[45] "Universal detestation;" and the generous donation of federal funds, over six and one-half years, for the building and support of a 48 bedroom establishment which was supposed to hold thousands of women in those years and instead, probably received only about one hundred residents; indicates to me that no matter what other concerns Americans had about Mormonism, polygamy was ". . . a primary reason for the persecution of the Mormons after the Civil War. . . ."[46]

Orson Pratt, attempting once again to convince the Victorians of the value of polygamy, pointed out that only in Europe and America did monogamy rule; while in the rest of the world, in Asia, Africa and the South Seas, polygamy dominated the marriage institution.[47] He didn't

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[44]Ibid., passim.

[45]Hansen, Quest for Empire, p. 170.

[46]Larson, "An Industrial Home," pp. 269-273 and Hansen, Quest for Empire p. 171.

[47]Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? p. 46.

seem to realize that to the Victorians this was precisely the point: the practice of polygamy was a mark of racial inferiority. Many anti-polygamy writers considered Mormons to be a sub-human species, because of plural marriage, similar to the Indians or blacks. Descriptions of Mormon physiognomy frequently gave him facial characteristics already identified with the black man. One modern author states:

> The analogy between Mormon polygamists and blacks was designed to deal with the problem of excessive sensuality. The inferior animal nature of the black man was already well established in the minds of Americans . . . it was a simple matter to recognize the deterioration brought on by sexual indulgence of the black man . . . the child of Mormon polygamy was simply a white Negro.[48]

Drs. Forshey and Cartwright, both from southern states, commented on Dr. Bartholow's observations of Mormon physiology; and in so doing used Bartholow's findings to justify their own racist ideologies. Forshey began by pointing out that the Mexican and Indian populations of America:

> . . . have the seeds of decadence and extinction in their constitution, while the offspring . . . of Celtish, Saxon and British varieties, as illustrated in the American citizen, presents the highest type of physical and mental health that has adorned the history of the master race of mankind.[49]

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[48]Cannon, "Awesome Power," pp. 78-79; and Beadle, Life in Utah, pp. 357-359.

[49]C. G. Forshey and Dr. Samuel Cartwright, "Hereditary Descent: or, Depravity of the Offspring of Polygamy among the Mormons," DeBow's Review Vol. 30 (New Orleans: 1861) pp. 210-212.

He went on to say that polygamy in the white race caused it to decline into the state of the other races, a state of "semi-civilization," of "pre-ordained servitude. . . ." Polygamy is contrary to the nature of the white race, which has an "instinctual abhorrence of the brutality of a promiscuous intercourse."[50] Dr. Cartwright continued this same theme but added the interesting observation that only whites could claim descent from Adam; blacks and other races descended from some other prototype, brought into the world during the animal period of creation.[51]

Dr. Bartholow cited the fact that the chruch permitted racial intermarriage in order to improve living conditions among the territorial Indians as further proof of the degenerative direction of the Mormon population. He asserted that the mixture of Yankee stock with the racially inferior Mexican and Indian populations, who were genetically "distinguished for indolence, cowardice and a lack of public or private virtue," would surely destroy the Mormon capability for higher intellectual achievement and would also increase their lustful natures.[52] Other literary sources frequently raised the issue of racial pollution through intermarriage in Utah and considered this another reason to restrict Mormon

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[50]Ibid.

[51]Ibid., pp. 212-216.

[52]Bartholow, "Physiological," p. 203.

political franchise. The Standard made the following statement: "I would like to ask Eastern ladies how they would like their husbands to remain one week at their house, and the next go spend with an Indian Squaw?!!" Later the same newspaper asked: "How would they like to hear their fair, delicate little children point to some naked half-breeds and say they were 'father's children by the Indian woman'?"[53] In another issue the Standard described the horrified reaction of Eastern visitors to the presentation of Chinese and Mulatto children with their white mothers.[54]

Thousands of Europeans, converted to LDS doctrine in the Old World, immigrated to the United States to join their brothers and sisters in Utah's Zion. The federal government tried to discourage or prohibit outright the immigration of European Mormons to the territory. Congress entertained several bills to deny immigration to these people, picturing them as poor, sickly, disease-ridden, of inferior intelligence and racial stock, and attracted primarily to the lascivious life of the territory because of their mental weakness.[55] One citizen warned that

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[53]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 1, No. 7, October 1880.

[54]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 2, No. 8, November 1881.

[55]William Mudler, Homeward to Zion (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), pp. 290-293.

"Europe is casting up the mire and dirt" of her poverty sticken classes and sending them to Utah.[56] The Governor of the Idaho Territory, addressing the territorial legislature of Idaho in 1881 stated that polygamy "is calculated to draw to the Mormon Church the most vicious and sensual classes of society. . . ." and warned that they threatened the "manhood" of the country.[57] Senator Edmunds of Vermont, the author of the Edmunds Act, also argued to restrict not only Mormon immigrants, but lower class Chinese immigrants as well.[58] Bartholow claimed that when he traveled in Utah he found the rivers in the central part of the territory too polluted to drink. He described many river baptisms and re-baptisms of lower class converts, and said that as a result there was "an odor of animal putrescence about the suspicious liquid."[59]

The Mormon attitude towards women, exemplified by their early endorsement and application of women's suffrage in the territory, gave Victorians another reason to suspect the weakened and unnatural state of the members of the Utah community. Mormon theology supported the political rights of women, and their rights to education

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[56]Marchmont, "An Appeal," p. 17.

[57]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 2, No. 2, May 1881.

[58]Congressional Globe, Senate, Forty-seventh Congress, First Session, March 8 and 9, 1882, p. 1858.

