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The Creffield Sect in Corvallis, 1903

FRANZ CREFFIELD'S CORVALLIS CAREER was as dramatic and sensational as it was brief. By early November of 1903 he was the principal talking point of the community and well known throughout Oregon, with his fame, or more properly infamy, also carrying well beyond the confines of the state. In this chapter we will examine the history of Creffield's sect in Corvallis in 1903 down to the late summer, looking at its origins, growth, and operations, its membership, the doctrines Creffield taught, and the practices he encouraged. Those doctrines and practices are linked to general developments in American religion in this period, and to the holiness movement in particular. Before we embark on this, however, it is necessary to introduce the setting – the college town of Corvallis.

The Corvallis on which Creffield had such a profound effect was a small town of some 2,500 to 3,000 people located at the confluence of the Willamette and Mary's Rivers, on the west bank of the former.¹ Founded in the mid-1840s as Marysville, it was renamed Corvallis in 1853 and when incorporated in 1857 was just the fourth city in what was still the Territory of Oregon. The name was coined by J.C. Avery, the first man to file a land claim in the region (in 1845), from the Latin for "heart of the valley." Situated in the Willamette Valley, a remarkably fertile agricultural area that served as the principal magnet for those embarking on the Oregon Trail mid-century, Corvallis' economy was based primarily on its role as a market town for the region and as a transportation hub. Lumber and agricultural produce – by 1900, mainly flour, fruit, hops, and dairy



products – were shipped to markets in California and elsewhere, first by river steamer and, from the 1880s, by railroad. Basic industries – sawmilling, tanning, a brickyard, a brewery and a cider factory, a furniture factory, and the like – supplemented this, as did Corvallis' status as the county seat for Benton County. Corvallis was probably best known then (as it is now) as the location of the Oregon Agricultural College – now Oregon State University – established in 1868. Dominating the small and low-rise downtown was the striking Benton County Courthouse. Completed in 1888, the courthouse was a symbol of style and architectural achievement as well as of law and order.

Corvallis' population was a homogenous one; the vast majority of the people were first-, second-, or third-generation Anglo-Celtic white settlers, largely from the Midwest, and only a few Chinese residents provided anything of an ethnic mix.² In 1903 the community supported two newspapers – the *Gazette* and the *Times* – and a community centre and recreation facility known as the “Opera House” in which visiting theatrical companies performed regularly. Its citizens endorsed a wide-ranging set of “blue laws” against gambling, nude bathing in the rivers, and Sabbath entertainments, invariably voted for the Republican Party, and had little truck with demands for female suffrage or, indeed, for any substantial role for women outside the domestic world and the churches.³ Although by this time it was clear that Corvallis was never going to rival Oregon's commercial metropolis, Portland, some sixty miles north at the head of the Willamette Valley, the first two decades of the new century were prosperous and comfortable ones for the town, in contrast to the region-wide depression of the 1890s. The renovation and reopening of the Hotel Corvallis in late 1902, which had lain empty for almost a decade, symbolized the optimism of the town at the time our story took place, as did the opening of the town's second bank.⁴ Economically self-sufficient, taking pride in living in a college town, embracing symbols of modernism such as the telephone, electric light, and an albeit rather limited street railway, and filling its variety of Protestant churches every Sunday without taking their religion too seriously, the citizens of Corvallis were content with their lot and confident about the future. The year 1903 saw two new arrivals in the town – the motor car and Franz Creffield's version of Christian holiness. The former was yet another symbol of progress and prosperity; the latter would show how fragile modernism could be for some, and would pose a profound threat to the comfortable, male-dominated social order.

THE ORIGINS AND OPERATIONS OF THE
CREFFIELD SECT

Creffield arrived in Corvallis sometime in the later months of 1902.⁵ The itinerant preacher attended meetings of the active local Salvation Army corps,⁶ and by early December 1902 he had induced almost all the local “soldiers” in the Corvallis corps – essentially the Army “congregation” – to follow him and his teachings. “The Army is not of God,” Creffield was later said to have announced, and many obviously agreed, for they went over “almost in a body” to the new sect.⁷

