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# Lewis C. Bidamon, Stepchild of Mormondom

Valeen Tippetts Avery and Linda King Newell

A fascinating event enlivened the otherwise dull social climate of Nauvoo during the 1847 Christmas season. Sarah M. Kimball in Nauvoo gossiped to Nancy Marinda Hyde at Council Bluffs:

The marriage of Mrs. Smith is the all absorbing topic of conversation. She was married last Thursday eve, the groom, Mr. Bidimen, is, I believe, looked upon with universal contempt. He was a widower, wears a wig, has two daughters, young ladies. A Mrs. Kinney . . . says he still loves her, but married Emy for her property. Mrs. Smith manifested the confidence she had in her intended husband by employing attorneys to execute a marriage contract and secure to her all the Property. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. Methodist Mr. Hany. The bride was dressed in plum colored satin, a lace tuck handkerchief, gold watch and chain, no cap, hair plain. We were not honored guests but were told that things passed off very genteely.<sup>1</sup>

Emma Smith's union with Lewis C. Bidamon served several purposes. It ended speculation that she might accept the Twelve's offer of assistance and go West with the main body of Saints. It ignored the threat made to her by Almon W. Babbitt that he could make her so poor that she would beg pardon of the Twelve and follow them.<sup>2</sup> It stated that she would determine her own course in the choice of a companion despite Babbitt's comment that she and Lewis "had no right to marry."<sup>3</sup> It united her for the second time in her life to a man she loved.

Emma Smith wed Lewis Bidamon on Joseph Smith's birthday, 23 December 1847.<sup>4</sup> In the eyes of many, Emma stepped out of her unique role when she married Lewis, who was not a member of any church, although he did help establish a Congregational

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Valeen Tippetts Avery, of Flagstaff, Arizona, and Linda King Newell, of Salt Lake City, Utah, have co-authored a number of articles on Emma Smith. This article is an excerpt from a forthcoming biography of Emma Hale Smith, planned for publication by Doubleday.

<sup>1</sup>Sarah M. Kimball to Mrs. Marinda Hyde, 2 January 1848, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. Hereafter cited as Church Archives.

<sup>2</sup>Heman C. Smith, "Distinguished Women," *Journal of History* 12 (July 1919):291, as quoted from Joseph Smith III history.

<sup>3</sup>Emma Bidamon to L. C. Bidamon, 7 January 1850, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Library-Archive, Independence, Mo. Hereafter cited as RLDS.

<sup>4</sup>The marriage date had been in question. Many sources list the date as 27 December. We secured a copy of the marriage certificate to establish the 23 December 1847 date.

church in Canton, Illinois, in 1842.<sup>5</sup> His opinion of Joseph Smith was that Joseph was honest but might have been deceived.<sup>6</sup> What then was the relationship between Emma and Lewis? What kind of man was he? What attitudes, examples, events, and emotional bonds did this man bring into the Smith household? Who, indeed, was Lewis Bidamon?

Lewis was fourteen when the Bidamon family moved from his birthplace in Smithfield, Virginia, to Highland County, Ohio. Little is known of him until his marriage at age twenty-five to Nancy Sebree in 1827.<sup>7</sup> Their first child was a boy, born in 1828. Lewis's second child was a girl, born the following year, not to Lewis's wife, but to one of Jeremiah Smith's daughters. This daughter—probably Nancy Smith—left her child, Almira, with her own parents to be raised. Almira knew who her father was. When she was twenty-four, she began a remarkable correspondence with Lewis Bidamon that spanned at least twenty-five years. In 1853, six years after Emma and Lewis's marriage, Almira's first letter reached Lewis in Nauvoo. It began with an apology, "I have of-times looked back with sorrow upon the time that I Slited you[r] kind offers toward me,"<sup>8</sup> possibly referring to a time when Lewis returned to Ohio to offer her a home. Her last known letter in 1880 offered consolation and comfort to Lewis at the death of his wife, Emma.