[59]Bartholow, "Physiological," p. 196.

as well. For example, throughout the 1870's and 1880's Mormon women were sent to the Woman's Medical College in Philadelphia to receive an education that would benefit the LDS community.[60]

In an era when physicians believed that women were merely "imperfect men" who had not completed the necessary embryological steps in utero to mature into males, most medical practitioners advised that women avoid all mental activity.[61] If they persisted in using their mind too much, they risked infertility, uterine cancer and numerous nervous disorders; or subjecting any children they might conceive to serious congenital defects. Mental activity caused nervous force and material to flow to the brain, instead of remaining centered in the reproductive organs where, in women, it belonged. The Mormon leadership intermittently encouraged women to participate in many mental occupations such as accounting, clerking or managing a store, in part to free men for more arduous physical labor.[62] To non-Mormons, this was an excellent

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[60]Robert T. Divett, "Medicine and Mormons," Bulletin of the Medical Library Association, Vol. 51, No. 1, January 1963, p. 7.

[61]Haller, Physician and Sexuality, pp. 37-39, 48-61, 62-63, 68-73.

[62]Claudia L. Bushman, ed., Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah (Cambridge: Emmeline Press Limited, 1976) pp. 57-88, 104-105 and 157-221.

example of their degradation and seemed certain to assure the territory's further decline into bad health.

Most of the anti-polygamy literature assumed that Mormon women were forced into some form of industry because their husbands could not afford to keep all their families, and that the women soon sickened under the stress of work they were biologically incapable of doing. In many reports wives existed as mere chattel, working in fields like slaves, while in one account, the husband sat on a nearby fence holding a whip and commenting that "he could get another wife anytime but it cost money to get a mule."[63] In addition, they were tormented with jealousy and fear at the thought of losing their protection to another woman.[64] Ironically, the same women who decried polygamy as degrading accepted meekly the idea that an increase in female births was a sign of inferiority.[65] Also, the Anti-Polygamy Standard, which pled so eloquently for the liberation of Utah women from the prison of polygamy, was also against women's suffrage:

> Men must ultimately remain the real rulers of a nation. The mental differences between men and women are as great as their physical differences, and must always

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[63]Stenhouse, Expose, p. 148 and passim; Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 1, No. 1, April 1880; Vol, 1, No. 2, May 1880.

[64]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 2, No. 10, January 1881.

[65]Cannon, "Awesome Power," pp. 79-80.

> preclude their taking a very large share in government, unless evolution , in the process of centuries, brings about changes undreamed of.[66]

It did no good for Mormon women to hold rallies and produce petitions proclaiming themselves free and healthy and far better off than their disenfranchised eastern sisters.[67] The Standard found justification for their position against women's suffrage in territorial elections such as one in 1880, when LDS women ignored their entreaties to vote against the Mormon political candidate for Congress, George Q. Cannon, and instead elected him resoundingly.

In 1852 the American explorer, Howard Stansbury, proposed that the territory of Utah which he had recently mapped and studied for the United States government, should soon become a state. At that time he wrote: "That such a state will soon be formed, no reflecting man will doubt, who has witnessed the indomitable energy, the unity and concentration of action . . . which seems to possess the entire Mormon community."[68] Although Stansbury's account of life in Utah, and the accounts of the English and French travelers Sir Richard Francis Burton and Jules Remy, disagreed with the portrait of an unhealthy and

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[66]Anti-Polygamy Standard, Vol. 1, No. 6, September, 1880.

[67]Larson, "Americanization," pp. 87-89.

[68]Howard Stansbury, Exploration and Survey of the Valley of the Great Salt Lake (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Granbo and Co., 1852), p. 192.

and degenerate population; and said, in fact, that there was no more sickness or unhappiness in polygamous homes than in any other American or European homes; their voices were drowned by the tumult and excitement of the anti-polygamy writers.[69] Not until 1896 did Utah finally achieve self-government as a state.

A major part of the forty-six year delay in Statehood can be attributed to the belief that the practice of polygamy led to disease, deformity, insanity and death. How could any upright American support equal citizenship for, as Bartholow put it, a "congress of lunatics?" Mormons were by their excessive sexual activity, rapidly deteriorating to animalistic savages in an era when society believed that true civilization was just within its grasp. In 1891 the LDS church agreed to halt any future polygamous marriages, and five years later Utah was accepted into the Republic. However, the prejudices which polygamy spawned continued to plague the new state and her congressional representatives well into the twentieth century. The sexual attitudes of the Victorian era had marked Utah Mormons and set them apart more successfully than a thousand miles of desert. It remains to be seen how long before that sexual wilderness will be fully explored and understood.

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[69]Richard F. Burton, The City of the Saints (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1862), p. 408 and passim; also Walter M. Gallichan, Women under Polygamy (London: Holden and Hardingtran, 1914), p. 310.

CHAPTER V

In this chapter we need to address one final question: was there any truth at all to the health and sex-related claims of the anti-polygamists? Many history students assume that descriptions of sickness and brutality in Utah arose either out of an author's deceitful malice or his stupidity and self-deception. This simplistic view ignores the persepctive of the sincere and otherwise intelligent anti-polygamist. It also diminishes the student's motives for attempting to understand the environment of the critic of Mormonism. An understanding of that Victorian critic is central to the purpose of this thesis, therefore, I will examine the most often repeated health and sex-related charges against polygamy, and look for elements of truth upon which Victorian sexual anxiety could build an exaggerated framework of anti-Mormon hostility.