The principal corps members defecting to Creffield were members of one family – the Hurts. The matriarch of the family, whom Creffield called “Mother Hurt,” was Sarah Matilda Hurt, née Starr. Born in Monroe, Oregon, in 1861 or 1862, she was from one of the first pioneer families in what is now Lincoln County, the coastal region west of Corvallis.⁸ Her father George Starr had migrated from Ohio to Oregon, taking up land in the Alsea region. Sarah had a common school education and worked the family farm until, not yet twenty, she married Orlando Victor Hurt on April 11, 1880, at Lower Alsea. Hurt, invariably referred to as O.V. Hurt, was born in Indiana in 1857, emigrating to Oregon with his parents in 1877. Two years later he met and married Sarah. The young couple homesteaded on two farms, spent a winter in Indiana, then returned to Oregon and lived on the Siletz Indian reservation, where Victor was industrial teacher and Sarah matron. They likely obtained these positions through the influence of Sarah’s father George, Indian agent for the region. They relocated in 1893 to Corvallis, where O.V. Hurt found employment at Kline’s, the leading department store in the town and a fixture since 1864, and where he worked for thirteen years.⁹ In the course of establishing himself as one of the town’s best-known citizens, he rose to become a senior employee. While O.V. was never a rich man, nor particularly well educated,¹⁰ he had an abundance of civic engagement and respectability: he was a county committeeman for the Republican Party between 1898 and 1902, and a member of the party’s state central committee from 1902 until 1906. He did regular jury duty and served as an appraiser of estates for the county probate system. O.V. was consequently a “highly esteemed” resident, “one of the most highly respected citizens of Corvallis.”¹¹

O.V. Hurt had little enthusiasm for radical religion; he joined the sect only briefly in the fall of 1903, and without much real conviction. But his modest house just south of Corvallis, set in two acres of ground, became one of the sect’s principal meeting places. Sarah Hurt had a long-standing

interest in religion, and she had been a Salvation Army soldier.¹² She and her three eldest children were early converts to Creffield's sect. Ida Maud Hurt, usually referred to as Maud, twenty-two years old in early 1903, had long been ardently religious.¹³ Her father later said that Maud was "always of a religious turn of mind and generally took up with every new creed that presented itself"; on other occasions he was less kind, saying she was "always a very peculiar girl and hard to understand" and somebody who refused to speak with those who differed with her on religious questions.¹⁴ In an obituary written by "A Friend," Maud was described as "intensely religious" from a very young age and a keen proselytizer. At the age of eight she was already "an energetic worker in revival meetings, going among the congregation and pleading with friends and acquaintances to seek the salvation so freely offered." She combined her zeal with "an even temper and a good disposition," helping the sick whenever the opportunity presented itself.¹⁵ By 1902 this "amiable and eminently respectable young woman, of more than ordinary intelligence" was devoting most of her energy and enthusiasm to the local Salvation Army corps, although there is evidence that her zeal made her at times critical of her superiors.¹⁶

Maud's younger brother, Frank Hurt, twenty-one years old and living at home at the beginning of 1903, was a mainstay of the sect. Indeed, he and Creffield worked together to bring about the defection of Army members, the two having become friends while Creffield had been stationed in Corvallis and Hurt was a soldier in the local corps. Variousy a salesman and a shipping clerk, Frank had been educated in the Corvallis public schools and worked in Portland for a time. According to his father, he was "always very religious, becoming a member of the Methodist Church while a mere boy" and joining the Salvation Army when just eight or nine years old.¹⁷ Eva Mae Hurt, invariably called May or Mae, was rather younger than her siblings, just sixteen years old when she joined the sect in 1903. She, too, had been a member of the Salvation Army before joining Creffield's sect.¹⁸ The Hurts' two other children, both adopted, were too young to be involved; Roy Robinett Hurt was a boy of thirteen, and Martha Hurt, née Brown, was an infant taken in by the Hurts the previous September.