In spite of Almira's birth, Lewis maintained his union with Nancy Sebree Bidamon and moved with her to Canton, Illinois. After Nancy died there, Lewis married in 1842 a widow named Mary Ann Douglas. Totally disillusioned after two months of marriage, Lewis carefully composed a letter to his wife's three brothers. The new groom called the duty "paneful in the extreme" to confess that his "ardent affections" were not returned by his "coald harless tyranical" wife. His first complaint was not about mistreatment of himself, but of his children:

I had my children under such command that if I had company at the table they would wait without a murmur but as a general

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<sup>5</sup>Nancy Abercrombie Bidamon's great-grandson Edward Luce has collected Bidamon family information for some years. He compiled some of his information and called it "The Bidamon Story." It is not published. This information was copied by him from the *History of Fulton Co.*

<sup>6</sup>Vesta Crawford collected much material about Emma Smith but the projected biography was never finished. Her papers, Crawford notes, are at the Marriott Library, University of Utah. The Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, has a copy.

<sup>7</sup>Luce, "The Bidamon Story."

<sup>8</sup>Almira Swigart to Lewis Bidamon, 11 December 1853, Bidamon Collection, the Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif. There are eight letters from Almira in the Huntington Library and one in private hands.

thing children should eat with the family in order that they could be taught. . . . My Dear companion made the quick reply with considerable anemosatie that my Children should not eat at hir Table . . . she would as leaf set down with a passel of Cats. I told hir my children had always eat at the table when I eat and I further desired that hir children and mine should set at the same board.

Further stating his case, Lewis objected to Mary Ann's "long re-sittles" of his "imaginary falts" and continued with his letter:

Almost as regular as the earth made hir diernal revolution she would reproch me on account of my not being welthy and remark what a fool she was a woman like hir . . . to marry me in poverty. . . . I will not bost of my welth but them that has more than me is not in a sufering situation. . . . The only night that I was ever out untill nine O'clock my place in bed was occupied by C<sup>9</sup> without apology and if my children would attempt to come into the room of an evening where we set to fondle on me as they ware used to do they ware ordered back with promptness.<sup>10</sup>

The marriage to Mary Ann Douglas lasted only six months. Lewis's explanation for its failure illustrated his concern for his children and his expectations of family life.

The business that may have given Mrs. Douglas the impression that Lewis was wealthy was an iron foundry in Canton, Illinois. Lewis and his brother converted a steam mill into a high-grade carriage factory. About 1843 they filled an order from Joseph and Hyrum Smith for four carriages. When Joseph saw how John Bidamon was running the business, he hired him on the spot to go to Nauvoo and attempt to make a profit out of the red brick store. Soon after John accepted the offer, he found himself in the store with boxes and bales piled around the premises. Saints walked in empty-handed and left with their arms full of merchandise. The only nod in the direction of the cash drawer was the statement, "My credit has always been good with Joseph."<sup>11</sup> After a face-to-face confrontation with Joseph, John Bidamon was successful in reversing some of the credit policy.

It seems likely that Emma Smith and Lewis Bidamon were acquainted with each other before Joseph's death. Lewis delivered two of the carriages to the Smith home before the Martyrdom;

<sup>9</sup>"C" probably was one of Mary Ann Douglas's children.

<sup>10</sup>To Messers Armstrong, Joel C., and John Walker, 29 December 1842. Unsigned. Bidamon Collection, Huntington Library.

<sup>11</sup>Personal interview with Lewis C. Bidamon's grandson (Charles Bidamon's son), Tom Bidamon, 28 November 1978.

John Bidamon ran Joseph's store; another brother, Christian, rented rooms in the Mansion House.<sup>12</sup>

Lewis took the Mormon's side during the months of the bitter "War" in Nauvoo. The wolf hunts against the Mormon farms and the Saints' retaliation raids in return forced Governor Ford to attempt control measures against the warring factions. Lewis, representing the governor, delivered a commission to Major Parker, commander of the state militia, with orders and instructions to control the mobs.<sup>13</sup> John Ferris in Quincy wrote to his brother in Nauvoo on 3 September 1846 that

Maj. Bidamon succeeded in reaching this place on Tuesday, not without having been met by Brigadier Gen. Stivers who intercepted them at Churchville and threatened to take them to [the anti-Mormon] Camp, etc., etc. Maj. B. left that evening for Springfield with dispatches for the Gov.<sup>14</sup>

From this time until his death, Lewis Bidamon was referred to as "the Major."