First, did the Utah territory have an unusually high number of insane or idiotic individuals living within its borders? The 1850 United States census reveals that while Utah, with a population of 11,380, had 8 persons classified as "blind, insane or idiotic;" Oregon territory, with a population of 13,294 had 9 persons "insane or

idiotic." Also, not until the early 1880's did the Utah territorial government feel the need of establishing a "Territorial Insane Asylum" in Provo.[1] It is probably safe to assume that there were more mentally-ill individuals in Utah than recorded either by census or medical record, especially since death records published in the Deseret News at the beginning of each month, often indicated a suicide in the preceding four weeks. The lack of established traditions and hard rules for the practice of polygamy combined with the hardships of a frontier life and an exacting religious code, may have contributed to the suicide rate and the incidence of chronic mental distrubances such as depression, anxiety, and hyper-excitability.[2]

Were considerably more female than male children born in the Mormon community? No evidence supports this. The 1850 census shows more male children under the age of five and the 1860 census shows more male than female children between one and five yeras old. The 1860 census does indicate more female than male children under the age of one, in a ratio of 999 males to 1016 females, but that is an insignificant difference. Furthermore, I found no

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[1]Seventh Census of the United States: Census of 1850 (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1853), pp. xii, 988 and 998; and "Biennial Report of the Board of Directors of the Territorial Insane Asylum, Provo City, Utah, January 18, 1884." (T.E. Taylor, printer).

[2]Campbell, "Divorce," pp. 15-17.

claims that female infants died at a greater rate than male infants in order to account for the census records, although some may have believed that.[3]

Anti-Mormons, including Dr. Bartholow, charged that Utah had a higher mortality rate than any state or territory except Louisiana. Was there any truth to that charge? According to the 1850 census, which would probably have been reviewed by Dr. Bartholow before his 1857 journey to Utah, that charge was absolutely correct. 1850 census records indicate a mortality rate in Utah of 21.00 deaths per thousand individuals, while Oregon territory had only 3.53 deaths per thousand and of all the states and territories only Louisiana had a higher rate of 23.06 deaths per thousand.[4] Why did Utah have such a high death rate? I can guess at several explanations. The rigors of a new settlement which was barely three years old; that is, fatigue, poor nutrition and inadequate housing, probably increased mortality from illnesses ordinarily less serious. Also, immigrants from the east and from England, weakened by their long journey and illnesses such as malaria, cholera, scurvy or typhoid fever which they may have developed along the way, may finally have succumbed only after they reached the Salt Lake valley. It

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[3]Census of 1850, pp. 988 and 998, and Population of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), pp. xli and 574.

[4]Census of 1850, pp. xii, 988 and 998.

is a human quality to be able to maintain life and necessary strength while one works towards a goal: some immigrants may have been mortally ill but able, through sheer force of will, to survive until they achieved their goal and arrived in Utah.

In 1860 the route west held considerable less hardship, and the economic and material welfare of the Saints in Zion had also improved dramatically. The census records indicate a significant decline in mortality figures between 1850 and 1860. The following chart shows the deaths per thousand in the United States, Massachusetts, Louisiana, Oregon and Utah for the six census years between 1850-1900.

TABLE I

CENSUS STATISTICS

	1850	1860	1870	1880	1980	1900
United States	13.91	12.45	12.53	14.59	13.36	13.67
Louisiana	23.06	17.37	19.32	15.06	13.97	15.16
Massachusetts	19.48	17.22	17.55	17.80	19.25	17.72
Oregon	3.53	5.71.	6.75	10.39	8.31	8.21
Utah	21.00	9.28	10.18	16.39	10.04	11.12

SOURCE: Census Reports Vol. IV: The Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900, Vital Statistics Part II Statistics of Death (Washington: United States Census Office, 1902), p. 2

A higher mortality rate in the eastern and southern states is accounted for, in part, by the large urban populations those states sustained.

Did any author disagree with the prevailing Victorian view of Utah's Mormon population? An Army surgeon stationed near Salt Lake City in the 1860's, Dr. Vollum, reported to the federal government that: "Polygamy in Utah, as far as I can learn, furnishes no idiocy, insanity, rickets, tubercles or struma (goiter), or other cachexia (weakness and emaciation, as from a serious disease), or debasing constitutional conditioning of any kind."[5] He goes on to compare the children of polygamous and monogamous marriages and states that as far as "the health or constitutional or mental character of the Anglo-Saxon race . . . no difference can be detected in favor of one or the other. . . ."[6] Jules Remy, visiting Utah in the late 1850's, said, "One sees but few sick in Utah; so that the want of medical men is little felt. . . ."[7] Dr. James Burns, commenting on the 1861 reprint of Dr. Bartholow's Utah finding in the DeBow Review, objected to calling the Mormons a separate "race," since, he said, too little scientific or statistical information had been gathered concerning their heredity and physical

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[5]John Shaw Billings, War Department Surgeon Generals Office Circular No. 8: Report on the Hygiene of the United States Army (New York: Sol Lewis, 1974, originally published 1875), p. 341.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Jules Remy, A Journey to Great Salt Lake, Vol. I (London: Jeffs, Burlington, Arcade, 1861), pp. 218-8.

constitution.[8] However, Dr. Bartholow responded in an 1867 paper: "Do not be influenced by the beautiful scenery and healthy climate in Utah. Neither be deceived by the well-dressed or healthy looking people paraded before visitors."[9] Benjamin Ferris warned potential visitors to Utah of an apparently healthy facade maintained for tourists, while the results of the "rapid degeneracy of races" remained hidden behind closed doors.[10]

Dr. Vollum, after discounting the picture of hereditary disease caused by sexual activity, goes on to say that the polygamous children appeared slightly more healthy than the monogamous ones, a fact which he attributed to the greater wealth of the polygamous families. He went on to ascribe high mortality rates among the children in Utah to the extreme poverty, neglect and ignorance in which he believed many of them lived. He remarked on the multitudes of children he observed, and assumed that "abundance doubtless cheapens the value" of children to their Mormon parents. He blamed much of the child mortality on the unhealthy influence of icy water on their young bodies: "The children of Salt Lake City may often be seen in groups insufficiently clad, the lower

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[8]Forshey and Cartwright, "Hereditary Descent," p. 207.