Other Creffield followers included, remarkably, Charles Brooks, the Salvation Army captain sent to Corvallis to reinvigorate the local corps after the defections, who went over sometime after late March 1903, probably in late May. He claimed some initial success in attracting new members to the Army, but when he attended one of Creffield's meetings in an attempt to win back others of his flock, he was converted.¹⁹ The defection

was a fatal blow to the local corps, with only Lieutenant Mannes soldiering on in June. At that point, the Salvation Army closed up shop in Corvallis and did not return permanently to the town until the 1990s.²⁰

In the early months of 1903 Creffield's sect met in a rented hall on Main Street (now Second Street) and occasionally in the homes of members, especially the Hurt house and that of Cora Hartley, who is discussed in detail below.²¹ Their meetings were animated and noisy and involved rolling about the floor, shouting, and going into trances. By late May or early June 1903 the group was sufficiently coherent and committed to set up a camp on a small spit of land in the Willamette River just south of Corvallis that was not quite an island, being reachable by a ford from the town most of the time. Referred to by contemporaries as the camp on "Kiger's Island," it was actually on neighbouring Smith Island.²² There for at least two months, probably longer, Creffield and his followers lived in large and commodious wigwam-style tents.²³ Not all members camped out during that summer. Some returned to their homes in Corvallis at night, others stayed a few days, interspersing camp life with the comforts of home. This transience was probably necessary since the group was not self-sufficient beyond what its members contributed from their family economies – and what they could take from R.C. Kiger's orchards.²⁴ Rather, Creffield encouraged his followers to give to his church, and those comfortably off were able to do so.

It was at a meeting on the island that Brooks was converted, a "spectacular" event that involved him seeing "the devil approaching enwrapped in a network of snakes," at which he "tore off his Salvation Army cap and coat and hurled them into the fire."²⁵ While they were on the island the sect members posed with Creffield for a group portrait, bequeathing to posterity the only known picture of them together (see Plates), a picture that contrasts markedly with the image evoked by Brooks' conversion. Six men and sixteen women are ranged in two rows, with Creffield positioned just off centre in the front row. Formally dressed, they look like the archetype of sober and respectable citizens.²⁶

For most of 1903 the group attracted no sustained opposition from the community, although they were talked about and to some extent complained about. They were known as the "Army of Holiness," the "Holiness Mission," or the "come-outers" (a term whose meaning will be explained later), and only occasionally by the more pejorative epithet of "Holy Rollers."²⁷ The few stories published in the local press about them observed variously that they were a "burlesque on religion," and that the members were "very devout" but that "their customs, rites, and formalities are so

queer and unusual that the organization has been the subject of much comment.”²⁸ When the sect had used the meeting hall on Main Street, they made enough noise with their “nightly incantations” that the neighbours complained.²⁹ Opposition from the community may have occasioned the move to the island, as some later claimed,³⁰ but we should be careful not to exaggerate the extent of this opposition. Press attention was minimal – only one story about the sect appeared in the Corvallis press before late October 1903 – and few people saw anything fundamentally wrong with the group. One noted that adverse comment came from “those who do not enter fully into the idea of allowing persons to worship God in the manner that seems to them best.” Another worried that the group’s eccentricities would cause the young to “scoff at religion in any form.”³¹ The island camp was only once mentioned in the local press, which otherwise recorded the most minute details of Corvallis life. This lacuna may have been partly because many of Corvallis’ citizens who could afford to do so went to the coast for extensive periods during the height of the summer.³² More importantly, the group operated well within the bounds of community toleration, attracting curiosity rather than antipathy.³³

THE SECT MEMBERS

The Creffield sect had a core membership of only about twenty people in 1903. Not all members joined at the beginning, and some had left by the time the sect was persecuted by the community at the end of the year. If we add the less enthusiastic and less steadfast members to the core group the number rises to more than twenty-five.³⁴ Four features of the sect’s membership stand out: many of the adherents were related; many had prior involvement in the Salvation Army; membership was predominantly female; and members were drawn from a variety of class backgrounds. Creffield’s sect, unlike many such groups in this period, was not largely made up of people from the poorer classes of society.