His kinship with the Mormons was apparent when he wrote to Emma early in 1847:

I Wright to you from this place where I have bin ever since our defeat at Nauvoo. . . . Brother John and my self are desirous to Rent the Mansion House of you. . . . Pleas inform me what will be your Termes per annum. . . . Your Sincere Friend and well Wisher.<sup>15</sup>

Emma scribbled her answer on the back of Lewis's letter:

I suppose I shall have to get possession of the Mansion before I can rent it again. . . . I formed a very agreeable acquaintince with Your brother [and] His family while on the boat with them.<sup>16</sup>

After Emma rushed to Nauvoo to save her possessions from the renter Van Tuyl—who she felt was a secret informer as well as a thief—she remained in Nauvoo for the summer, and the Major found it convenient to be there also.

Emma was forty-three. A tall, dark-haired, brown-eyed woman, she had dealt with situations unusual to the life of the ordinary woman during her seventeen years of marriage to Joseph Smith. She had five children; Julia Murdock Smith was 16, Joseph III al-

<sup>12</sup>Deeds, Emma Smith to Lorin Walker, 21 December 1847, RLDS.

<sup>13</sup>Luce, "The Bidamon Story."

<sup>14</sup>John M. Ferris to Hiram G. Ferris, 3 September 1846, Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley.

<sup>15</sup>L. C. Bidamon to Emma Smith, 11 January 1847, RLDS.

<sup>16</sup>Emma Smith to Mr. Bidamon. Undated. Answered on reverse of above letter.

most 15, Frederick 11, Alexander 9, and the baby David, born after Joseph's death, was two and one-half. Emma was vivacious and quick-witted with a good sense of humor.

The Major was forty-five. He had two young daughters, Zereida 13 and Mary Elizabeth 11. His two sons died before 1847. He was a handsome man, smooth, well dressed, and debonair for Nauvoo. He could laugh at himself and had a quick, easy sense of humor. He possessed, in addition, whatever indefinable quality it is that makes a man unusually attractive to women.

Lewis's granddaughters report that he was first attracted to Emma Smith when he saw the beautiful darns in her stockings.<sup>17</sup> However she darned them, and whatever he observed along with the darns, it was enough to keep him in Nauvoo as he settled down in the deserted town to increase his acquaintance with Emma.

Their middle-aged courtship was not without its problems, however.

Once he [Lewis] came stepping along to call on Emma, wearing a high hat. She sat at an upstairs window sewing and as he proceeded to raise his hat to her it caught on the clothesline and off went both hat and wig. . . . Young Joseph . . . grooming a horse in the stableyard was quite convulsed with laughter. Bidamon recovered hat and wig and said, "Damn that wig, anyway!"<sup>18</sup>

Lewis's marriage proposition to Emma was reported by his grandchildren. "You are alone," he said, "And I am alone. Let us live our lives out together."<sup>19</sup>

Lewis probably assisted Emma with the tangled legal matters she faced at the time. Two days before her marriage to Lewis, she deeded the Mansion House to Lorin Walker, who deeded it back on the same day. It was obviously an attempt to clear title.<sup>20</sup> When Sarah Kimball charged that Emma had executed a marriage contract which secured to her all the property, the charge may have been true. But Sarah misunderstood the purpose. Lewis had a marriage contract with Mary Ann Douglas which relieved her of any responsibility for his debts. It would be in character for Lewis to provide the same security for Emma.

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<sup>17</sup>Personal interview with Lewis C. Bidamon's granddaughter (Charles Bidamon's daughter), Nancy B. Kalk, 28 November 1978.

<sup>18</sup>Crawford notes.

<sup>19</sup>Personal interview with Nancy B. Kalk, 28 November 1978.

<sup>20</sup>Deeds, Emma Smith to Lorin Walker, Lorin Walker to Emma Smith, 21 December 1847, RLDS.