[9]Bartholow, "Physiological," p. 197.

[10]Ferris, Utah and the Mormons, pp. 247-250.

half of the body bare, playing about in (the) cold water . . ." which flows down out of the mountains.[11]

Vollum's portrayal of a group of sparsely clothed children splashing about in irrigation ditches should be recognizable to anyone who has lived in Utah during the summer. The rest of his account is also a meticulous and conscientious report, even to the point of contradicting prevailing medical thought on the subject of polygamy. For that reason I am inclined to take seriously his observations that many Salt Lake City children appeared dirty and poorly cared for, at least by his middle-class American standards. Impoverished immigrants, many from the working classes of England and Scandinavia, poured into Salt Lake City during the 1850's and 1860's. They scrambled to make a living for themselves and their families. Church work projects and physical assistance helped many to gain a measure of security, but soap and new clothing were both precious commodities.[12] Vollum probably did observe many poorly dressed, dirty-looking children amusing themselves as best they could while their

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[11]Billings, Circular No. 8, p. 341.

[12]William Mulder, Homeward to Zion--The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957); Burton, City of the Saints, pp. 440-441; Le Roy and Ann W. Hafen, Handcarts to Zion (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1960; and Leonard J. Arrigton, Feramorz Y. Fox and Dean L. May, Building the City of God (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976).

parents worked to maintain the family. And, there is no doubt that even mildly dirty or unsanitary conditions contributed to the spread of illnesses such as typhoid fever and parasitic infestations which would contribute to weakening the resistance of individuals to sickness, especially small children. Other, less credible voices, joined Vollum in proclaiming a high rate of childhood mortality in Utah, and blaming it on the neglect of Mormon parents and the poverty of their surroundings.[13]

Yet the dominant attitude in Victorian America was that the practice of polygamy itself caused hereditary problems in Mormon children. This was the logical assumption of Victorian medical thought, but there was one apparently genuine example in Mormon polygamy of the sins of the father being visited on his children. In Women of Mormonism the authors present a son of Joseph Smith as an example of the evil results of polygamy. They describe the boy as "indulging in nearly every kind of vice," including sexual crimes such as an attempt at incest with his sister.[14] In point of fact the youngest son of Joseph and Emma Smith, born after Joseph's assassination, was committed to the Hospital for the Insane at Elgin, Illinois

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[13]Utah Board of Trade, Resources and Attractions of Utah (Omaha: Republican Book and Railroad, 1879) p. 16 and John H. Beadle, "Social Experiments in Utah," Popular Science Monthly, Vol. 9 (August 1876) p.480.

[14]Froiseth, Women of Mormonism, p. 208.

in 1877. He was 33 years old at the time, and remained there at least until 1881. Little is known about his illness, but the physician at Elgin reported to Dr. John Bernhisel that the boy had been insane for two years prior to admittance, although by 1881 he had become "childish," calm and "contented."[15]

Finally, anti-polygamists, particularly orthodox physicians, attributed the deaths of children and adults in Utah to a scarcity of regular medical care. Certainly many herbalists, quacks and poorly trained physicians practiced medicine in the territory just as they did throughout the country. But the claim that well-qualified regular health practitioners did not exist in Utah was a false one. Between 1847 and 1880 approximately 137 orthodox physicians practiced in the Utah territory.[16] One of the most renowned of them, a non-Mormon named Washington Anderson, arrived in Utah in 1857 and soon became one of the most highly regarded men in the territory, sought out by Mormons and gentiles alike. He cared for Brigham Young at the time of Young's death, along with three other orthodox physicians with degrees from some of the better eastern medical schools, including one of Brigham Young's

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[15]Barrett, Bernhisel, pp. 184-185.

[16]Waters, Pioneering Physicians, pp. 24-25.

nephews, Seymour Young.[17] Richard F. Burton, in his 1860 visit to Salt Lake City discovered "none of the prejudice founded upon superstition and fanaticism which anti-Mormon writers have detected."[18]

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Now I will examine the accuracy with which anti-polygamists reported Mormon sexual practices. Did Mormons consider sexual sin, like adultery and fornication, as serious a crime as the Victorians did? How easy, or difficult, was it for Mormon men and women to change sexual partners; that is, how firmly did the bonds of a polygamous marriage hold husband and wife in that relationship? Most nineteenth century middle-class Americans assumed that polygamy, as the Mormons practiced it, involved far more than just a normal marriage relationship with several wives. They considered it impossible for a man, once he experienced sexual favors from more than one woman, to remain content with his sexual relationship: they insisted that women and men in polygamy changed partners promiscuously. We need to remember that it didn't take much to appear promiscuous to Victorian society. For example, they considered divorce, when it occurred,

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[17]Lester E. Bush, Jr., "Brigham Young in Life and Death: A Medical Overview," Journal of Mormon History, Vol. 5 (1978) pp. 94-95.

[18]Burton, City of the Saints, p. 278.

an utter and lasting disgrace for both husband and wife, and permitted it under law for only the worst possible sexual or physical offenses.[19] Recalling the physical and mental results presumed to follow certain sexual attitudes and practices, we must realize that the slightest deviation from the rigid Victorian marital and sexual code, such as more liberal divorce procedures, would have, in the eyes of many Americans, amounted to an action invoking those results. I will demonstrate how Mormon practices actually deviated from that code and verified, in the Victorian's mind, his deepest suspicions about Mormonism and polygamy.