As mentioned, the Hurt family (with the exception of O.V.) were core adherents, and a number of other sect members were closely connected to that family. Mollie (Sandell) Hurt was a twenty-four year old from Mercer Island, Seattle, who had moved to Corvallis as a captain in the Salvation Army in December 1900.³⁵ She met Frank Hurt through the Army, and the two were married in a civil ceremony in July 1903 at the Hurt house, with O.V. Hurt and Charles Brooks as witnesses.³⁶ Their courtship

thus survived Mollie's postings to Salem, San Francisco, Boise, and Portland, where she spent her time between February 1901 and July 1902. She resigned from the Army in the latter month, and we suspect she did so to follow Creffield. Mollie's older sister, Olive Sandell, twenty-six years old, was another adherent, although we do not know what brought her to Corvallis beyond being able to live with her sister. She too had been an officer in the Army, stationed in Portland in 1901.³⁷ Attie Bray, seated on the extreme right in the group portrait (see Plates), was Sarah Hurt's niece, the first child of her older sister Georgianna, who had married Ira Bray, a well-known and successful pioneer of the Waldport area and originally from Indiana. Attie had come to Corvallis in 1896 because the schools were better there than on the coast, and had stayed. In 1903 she was twenty-two years old and working as a domestic in the Kline household, a position probably secured through the influence of her uncle, O.V. Hurt.³⁸

One brother (Clarence Starr) and two sisters-in-law (Hattie Starr and Donna Starr) of Sarah Hurt also joined the sect. Clarence and Hattie (Harriet Adelia) Starr ran a farm five miles west of Philomath. Hattie was born Hattie Baldwin to yet another coast family (discussed in more detail below) and married Clarence in Corvallis in 1890. In 1903 the couple, she in her early thirties and he thirty-five, were raising five boys ranging from two to twelve years old.³⁹ Clarence was never an enthusiastic adherent to the sect and is not in the group portrait, though Hattie is. Both became disillusioned with aspects of Creffield's teaching and left either during the Smith Island period or shortly thereafter. When she did so, her image in one version of the group portrait was covered by bible verses. Donna Starr, née Mitchell, was the twenty-three-year-old wife of Burgess Ebenezer Starr, usually called Burt, the youngest sibling of Sarah Hurt, whom Donna had married in 1900. Burgess and Donna lived in Portland, the former working variously for Standard Oil and a meat market as a "helper," a driver, and a labourer. Both were Salvation Army supporters, and by 1903 they had two small girls. In 1903, on a visit to Corvallis, Donna committed herself to the sect.⁴⁰

Three more sect members had a connection to the Hurt family. James Kemmer Berry was originally from Minnesota and a rising young Corvallis businessman; he ran a general hardware store and sold and repaired bicycles and other machinery, and was the first man in Corvallis to sell a motor car.⁴¹ He was also for a time in 1903 Maud Hurt's fiancé. He liked Maud more than religion and had little or no involvement in the Smith Island camp. Berry was one of the first to leave the sect, doing so before the group picture was taken. That decision cost him his relationship with

Maud, but he soon found solace elsewhere, marrying Clara King of Salem in January 1904. Eunice Baldwin, usually called Ona or Una, twenty-two, was the oldest of the four daughters of Edwin (Ed) Baldwin. Second from the right of those standing in the portrait, her connection to the Hurts was a distant one – Ed Baldwin was the older brother of Hattie Starr, Sarah Hurt's sister-in-law. A Waldport sawmill owner, Baldwin had moved his family from the coast to Corvallis in 1900 for his children's schooling and had tried his hand at many occupations. He farmed and engaged in construction during his Corvallis years and spent part of the time back in Waldport.⁴²

In the group portrait, Esther Mitchell, the final person connected to the Hurt family, is standing in the back row. Donna Starr's younger sister, Esther was born in January 1888 and thus was fifteen years old in 1903. Esther, her sister Donna, and her brother George play central roles in this book. The Mitchell family – Charles and Martha and three girls and four boys – had migrated to Oregon from Illinois in the late 1880s, probably in 1888, just after Esther was born.⁴³ They settled in Newberg, Yamhill County, likely because they were Quakers (Newberg was the principal Quaker settlement in the state) and because Charles Mitchell's brother, George W. Mitchell, lived there. Charles' wife Martha died of tuberculosis in December 1894, and he returned to the east shortly afterwards, leaving behind all seven of his children. Six-year-old Esther was farmed out to relatives.