It would also be in character for some Mormons to misunderstand it. Letters written within weeks of Emma's marriage indicate the mood then prevalent among the Church leadership. John S. Fullmer advised Brigham Young:

I suppose you know by this time that there was a certain widow in this place, who was lately given . . . "in holy matrimony" to one of his Satanic Majesty's high priests, to wit, one Lewis Bidamon. Now these twain being one flesh concocted a grand scheme by which to enrich themselves. They hit upon the idea that the church . . . could only hold ten acres of land, and that . . . the deed from Emma . . . to Joseph was illegal.<sup>21</sup>

Almon W. Babbitt also wrote to Brigham Young:

We have had no little excitement about Emma Bidamon's doings. . . . The temple has been sold since I left and bid in by Emma's husband on an execution in favor of William Backenstos. . . . Emma has joined the Methodist Church; they took her on trial. It is to be hoped that she will suit them.<sup>22</sup>

Emma was fully aware of the strong opinions held about her, and she feared that the antagonism would extend to her husband. A clear example of Lewis and Emma's love and concern for each other lies in their 1849–1850 correspondence.

In 1849 Lewis and his brother John succumbed to gold fever and loaded a wagon for California. The minutely itemized supply list included sugar, flour, bacon, boots, Dr. Braggs pills, and gold scales, but no liquor.<sup>23</sup> Even his recipe for "colery cure" which included tincture of "opiam, rhubarb, Pepermint and camphor" was expressly not to be mixed with alcohol or any other "Sperrits."<sup>24</sup>

Four days out of Nauvoo on the way west, Lewis happily wrote his wife,

I have nothing to regret in determining the undertaking [of] this jant only being Seperated from hir—that I *love* and the Society of the Children I have nothing of note to record except my Waggon is not made by gentlemen. . . . One evening . . . [we had] some fine browned squirl upon our board and nothing but moon for our lite the board acedently being noct over its contents was scattered on the earth and John . . . grappled amoungst the grass and thinging he had found a piece and applying [it] to his tasters to his great astonishment found it to be not bufelow chip but Cow chip didnt he Spit.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup>John S. Fullmer to Brigham Young, 26 January 1848, Crawford notes.

<sup>22</sup>Almon W. Babbitt to Brigham Young, 31 January 1848, Crawford notes.

<sup>23</sup>L. C. and J. C. Bidamon's outfit for California, Bidamon Collection, Huntington Library.

<sup>24</sup>Colery Cure, Bidamon Collection, Huntington Library.

<sup>25</sup>L. C. Bidamon to my dear companion, 4 May 1849, RLDS.

When he wrote again, he detailed for Emma the events that happened on the journey, inserting the following paragraph between an account of Indians along the Platt and a description of four crossings of the Sweetwater:

Dear Emma ofttimes me mind hovers around the[e] and in amagination [I] press the[e] tenderly to my bosom O my Love if I could only here from you and know that you was well and the family and you was injoying your Selfs it would ease this akeing hart. . . . Be cherefull *Dear*, if we live the day will arive where we will again meet and press each other to our congenial brests.<sup>26</sup>

When Emma answered his letter, she described her joy when she recognized the handwriting. She hurried to her room to savor the contents alone. She vented her fears for his safety and expressed her love:

my dear Lewis I have scarsley enjoyed any good thing since you left home in constant terrifying apprehension that you might be suffering for the most common comforts of life, I have never been weary, without thinking that you might be more so. I never have felt the want of food without fearing that you might be almost . . . starving, and I have never been thirsty without feeling my heart sicken . . . that perhaps you were sinking faint and famished . . . but now the anxieties are over and some may think that I might be content, but I am not, neither can I be until you are within my grasp, *then*, and *not*, till *then* shall I be free from fears for your safety. . . . I think you should be . . . caotious of the Mormons for I believe they intend that I shall not enjoy anything. . . . I can tell you they are capable of an infamous ingratitude. . . . They think that you occupy a situation here that you have no business to . . . it is explained by Babbit that you had no right to marry me, and . . . I had no right [to marry] you. . . . *When, O! When* can I begin to think about you coming home.<sup>27</sup>