Mormon church leaders, modern historians, and a few gentile writers contemporary with Mormon polygamy, agree that most Mormons were chaste within their marriage bonds, and that they regarded sexual sin as a serious crime deserving of excommunication.[20] One journal, that of Mormon pioneer Hosea Stout, even gives an instance on the westward migration when three young men endured a whipping as punishment for adultery. Stout notes that the whipping occurred as a last resort and that he knew of no other such acts ordered by church authorities.[21]

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[19]Haller, Physician and Sexuality, pp. 249-250.

[20]Burton, City of the Saints, pp. 407-409; Stanley S. Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," Utah Historical Quarterly, Vol. 35 (1967) p. 314; Juanita Brooks, John Doyle Lee, (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1964) p. 191; and Young, Isn't One Wife Enough?, pp. 56-81 and 130-136.

[21]Brooks, Hosea Stout, Vol. I, pp. 191-192.

Although sexual immoralities such as adultery or fornication received the strongest condemnations from the pulpit, there does not seem to have been anything close to the attitude towards them which permeated most of white American society in the last half of the nineteenth century. Modern historian Juanita Brooks states that sexual sins in the Mormon community were "quickly forgiven if the people repented. . . ."[22] The sense one gets, as Brooks speaks of it, from reading early Mormon journals and church records, is that the feeling of most Latter-Day Saints towards sexual immorality was one of stern reproach combined with a certain amount of humane understanding--a sort of "forgive and forget" attitude--as long as the sinner showed sincere repentance. (Men and women considered to be without repentance and likely to sin again sometimes found themselves invited to leave town.) As a group, Mormons were definitely more relaxed about sexual sin than their Victorian contemporaries, perhaps because other things concerned them more.[23]

The relatively relaxed attitude towards sexual relations found in Mormon society contributed to the anti-Mormon belief that most men married in polygamy because of animalistic sexual desire. Obviously, some men did

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[22]Brooks, John Doyle Lee, p. 191.

[23]I still remember being told as a teen-ager that most Utah young people felt much less guilty about enjoying the sins of the flesh than about putting a cigarette to their lips.

take plural wives partly or primarily out of physical desire. Kimball Young recounts several instances of husbands sneaking off for romantic interludes with women soon to be their polygamous wives, and even one instance of a husband kissing and petting with his paramour with the first wife present, and in the parlor of her home.[24] This does not quite live up to the titillating image, which anti-Mormon novelists loved to exploit, of husband and wives all sharing the same bedroom. However, necking with your future wife in the presence of your present wife, even if only remotely hinted at, would have been enough to start rumors in Victorian circles of more exotic and barbaric behavior. Some church authorities unknowingly contributed to such rumors by appearing to marry primarily for temporary convenience or gratification. For example, Orson Hyde, after receiving permission to take a wife for companionship from Salt Lake City to a lonely church outpost, left her behind, apparently on her own from then on, when he was recalled back to the city.[25]

In general, however, most modern historians believe that polygamy was not very popular and entered into primarily for religious reasons. Plural marriage probably would have died out by itself if not for periodic

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[24]Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? pp. 116-119 and 133-135.

[25]Campbell and Campbell, "Divorce," p. 18.

encouragement given the practice by church leaders. Of the polygamists, most took only as many wives as they needed to qualify themselves as faithful and obedient servants of the Lord: 60% of all polygamist husbands had two wives, only about 20% had three wives and less than 6% had more than four wives.[26]

A common anti-Mormon theme, which supported Victorian suspicions of excessive sexual activity and degeneration in Utah, was that sexual partners changed frequently and without a great deal of control in Mormon society. However, it would be a mistake to assume that lascivious stories such as Boadicea, involving Mormon men and women in wife-swapping and other erotic adventures, was entirely a product of either avarice or malicious intent on the part of the author.[27] Victorians accusing Mormons of promiscuity may have merely interpreted actual practices and attitudes in terms of their own sexual anxiety. It certainly was far easier to change sexual partners under polygamy than under Victorian monogamy. Brigham Young, although opposed to divorce in principle, granted divorce decrees at a much greater rate than they were granted in the rest of America, and for causes other than infidelity or gross mis-conduct. Moreover, one of

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[26]Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," pp. 313-314.

[27]Bell, Boadicea, passim.

the possible explanations given today for his frequent granting of petitions for divorce was to exert some kind of control over casual marrying, divorcing and remarrying without state or even church authority.[28] Add to this an 1861 statement by Young saying that a woman did not even need a formal divorce if she wished to marry a man "higher in authority" as long as both the future and present husband consented, and anti-polygamist's seemingly wild claims become more understandable.[29] Considering the average American's view of the absolute power enjoyed by Mormon church leaders, it would not be hard for them to assume from the preceding, that if a high church leader desired the wife of a man lower down the ecclesiastical ladder, he need only inform both of them of his wishes, receive tacit (or forced) cooperation, and take her for his wife. Certainly Young and others in authority exhorted church leaders to marry any woman who petitioned them for that honor, although Young may have regretted that instruction at least once: he had to "forcibly eject" a woman from his offices because she was "too persistent in applying to be sealed to him."[30]

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[28]Campbell and Campbell, "Divorce," p. 12 and T. B. H. Stenhouse, Expose of Polygamy in Utah: a Lady's Life among the Mormons (New York: American News Co., 1872) pp. 172-180.

[29]Ibid., p. 19.