Charles Mitchell stopped supporting his children a few years after he left Oregon, and by the turn of the century the three Mitchell girls – Phoebe, Donna, and Esther – were living in Portland and involved with the Salvation Army. Phoebe was the most committed, holding the rank of sergeant-major. In 1904 she married another Army officer, Peter Vanderkellen. But Esther and Donna were also committed soldiers before they joined the Creffield group. Donna probably defected during a visit to her sister-in-law, Sarah Hurt, in late 1902,⁴⁴ and she and Burgess moved to Corvallis in 1903. In early 1903 Esther was living in Oregon City and working in the woollen mills there, probably as a tailor. During a visit with Donna and the Hurts she too joined the sect. This was not the first time Esther Mitchell had met Creffield, however; she had previously heard him preach in Portland.⁴⁵

In total, fourteen members of the sect had some connection to the family of O.V. and Sarah Hurt, and with the exceptions of O.V. Hurt, Clarence Starr, Hattie Starr, and Berry, they were deeply committed to the sect over time. All of the ten people we identify as close and consistent

adherents were female, except Frank Hurt. Another mother-daughter combination, Cora and Sophia Hartley, had no connection to the Hurt family, and came from the highest strata of Corvallis society. They were the wife and only daughter of fifty-year-old Louis Hartley, who managed the Great Eastern Mining Company's interests in the Bohemia Mines near Cottage Grove, Oregon, in which Louis was also a major investor. Louis was frequently away from home on business trips, leaving Cora and Sophia plenty of time to devote themselves to religion. They lived on Smith Island for much of the summer of 1903. At age forty-four, Cora was a few years younger than her husband. Sophia was just twenty and a student at the Oregon Agricultural College (OAC), taking household science;⁴⁶ she was said, like many of the sect members, to be "an intelligent and amiable young woman" apart from "her delusion on religious matters."⁴⁷ Neither woman appears to have had prior experience with the more radical forms of Christianity; they were "reputable ladies and former members of the Methodist Episcopal Church."⁴⁸ The Hartleys also had a son, Warren, a mining engineering student at the OAC, but he had no interest in ardent religion.⁴⁹ The Hartleys likely joined the sect in the first couple of months of 1903, while Louis was in the Midwest on an extended business trip.

Another family group in the Creffield sect were the Seeleys. Three sisters – Rose (twenty-seven), Edna (twenty), and Florence (Urania) (fifteen) – and their brother, Wesley Seeley (nineteen), are in the back row of the portrait. Wesley, Rose, and Florence stayed with the sect throughout 1903, but Edna left sometime after the Smith Island period and went to live in Oregon City.⁵⁰ Little is known about the Seeleys' background, beyond the fact that they were a poor family from the Alsea region of Benton County. Their mother, Julia, died of tuberculosis in 1897, and the sources state both that their fisherman father Judson Seeley was also deceased and (more likely) that he had abandoned the family. Florence Seeley is described as "more than passing fair." Rose Seeley worked as a domestic servant in Corvallis in the same house (the Kline's) as Attie Bray, which may have provided the entree first of Rose and then of her sisters to the sect.⁵¹ The Seeleys were not the only sect members who had had a difficult upbringing; Donna Starr and Esther Mitchell had lost their mother and seen their father walk out on them, while Attie Bray had lived many years away from her parents.

Four other men and another woman complete this listing of the sect members. The woman was likely Mrs Coral Worrell, of Portland, but we know little about her beyond her name, and do not know what brought her to Corvallis that summer. She is not mentioned as part of the group

in Corvallis after Smith Island, and, as a Portland resident, she presumably returned there in the fall. We shall see later that she again became a follower of Creffield when he went to Portland in 1904.⁵² The additional men include two who are in the photograph and who remained with the group throughout 1903 – Milton Lee Campbell and Sampson Levins, both “ardent followers.”⁵³ Campbell was in his mid-forties and worked as a general labourer and in the logging industry.⁵⁴ Levins, variously referred to as Sanford and Samuel, was born in 1868. He was a private in the Oregon Light Artillery in the Spanish-American War, and a devout Methodist before joining the sect. One source says that he worked in Corvallis for a time, principally in logging; another describes him as “a very ordinary man of the working class” who came from Portland and had worked in The Dalles.⁵⁵ He “converted” to Creffield’s version of holiness in the fall of 1902.⁵⁶