Lewis answered:

Oh my dear Emma that I could press you to my lonsoem hart. . . . I doo not like California it affords no charms for me and especly in the absense of hir and only hir that can make me happy. . . . Give my warmest affections to the children and all inquireing friends and curses to my enmeys.<sup>28</sup>

Lewis manufactured axes and shovels for the miners, served Hangtown, California, as deputy sheriff, and labored in the gold-fields. When he returned to Nauvoo in 1850, he came by Panama,

<sup>26</sup>L. C. Bidamon to my dear Wife, 5 July 1849, RLDS.

<sup>27</sup>Emma Bidamon to my ever dear husband, 7 January 1850, RLDS.

<sup>28</sup>L. C. Bidamon To My Dearly beloved and affectionate Companion, 20 April 1850, RLDS.

Cuba, and New Orleans—somehow losing whatever funds he had gathered.

He arrived in Nauvoo to find the economy even more depressed than when he left. Fear of cholera kept travelers from boarding at the Mansion House; business at the store was slow; Emma decided to take the sign down and concentrate on the farm if travel through Nauvoo didn't improve.<sup>29</sup>

Vesta Crawford, a granddaughter of Lewis Bidamon, attempted a biography of Emma in the 1940s, and her notes express a common attitude and belief about Emma's marriage to Lewis and about his willingness to help support the family. "Emma's marriage to him was one of convenience. He was easy-going, would lie late abed, was fond of liquor and was very profane, would let her toil very hard."<sup>30</sup> But when Lewis Bidamon's attempts to support his family are examined, two things become apparent. He was industrious and imaginative in devising ways to make a living, and Emma herself recognized that he worked hard. No item of correspondence from Emma implies that Lewis was not carrying his share or that she felt he had taken advantage of her industry.

Lewis sold the iron foundry in Canton to the McCormick interests and then started a match-manufacturing business which became Diamond Match Company. By the early 1850s the Warsaw and Rockford Railroad planned a branch line to Nauvoo. In 1853 Lewis paid \$370 for seventy-four shares of stock,<sup>31</sup> and during this period he was salaried for his contracted services to the railroad.

He ran the packet boat *Lorna Doone* on the Mississippi and kept a horse and buggy ready for hack services. By 1858 he was ready to start a business that was new to Nauvoo. A newspaper account reads:

L. C. Bidamon Esq. of Nauvoo, passed through this place . . . with a new sugar cane mill he expects to have ready for operation soon. Mr. B. has several acres of the cane from . . . which he expects to manufacture both sugar and molasses.<sup>32</sup>

The Civil War in 1860 probably ended the sugar experiments as Lewis served as a major and colonel of the Illinois State Militia during the war.

<sup>29</sup>Emma Bidamon to my ever dear husband, 7 January 1850, RLDS.

<sup>30</sup>Crawford notes.

<sup>31</sup>Receipts, Bidamon Collection, Huntington Library. Also Marcia Vogel private collection. Marcia Vogel is a granddaughter of Lewis C. Bidamon. This collection contains receipts and other papers which establish the Major's efforts to provide a living.

<sup>32</sup>The Hamilton, Ill., *Representative*, 2 October 1858, as recorded in Luce, "The Bidamon Story."

The grape-growing industry furnished Nauvoo with a cash crop during the postwar years. In 1869 the Wine Growers Association elected Lewis Bidamon to represent them to other areas of the state as they enlarged their business.<sup>33</sup> In the same year Emma wrote to Joseph III that "Pa Bidamon has worked very hard this summer . . . has kept our garden tolerable well and clean."<sup>34</sup>

In his later years the Major served Nauvoo as its justice of the peace and as police magistrate—both were elective offices and he served repeated terms in each until his death.<sup>35</sup> These activities of public nature argue that he was a responsible man and that his neighbors trusted and respected him.