[30]Green, Mormonism: Its Rise, pp. 89-90; and Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," p. 319.

The state of "anomie" or normlessness which existed in Utah's polygamous society, described in Campbell and Campbell's work on divorce among Mormon polygamists, must have created an atmosphere of sexual uncertainty and experimentation in many territorial communities.[31] The fact that sexual partners could split and re-group with other individuals in a more relaxed fashion in Utah than in the rest of America accounts for much of the horror and amazement expressed in the polemics of the anti-polygamists. Personally, I believe that many of the most vehement anti-polygamy writers, authors like John Beadle, Jennie Froiseth and Roberts Bartholow, were relatively honest and conscientious individuals who misinterpreted what they observed or heard about in Utah in terms of their own cultural expectations. They were neither villains who made up lies about the church nor fools too ignorant to see the truth: they were Victorians who could not even begin to understand Mormon attitudes towards sex and marriage without completely contradicting all the rules and norms of their own society. Bartholow, after his experience in Utah, went on to gain a considerable amount of respect in the medical world, as a professor of medicine at two universities and the author

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[31]Campbell and Campbell, "Divorce," pp. 15-17 and 22. Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? pp. 208-209.

of several medical texts.[32] In reading those of Bartholow's works unrelated to polygamy or racism, I was struck by the thoughtfulness and attention to detail which his work demonstrated. He was hardly years ahead of his time, but he does appear to represent some of the better thinking of his era. His book on spermatorrhea is one of the more conservative works on the causes, effects and cures of that Victorian malady.[33] Victorians and Mormons spoke utterly different sexual languages and the tragedy was that neither group seemed ever to have realized that fact.

One of the marriage customs in Utah which particularly disturbed Victorian sensibilities involved the marriage of young men, and particularly the polygamous marriage of young women, at a very early age. Descriptions of 13 and 14 year old girls being dragged off to be married aroused great concern and anger, for reasons discussed in an earlier chapter, in much of middle-class America. Could there be any basis in truth for these claims? We know that competition for women was intense in Utah, particularly during times of peak plural marriage

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[32]Lester E. Bush, Jr., "A Peculiar People: the Physiological Aspects of Mormonism, 1850-1875," Dialogue: a Journal of Mormon Thought, Vol. 12, No. 3,(Fall, 1979) p. 62

[33]Bartholow, Spermatorrhea, passim.

activity such as during the religious reformation of 1856-1858.[34] The alleged surplus of marriageable Mormon women, which some have guessed as one of the reasons for polygamy, never existed, either in the immigrant trains or in the Utah population.[35] It is not unreasonable, then, to assume that young women were probably vigorously courted at the earliest possible moment, especially during these times of peak demand. The common age of marriage for women appears to have been around 16 years of age. But what about the accusations that Mormon men were marrying very young girls, fourteen years old or younger? During the reformation several men asked Brigham Young for permission to marry girls under the age of fourteen, and although he was uneasy about it, he granted a few requests. He usually included an admonition similar to this one sent to one of the petitioners: ". . . preserve her intact until she is fully developed into womanhood," or to another, "Go ahead, but leave the children to grow."[36] In another letter he said, "I do not wish children to be married to men before an age which their mothers can best determine." George A. Smith, in commenting on the reformation to Wilford Woodruff in 1857 said:

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[34]Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," pp. 311-312 and Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? pp. 139-141.

[35]Mulder, Homeward to Zion, pp. 108-9 and Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? pp. 124-126.

[36]Campbell and Campbell, "Divorce," pp. 9-10.

> We have had a great reformation this winter; some of the fruits are: all have confessed their sins . . . all are trying to pay their tithing and nearly all are trying to get wives, until there is hardly a girl over 14 years old in Utah, but what is married, or just going to be. President Young has hardly time to eat, drink or sleep, in consequence of marrying the people and attending the endowments.[37]

Although anti-Mormon writer Beadle places the following activity at the time of the announcement of polygamy in 1852 instead of the reformation, compare his portrayal of the scramble for young brides with George A. Smith's description:

> . . . an almost incredible reign of lust and fanaticism . . . (in which) old men met openly in the streets and traded for young girls. . . . Hundreds of girls only 12 or 13 years old were forced or persuaded into (polygamy's) practice and in innumerable cases even younger girls were "sealed" to old reprobates, with an agreement on the part of the latter to wait until the girls were more mature and suited to act the part of wives. . . .[38]

Beadle's account is a sordid exaggeration, but not an unexpected or necessarily intentionally deceitful one. He may have merely seen or understood what was actually occurring in the terms of a Victorian's sexual apprehension That apprehension enabled him to assume the worst in all situations. Hence, a Mormon religious revival which prompts men to fulfill their earthly duty in preparation for the imminent coming of the Savior, duties which include paying tithing and taking plural wives, becomes a "reign of lust and fanaticism"; and a few cases of marriage

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[37]Ibid., p. 9.

[38]Beadle, Life in Utah, p. 349.

to children under 14 years old become "hundreds of girls." Many of those young girls may have been among those to whom Young granted divorces shortly after the close of the reformation. Beadle picked up on that fact and said that Brigham Young did grant many divorces after the fever of polygamous marriage cooled, however, he went on to assume that those young women fell into the only role he could imagine for such girls, that of religious prostitutes, married only for a short period of time to each of a series of men.[39] It would be interesting today to have a record of how many women took more than two husbands in their life time. No matter what the age or frequency of remarriages, however, many Mormon girls appear to have married and born children at a relatively young age. Victorian visitors to Utah were probably outraged to observe, as innocently recalled in a biography of such a young mother: we would "settle on a time to put the babies to bed and then run out to play 'jump rope' in the sunshine."[40]

The common anti-Mormon claim that the church sent out her missionaries primarily to find polygamous wives may have had a small element of truth in it as well. Certainly with the shortage of women at home, that thought

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[39]Ibid., p. 350.