Both Campbell and Levins stayed with the sect through 1903, but our final two men, about whom we know very little, did not. One Terry Mercer – a “fellow revivalist” – briefly shared the leadership of the group with Creffield, but the two had a falling out and Mercer left; he later became prominent in one of the larger holiness churches, the Church of the Nazarene.⁵⁷ He is not in the group portrait, nor is he mentioned in the 1903 sources. There is even less evidence of Ed Sharp, mentioned in one newspaper story as a youth briefly associated with the group while it was on the island.⁵⁸

At most, therefore, the sect consisted of eleven men, including Creffield, and sixteen women. But the total of twenty-seven members is reached only by counting people who were involved either peripherally or temporarily, or about whom there is very little evidence. Sharp, Mercer, O.V. Hurt, and Berry should be excluded from any count of the group’s effective strength during the Smith Island period, meaning that there were no more than twenty-three sect members during the summer of 1903. Although O.V. Hurt joined the sect for a few weeks in the fall of 1903, Worrell, Edna and Wesley Seeley, and Clarence and Hattie Starr were not in it at that time, reducing the number to nineteen. Other people went to a meeting or two early on but never effectively joined the group, and what we would term the “core followers,” which excludes O.V. Hurt, consisted of just thirteen women and five men, including Creffield.⁵⁹ The truly committed followers were thus predominantly female, and many – including the Hurts, Sandells, and Mitchells – had been involved with the Salvation Army. This group was fairly evenly divided between the middle and lower-middle classes (the Hartleys, the Hurts, the Sandells, Attie Bray,

and Ona Baldwin) and those from lower down the socioeconomic scale – Levins, Campbell, the Mitchell sisters, the Seeleys, and probably Brooks. In attracting middle and lower-middle class adherents, the Creffield sect was unusual; as we shall see, it was mostly the working classes who joined such groups during this period.

THE HOLINESS MOVEMENT

The Creffield sect was part of a larger movement in American religion in the period, usually referred to as the holiness movement, and an understanding of this particular group's beliefs and practices requires looking first at that movement. This in turn necessitates coming to terms with certain key doctrines in nineteenth-century Protestant theology and practice. What follows is a general survey, and by no means a complete one; a comprehensive understanding is probably impossible to achieve, because both contemporaries and historians used and use terms to mean different things. As one of the movement's leading historians, Melvin Dieter, has put it, variety and heterogeneity were its hallmarks.⁶⁰

Broadly, Protestantism teaches two principal stages that Christians pass through on their way to salvation. The first is justification, in which God forgives sins, and guilt is removed from his followers; they are made righteous in his eyes and saved. The second is sanctification, in which God releases believers from the power of sin and enables them to live truly godly or holy lives. While the Lutheran and Calvinist traditions tend to stress the former, Methodism – the dominant Protestant tradition in the United States – has always placed more emphasis on the latter. John Wesley described the difference between the two as that between what God does for his followers (justification), and what he does in them (sanctification). Wesley believed that sanctification was a process that would occur gradually and culminate in a dramatic experience, a “second blessing” after conversion in which the believer would be filled with the perfect love of God – hence, the teaching that sanctification is possible is sometimes called perfectionism. Sanctification did not mean a complete lack of sin, but it did entail freedom from conscious or deliberate sin.

Throughout the nineteenth century there were differences of opinion over when and how one could achieve sanctification. One of the most influential evangelists, for example, Phoebe Palmer, attracted many adherents in the 1840s with her message that a person could achieve “entire” or “complete” sanctification as an instantaneous gift from God and do so