Lewis Bidamon's associates valued his friendship. A boarder with an unpaid debt wrote:

I would not cheat any man wrongfully and least of any the Major, who had been always kind to me and my family. . . . I am sorry to have lost the good opinion of you and Mrs. Bidamon and hope in some measure to redeem it.<sup>36</sup>

A friend named Butler wrote in 1872:

As far as friends are concerned in Nauvoo I would not give the snap of my finger for all of them, after taking you and Geo. Ritter out. . . . Tell Mrs. Bidamon that I very often think of her & will never forget her kindness bestowed on me . . . ask old Whitfield if he has beat any of the boys out their wages . . . tell him he must keep a diary of what he says to day so as to be able to repeat it tomorrow without making a mistake. . . . When you get this letter sit down and answer it.<sup>37</sup>

We have found approximately thirty-five contemporary accounts mentioning Lewis Bidamon after 1848. These are letters, journals, and newspapers, and of that number only three speak of him in disparaging terms.

Lewis Bidamon was reviled by the Mormons during two periods in his life—at the time of his marriage to Emma and for a period after Brigham Young's inflammatory address to the assembled Saints in October 1866. Incensed at the missionary activity in Utah conducted by Emma's sons in behalf of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), Brigham

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<sup>33</sup>Emma Bidamon to Joseph Smith, 17 — 1869, RLDS.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Vogel private collection.

<sup>36</sup>L. R. Miller to L. C. Bidamon, 24 July 1868, Vogel private collection.

<sup>37</sup>W. O. Butler to Major Bidamon, 7 January 1872, Huntington Library.

Young took the stand to pronounce her a liar and a devil.<sup>38</sup> Thereafter, some Mormon elders visiting Nauvoo reported:

I stepped into the office where, perchance, angels once visited and there . . . old Bidamon, the present husband of Emma, sat spitting tobacco on the stove. . . . The furniture and general appearance of the room was old, unclean, and decidedly shabby. Dinner was announced and I passed through the hall, once familiar to the saints, into the kitchen. Here I beheld . . . Emma, the youthful wife of one of God's most honored prophets. . . . Emma looks very old and broken.<sup>39</sup>

In the same month another letter went to Utah:

On arriving at Nauvoo we went to the "Mansion House", and found Major Bidamon engaged in playing cards. The fire having gone down, the major, with sundry twists of the poker, assisted by some oaths too profane to be mentioned here, succeeded in arousing the fire . . . at dinner I saw Emma . . . I must admit I was somewhat disappointed in her appearance.<sup>40</sup>

When these men described the Mansion House, it was twenty-seven years old and the Bidamon family's efforts had been spent in building the Riverside Mansion. Emma was sixty-five years old and Lewis was sixty-seven; age had left its mark, yet gawkers compared them to Joseph whose death in the prime of life gave him eternal youth.

But another comparison with Joseph is in order.

One of the vast ironies of Emma's life occurred after 1864. After bitterly opposing Joseph Smith's attempts to establish polygamy in his own home during her first marriage, Emma found her second marriage threatened by Lewis Bidamon's relationship with another woman.

About 1860 a widow named Nancy Abercrombie moved to Nauvoo. She was small, with dark hair and dark eyes. She had a soft voice and was a little shy. On 16 March 1864, in the seventeenth year of Emma's marriage to Lewis, Nancy Abercrombie gave birth to Lewis's son. The child was named Charles.

Whatever the circumstances surrounding Charles's birth, there was no question that the child was Lewis Bidamon's. Emma's reaction can only be surmised. Whatever the hurt may have been, she

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<sup>38</sup>Brigham Young Address, Semi-annual Conference, 7 October 1866, recorded by George D. Watt, Church Archives.

<sup>39</sup>J. C. Rich to Bishop Edward Hunter, 25 December 1869, Crawford notes.

<sup>40</sup>W. M. Riter letter, 9 December 1869, Crawford notes.

did not allow it to destroy her marriage nor her family unity, nor did she seem to interpret Lewis Bidamon's infidelity as a deliberate means to injure her. Accepting the facts of life as they existed, Emma took four-year-old Charles Bidamon into her own home to raise at Nancy Abercrombie's request. One of the most powerful tributes to Emma's character came from this child.