[40]Blanche Kendall Thomas McKey on her parents Richard Kendall Thomas and Carrie Stockdale Thomas, manuscript in author's possession, p. 6.

must have been on the minds of some of the elders of Zion as they went out to convert the world. Brigham Young received a letter from one man in Fillmore, Utah saying that he wanted a wife, but:

> . . . it is evident that I must go somewhere else than Fillmore as there is 56 single men here besides all the married ones that are on the anxious seat to get more and only 4 single women. Now Sir would it not (be a) good policy for me to go on a Mission to the States or England if you thought best I know some good women in the States of my own Baptizing that might be got besides many more. . . .[41]

Anti-Mormon authors frequently charged Mormons with practicing incest. Exactly what qualified as incest is unclear, except that many anti-polygamists considered the marriage of one man to sisters, or a mother and daughter, a clear case of incest. Historians today are divided on whether the practice of marrying sisters was common or more unusual, but no one denies that it occurred with some regularity. In attacking polygamy some writers hinted at closer incestuous relations, and at least one pointed out that with all the half-brothers and sisters running around, it would soon be difficult for Mormon children to avoid marrying close relations.[42] Certainly polygamy made for some bizarre situations. For example, within my own family, my mother's cousin Helen Gail Harker Bingaman had

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[41]Campbell and Campbell, "Divorce," p. 10.

[42]Ibid., p. 20; Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? p. 126 and Beadle, Life in Utah, pp. 365-371.

the difficult task of explaining to people that both her grandmothers were married to the same man, Mathias Cowley. That would have made her mother and father half-brother and sister. Actually, Helen Gail's maternal grandmother married Brother Cowley in polygamy after Helen Gail's mother was born, and so there was no blood relationship between her parents. However, it demonstrates how easily a superficial glance at polygamous unions could have appeared to reveal incestuous relationships.

What about claims of brutality, barbarism and forcing individuals into marriage? Antecedents for those claims porbably arose out of the over-zealous activites of some church members during the reformation. [43] During that time John D. Lee noted in his journal, hooded men showing up at a party to remind the host of his duty to bless the food, after the ordinance had been neglected. The man then said a long and apparently anxious blessing over the watermelon dessert.[44] During the reformation Hosea Stout recorded in his journal two separate instances of a man castrated by a mob for the sin of adultery.[45] By 1858 Brigham Young and some other church authorities recognized that the reformation had gotten out of hand

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[43]Dale L. Morgan, The Great Salt Lake (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1947) pp. 264-265.

[44]Brooks, John Doyle Lee, p. 191.

[45]Brooks, Hosea Stout, Vol. II, pp. 663 and 653.

and they exerted their influence to calm things down. In 1862 Appleton Harmon who was called to go settle in southern Utah just as he was becoming comfortable in Salt Lake City, could safely hesitate before he finally decided to accept his calling: "Sunday after Sunday Appleton's name with others was called in meetings and it was some time before he would consent to go."[46]

The status of women in the Mormon community alarmed many Americans, and most anti-Mormon literature enlarged on the second class citizenship of Mormon women despite the activity of women's rights advocates within the church. Gentiles objected to Mormon theology which said that a woman could not achieve glory in the next life without a man to take her to it. They said that her only form of personal achievement was to meet her husband's sexual needs and have as many children as possible.[47] Only the explorer Howard Stansbury pointed out, in rebuttal, that a man needed at least one wife to achieve celestial glory as well.[48] The dominant nineteenth century American view of a married woman's role in life was hardly a liberated one: she remained submissive and

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[46]Maybelle H. Anderson, Appleton Milo Harmon Goes West (Berkley, California: The Gillick Press, 1946) p. 179.

[47]Beadle, Life in Utah, p. 315; Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? pp. 10-11, 29-33 and 449-450; and Bell, Boadicea, p. 54.

[48]Stansbury, Exploration and Survey, pp. 136-138.

inferior to him both physically and mentally. Yet the Victorians tried to make that very position of submission appear an elevated one. Caught up in their own contradictory attitudes towards women's roles in society, and feeling the pressure of the emerging woman's movement, the apparent subjugation of Mormon women gave Victorian males a chance to proclaim their opposition to such tyranny without threatening the status quo in their own homes. In addition, one modern historian has suggested that much of the Victorian woman's anger at the inferior position which Mormon women appeared to be forced into, was actually an unconscious or perhaps even conscious attempt to protest against her own forced submission to a male dominated society.[49]

Mormon women did have quite a few children; more, on the average, than middle class Victorians conscious of the trend towards limiting family size through sexual restraint. Many nineteenth century parents associated large families with ignorant foreigners or inferior races, whose reproductive organs were much stronger than their brains. In Utah there was an average of 5.9 children born to a polygamous wife and 8 children to a family in monogamy.[50] Church authorities generally encouraged large families, stressing the child-bearing potential of

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[49]Cannon, "Awesome Power," pp. 76-77.