well within the compass of one lifetime. Sanctification did not, as Wesley had believed, have to be a gradual process with perfection achieved only at or near the end of one's life. Palmer thus refined Wesleyanism by teaching that sanctification was "more the beginning of the Christian life rather than the goal."⁶¹ Palmer's simple and optimistic message built on the enthusiasm for personal religion inculcated by the Second Great Awakening, and led in turn to what historians have dubbed the first, pre-Civil War phase of the holiness movement. It should be stressed here that "holiness" had, and has, more than one meaning. The term "holiness movement" simply describes a movement – a process in which thousands were convinced of the "possibility of a Christian believer's gaining complete freedom from sin in the present life."⁶² But holiness also came to mean the desired state in which a sanctified person would live. In Frankiel's words, holiness adherents were evangelicals who were "inspired to seek a greater sense of Christian grace, purity and devotion within themselves."⁶³ Generally, an adherent to "holiness" in the second half of the nineteenth century believed that, once sanctified, a person lived, or at least was able to live, in a state of holiness. The second phase of the holiness movement, which began soon after the Civil War and is often dated from the formation of the National Holiness Association in the late 1860s, saw many thousands of new adherents from all classes and regions drawn to its message. Holiness reached out beyond its earlier urban and middle-class strongholds to rural areas and to all classes, drawing in as disparate segments of the community as the urban poor and the Van Rensselaers of New York. At the same time, schisms emerged within the movement, which were not rooted in basic theology but in differences of opinion about how those imbued with holiness should behave in the world. One strand of holiness became the social gospel movement, which emphasized "social holiness" and was dedicated to social and political change – temperance, sexual and racial equality, and pacifism, for example. The other principal strand was a pre-millennialist one, a belief not in social holiness but in personal holiness. Pre-millennialists believed that Christ would come again before the millennium – the thousand-year period of peace on earth – and judge each person. The world could not be made better before that event, for it was fundamentally corrupt, and thus holiness adherents should work to save individual souls – theirs and others.

In this phase holiness was still largely a movement within the established denominations, especially the Wesleyan Methodist Church. The differences between the pre-millennial holiness adherents and others became much more pronounced during the third phase of the movement, the

beginnings of which are generally associated with the founding of the Church of God in Anderson, Indiana, in 1881. The creation of new institutions was the most significant feature of the third phase. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, thousands of pre-millennialists broke away as mainstream hierarchies became increasingly unsympathetic to holiness within the churches. Innumerable small congregations were formed throughout the United States, with the greatest growth in what was called “come-outism” in rural areas and the west. The term was derived from the second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians, in which true believers are told not to mix with unbelievers, to “come out from them, be separate from them.”⁶⁴ By 1910 “come-outism” had “almost totally removed the holiness movement from the main denominations into independent holiness churches.”⁶⁵ The best known of these, and certainly the most enduring, was Phineas Bresee’s Church of the Nazarene, founded in 1908. In the newly industrializing cities these churches appealed particularly to the poorest classes; in rural areas their appeal seems generally to have been equally potent for all classes. Everywhere holiness churches attracted more women than men to their congregations, as did the Creffield sect, and women often occupied central roles in those churches because of the emphasis on lay involvement. But it is not clear that holiness movement congregations attracted women in greater numbers than all religious denominations and movements did throughout the nineteenth century. In particular, all churches that emphasized the personal nature of a relationship with God, unmediated by authority figures (invariably male), attracted substantial numbers of women.

The creation of new churches was much more than an institutional re-ordering; it represented an increasingly profound difference in doctrine and practices. By the late nineteenth century, the new churches had become known for enthusiastic and ecstatic practices – shouts of praise, waving of arms, and so on – which derived from stressing the power of the holy spirit within each individual. Holiness people also criticized the established churches, especially the Methodists, for their worldliness, their laxness in discipline and membership standards, their ecclesiastical bureaucracies, and their church-building programs, all of which they claimed were too often given priority over individual salvation. In contrast to the worldliness they saw around them, many holiness groups encouraged asceticism and plain living in all things. The gap between these two varieties of Christianity grew apace as members of the established churches weighed in with their own criticisms of followers of the holiness movement as “fanatics.”

We will see shortly that Creffield was very much a part of the holiness movement. He joined it, however, only a few years before a crisis disrupted the already fragmented movement and a new direction was taken by many of its members. Some preachers in the first years of the new century saw speaking in tongues, a gift given by God to the apostles on the day of the Pentecost, as “the definitive sign that one had received Spirit baptism.” For these people the presence of the Holy Spirit was manifested not just by an “inner witness” but also by outward “charisms” such as tongues, prophecy, and healing. The result was the Pentecostal movement, usually dated from William Seymour’s Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906 and which has become the principal legacy of the holiness movement in the century since then.⁶⁶