I was raised in her home, and knew what kind of a woman she was . . . and was as one of the family until her death. . . . She was a person of very even temper. I never heard her say an unkind word, or raise her voice in anger or contension. . . . She had a queenly bearing, without the arrogance of a queen. A noble woman, living and showing a charity for all, loving and being beloved.<sup>41</sup>

The children of Nauvoo flocked to Emma's kitchen for the cookies baked there. But following the Major around also had its special delights. Mrs. Heman C. Smith described her childhood with the Major when she wrote that Grandpa Bidamon was the only Grandpa she ever knew. She often followed at his heels with a group of children to gather grapes when they began to get ripe.<sup>42</sup>

Four years after Charles came to live with Emma, the youthful David Smith wrote to Lewis. Teasing gently about the new city magistrate position, David called his stepfather "Illustrious Juror" and then accounted for affairs at the farm. Addressing her "Ever Dear Husband," Emma added a long postscript to the letter, signing it, "Affectionately yours always in a hurry."<sup>43</sup>

Correspondence between the family members was open and free. They were frank, humorous, and loving. They discussed personalities, marriages, problems, quirks of human nature, and financial affairs; but in the correspondence available there is little criticism of Lewis Bidamon.<sup>44</sup>

Joseph III, in his memoirs, did suggest that his mother's marriage to Lewis Bidamon brought mixed feelings to children who idealized their dead father.

He was a man of strong likes and dislikes, passionate, easily moved to anger, but withal ordinarily affable in manner, decidedly

<sup>41</sup>Charles Bidamon to L. L. Hudson, 10 August 1940, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

<sup>42</sup>Mrs. Heman C. Smith to Mrs. L. C. Bidamon (Nancy), 29 May 1905, private collection.

<sup>43</sup>"Titus" (David Smith) to "Illustrious Juror" (Lewis Bidamon), 24 June 1871, Huntington Library.

<sup>44</sup>Joseph's daybook entry for 22 April 1879 reads: "Gave the Major \$12 to finish paying his taxes. He says he will return it. Don't expect it." (RLDS.) That statement could be interpreted to mean that the Major didn't repay his debts, or that there were not sufficient funds for him to pay it back, or that Joseph reminded himself not to expect the money when figuring his own finances. There is evidence for the latter (see footnote 48), but since we have no strong conclusions, we have left it out of the text.

hospitable, and generous in disposition. He made friends easily, but, unfortunately for him, lost them quite as easily. His love for intoxicating liquors and his lack of religious convictions were the two most serious drawbacks to the happiness of our home, and tended to color materially the afterevents of our lives.<sup>45</sup>

Lewis insisted that Joseph study law,<sup>46</sup> which was a valuable asset to him for the remainder of his life. Joseph closed an 1872 letter to his mother, "with my kind love to all, Pa Bidamon, the first, I remain, Your son."<sup>47</sup> Joseph was forty-one. Four years later, Joseph wrote to his stepfather.

So far as the \$5, already received by you for rent is concerned, please do me the *favor* to lay the same out in the purchase of a hat to replace the one the wind and the waves stole from you last winter. It will give me pleasure to think that I have been instrumental in replacing your loss.<sup>48</sup>

Writing from California while on a mission for the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Alexander Smith remembered, "Give my kind regards to Pa Bidamon."<sup>49</sup>

Emma and Lewis lived their years out in a general atmosphere of kindness and consideration. When Emma expressed her love for blue damson plums, Lewis ordered plum trees from Massachusetts.<sup>50</sup> Emma regularly served Lewis his favorite corn bread. Lewis built a new home for Emma. It took him years. One can either scoff at the length of time or admire his perseverance.

However, Emma's forthright personality was not diminished by her years with Lewis. Emma kept the milk cool in the low stone cellar. The Major put off repairs to the cellar steps until Emma delivered an ultimatum: Fix the stairs or she wouldn't carry any more milk down. One day, in exasperation, she threw the milk into the cellar then quietly proceeded with the kitchen duties. The Major mended the steps.<sup>51</sup>

In 1866 Emma wrote to her son Joseph:

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<sup>45</sup>Joseph Smith III, "The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith," *Saints' Herald* (Independence, Mo.), 5 February 1935, p. 176.