[50]Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," pp. 318-319.

individuals with talk of populating planets and the supposed fact that one man who had 40 wives all his life could find himself, at the age of 78, the ancestor of almost 3 million individuals.[51]

Despite the accomplishments of some women in Utah, they were still dominated by the all-male priesthood. Even the most ardent advocates of woman's rights among the Mormons yielded to the will of the priesthood and counseled other women to do likewise.[52] It was not unknown for a husband to take polygamous wives without his present wife's consent or even her knowledge.[53] Moreover, some church authorities, in their speeches, indicated that Mormon women were unhappy with polygamy and their roles in the church. The response of the church leaders often involved calling the women to repentance and their husbands to the task of bringing their wives into line.[54] In 1875 Wilford Woodruff said:

> We have many bishops and elders who have but one wife. They are abundantly qualified to enter into the higher law and take more, but their wives will not let them. Any man who will permit a woman to lead him and bind him down is but little account in the church. . . .[55]

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[51]Ibid., p. 318.

[52]Bushman, Mormon Sisters, pp. 25-42 and 177-224.

[53]Young, Isn't One Wife Enough?, pp. 120-123.

[54]Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 4 (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1857) p. 55

[55]Campbell and Campbell, "Divorce," p. 7.

Before closing this chapter I will consider one more possible explanation for gentile accounts of disease in the Mormon community. Modern medical science has only recently legitimized investigation into the role of stress and anxiety in common illnesses. Although physicians have admitted in the past that fatigue and exhaustion may contribute to the likelihood of an individual becoming ill, they are now recognizing that any change or situation in which norms are unclear and traditional roles disturbed, creates a greater chance of contracting any diesease, from colds to cancer, in the individual involved. Even if the individual approves and supports the change, or feels no apparent anxiety concerning the lack of traditions, the impact of those conditions can be just as substantial as if the individual were consciously aware of his or her anxiety.[56] Therefore, portrayals of Mormon men and women in polygamy, in the condition of anomie, appearing haggard or afflicted with numerous unspecified complaints, might not be so far-fetched after all. Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing today whether or not the stress of their lifestyle caused them an undue amount of physical problems.

In this chapter I have attempted to show the possible basis for some of the anti-Mormon claims because

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[56]For further enlargement on the role of stress in disease, see the Journal of Human Stress; a quarterly journal which began publication in March of 1975.

I believe it re-enforces the view that much of the anti-Mormon sentiment in the last half of the nineteenth century arose out of common Victorian beliefs concerning sexual relations. White, middle-class Americans looked at Mormon practices in a Victorian, instead of a Mormon, context, and therefore saw a distorted view of what was actually going on. They did not sit together and dream up a totally imaginary world upon which they superimposed Mormon society, for the purposes of alarming the sensibilities of Victorians against the Mormons: they looked at actual Mormon attitudes and practices and enlarged upon them in logical consequence of their opinions of sexual reality. In other words, they did not simply make up stories to inflame the populace against Mormonism; they believed in the truth of their own words, and in the genuine threat which Mormonism and polygamy posed to Victorian society.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to tell today exactly when or how Victorianism faded. Certainly the post-World War One disillusion with the perfectability of western man and the subsequent hedonism of the 1920's; along with the advent, in that era, of a popular psychology which emphasized the negative role of guilt in neurosis, wrote a final end to the domination of Victorian ideology in American society.

The medical world, after 1890, changed rapidly and no longer needed sexual activity as a major cause of illness. The 1890's and 1900's brought wide-spread acceptance of antisepsis, the germ theory and the experimental method. In the United States, the Johns Hopkins Medical School imported the German system of pseudo-military medical authority and exacting scientific research, as opposed to the more humanistic French school. Graduates of the Hopkins program spread throughout the country, and as "Herr Doctor" gained prominence and demanded respect, so did the American medical establishment. Vaccination, "clean" surgery, the eradication of yellow fever and malaria from the United States, also helped rebuild medical confidence and prestige. The 1910 Flexner Report on

American medical schools, along with the routing of tremendous amounts of American capital from philanthropic industrialists into medical research and medical schools, helped improve the quality of an American medical education.

In Utah, second and third generation Mormons coming to maturity in the 1880's and 1890's demanded, with a stronger and stronger voice, that the church get in step with the rest of the country's march towards the American dream. The practice of polygamy, first disavowed by church President Wilford Woodruff in 1890, was finally eliminated from the doctrines of the earthly church in 1904. Plural marriage came very close to destroying the Mormon church both as a physical institution and as a unified body of religious thought, largely because of the clash of Victorian and Mormon cultural values, and their concepts of health and disease. If Mormon church leaders were to institute the practice of polygamy today it would cause barely a ripple in the world outside the church; however, it would probably prove cataclysmic to the current population of Mormons who have so successfully internalized much of the Victorian marriage ideology.

The relationship between Mormon sexual practices, Victorian medical theories, and the political oppression of Mormons, tells us more than simply why it took so long for Utah to achieve statehood. It demonstrates the impact

which human attitudes towards the causes of disease and the definitions of health can have on the actions of everyday American life. That impact can be seen elsewhere in history, particularly in the areas of racial intolerance and prejudice in the United States. Until we can clearly understand that physical element in our intellectual decisions, we will never be free of its effects. It is my hope that further exploration of the influence of attitudes towards health and sickness in American history will provide at least a part of that understanding.

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SEX, SICKNESS AND STATEHOOD: THE INFLUENCE OF VICTORIAN MEDICAL OPINION ON SELF-GOVERNMENT IN UTAH

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ABSTRACT

In the struggle for self-government which occupied the Mormon population of Utah between their entry into the Great Basin in 1847 and statehood in 1896, the issue of polygamy dominated public discussion. The non-Mormon population of the United States generally objected to the practice of polygamy, in large part because of Victorian attitudes towards sexual activity and the presumed physical and mental results of violating Victorian sexual norms. It was assumed by most Americans that polygamy, by violating those norms, caused real physical damage to the Latter-day Saints in Utah; damage that disqualified them from holding full and equal political rights with their fellow citizens.

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