<sup>46</sup>Audentia Smith Anderson, *Ancestry and Posterity of Joseph Smith* (Independence, Mo., 1929), p. 656.

<sup>47</sup>Joseph Smith to Emma Bidamon, 8 March 1873, RLDS.

<sup>48</sup>Joseph Smith to Maj. L. C. Bidamon, 4 September 1875, Vogel private collection.

<sup>49</sup>Alexander Smith to Dear Mother, undated, private collection.

<sup>50</sup>Personal interview, Lewis C. Bidamon's granddaughter, Leah Bidamon McClain, 28 November 1978.

<sup>51</sup>Crawford notes.

Pa Bidamon was gone to Canton eleven days. . . . He quite insisted that I should fix up and go right off to Plano. . . . It was very kind in him and quite a temptation to me, for dearly indeed I would like to come . . . and see you all.<sup>52</sup>

In 1879 when Emma was dying, her children gathered at her bedside. Emma's adopted daughter Julia cared for her mother and Nancy Abercrombie cared for the house. Alexander wrote home to his wife:

Mother is still alive, but oh, how she suffers. . . . [She] needs someone constantly by her, she must be lifted up about every fifteen or twenty minutes. Night before last I sat up all night and lifted her. . . . Mr. Bidamon is very kind and gentle to her, but is nearly worn out.<sup>53</sup>

A remarkable woman, on her deathbed Emma Smith again faced life as it existed. She asked Lewis and Nancy Abercrombie to marry in order to make sixteen-year-old Charles legitimate.

Lewis and Nancy Abercrombie were married in 1880. Joseph's comment after Lewis married Charles's mother suggests far more indulgence with his stepfather than rancor. "How are the Major & Mrs. Major getting on?" he asked; "I wrote him but concluded that he is in the house of the Honeymoon and has not time to answer me."<sup>54</sup> One last delightful glimpse of the Major is apparent in his will naming Nancy his beneficiary. He intended to leave her

the East half of the . . . Riverside Mansion . . . One half of the garret . . . equal priveleges of the halls and stairs below and above . . . one half of the cellar . . . and full ingress and egress to and from the privy on the premises.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps the controversy which has surrounded Lewis Bidamon was inevitable. No man could have stepped into the place Joseph Smith occupied without being unfavorably compared to the Prophet. For the most part, RLDS historians and writers simply ignored Lewis Bidamon's existence, thereby damning him with faint, or no, praise. LDS writers have found most accessible those letters written about him after Brigham Young's public condemnation of Emma, letters which were often written (and interpreted) in support of Brigham's personal fury. Vilification of

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<sup>52</sup>Emma Bidamon to Joseph Smith, 19 August 1866, RLDS.

<sup>53</sup>Alexander Smith to Lizzie, 27 April 1879, Crawford notes.

<sup>54</sup>Joseph Smith to Thomas Revell, 2 July 1880, RLDS.

<sup>55</sup>L. C. Bidamon, Last Will and Testament, undated, Vogel private collection.

Lewis Bidamon easily became a subtle means of establishing that something must have been wrong with Emma Smith.

There was the unavoidable fact of Lewis Bidamon's relationships with other women and his fathering of children outside the legal marriage covenant. For Emma, who had rebelled so vigorously against any sharing of Joseph's love and attention, there was deep irony in her final passive acceptance of Lewis Bidamon's extramarital affairs.

Lewis Bidamon, indeed, was a man of this world, not the next; for him there was simply the reality of the flesh and his own nature. He had his faults, but mostly he was a colorful, attractive man, humorous at times, kind and compassionate, and, whatever the circumstances may have been, he did assume as much as possible his responsibilities for the women in his life and the children they bore to him.

Lewis Bidamon's place and contribution to the Mormon scene will undoubtedly always be controversial. But as time goes on, it seems obvious that any conclusive perspective of him and his life would gain much by following Emma's final example of acceptance and understanding.