THE CREFFIELD SECT: HOLINESS IN OREGON

Contemporary accounts of the sect’s beliefs and practices, statements to the press by Creffield and others, and articles published by Creffield in 1901 and 1902 make it clear that the sect was an Oregon instantiation of the holiness movement. In one of those articles, “He’ll Not Compromise,” Creffield argued that true believers should not concern themselves with “charity” but with baptism with the fire of the Holy Ghost.⁶⁷ There were too many “soft” preachers in the holiness movement who were willing to compromise with the world. A person truly baptized with the fire of the Holy Ghost would not think that way: “When you get baptized with fire,” he argued, “fear of man is burned out, and all you see is the soul plunging into an everlasting, burning, seething hell, and your cry becomes ‘Holiness or hell.’” Preachers who looked for success in this world, who counted conversions or craved worldly recognition, had forgotten the essence of holiness. Our words cannot capture Creffield’s own fire better than his:

There are evangelists who were once all aglow, a flame of fire. Today they are a back number. What’s the cause? Compromise, human sympathy, shrinking from persecutions, lowering God’s standards a little, letting down the bars and giving carnality a chance to creep in, keeping silent when they should rebuke sin, grieving the Spirit, and getting so at last that they can not detect the devil creeping in.

“God save us from compromising preachers,” he concluded. Creffield’s earlier article, “Holiness,” covered much the same ground. “‘Be ye holy’ is

just as much a command as ‘Thou shalt not steal,’” he insisted, adding that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord” and using a phrase he would later cite in another piece – “it is either holiness or Hell.”⁶⁸ He brought the same kind of fire to his preaching, exhorting and exciting his followers in much the same way that an eyewitness described him as acting when he had been in Salem earlier – “jumping up in the air and going through all kinds of antics.”⁶⁹

Creffield brooked no compromise. He taught that the end of the world would soon arrive, and a new world come, in which there would be no sin, as in early Eden. But only the truly sanctified would be saved to enjoy it, only those baptized with the fire. “If we ever expect to gain Heaven, and see the King in his beauty,” he wrote, “we must live holy lives here on earth.”⁷⁰ As one reporter put it, “he thinks no one can be saved unless filled with the power of the Holy Ghost.” When you were baptized with fire, you could not sin. “We are told in the Bible that the Apostles lived without sin,” he told the reporter, because “they lived by faith”; he insisted, “I can live the same way.” The alternative to true holiness was hell, a concept in which Creffield believed deeply, scorning “the modern doctrine that there is no material hell and that Satan does not exist in form.” Creffield’s conversion to this radical version of holiness came, according to his own account, through many months of prayer, after which he received the Holy Ghost, which told him to leave the Salvation Army “and follow evangelistic work.” It also instructed him to “live a life of pure faith,” to “do everything by faith.”⁷¹ Although there was some talk in the fall of 1903 about proselytization,⁷² Creffield evinced no interest in doing good works in the world, despite the prior Salvation Army connections of many of his adherents.

Although Charles Brooks played a major role as a kind of second in command, Creffield had a special status in the sect. Like other holiness preachers, it did not matter that he had no formal theological training or appointment from some authority. Sanctified preachers were “immediately directed by the spirit” and considered themselves “the special instruments of the Spirit,” the men, and occasionally women, who could convey the message of redemption.⁷³ Creffield, unusually, went further, claiming to be a prophet and an apostle. He announced himself as “Joshua II” during his time in Corvallis, and the designation remained a constant one until his death in May 1906.⁷⁴ Creffield thus wished his followers to believe that he was much more than a minister of the gospel – that he was the second coming of the man who had led the Israelites into Canaan. Although not equal to him in status, Joshua was Moses’ successor and, most importantly,

was “filled by the Spirit of God.”⁷⁵ God was in Joshua and worked through him, as he worked in and through the apostles who received the Holy Spirit on the day of the Pentecost, and by taking his name Creffield claimed a similar status and authority. In addition, he was said by his followers to be “an apostle endowed with the power of the apostles of Christ.”⁷⁶ While the name of Joshua was used throughout his career, for a time Creffield also took on another prophetic guise, that of Elijah, and in 1906 he and his followers came to believe that he was in some way divine, that he could not be killed and would rise from the dead. However, there is no evidence of any such beliefs in 1903.

What Creffield did claim throughout, however, was that he received messages from God and had a duty to disseminate them. “God revealed himself to me . . . in the form of messages,” he told a reporter in 1904, “He spoke to me” and “I heard his voice.” Creffield did nothing “without querying heaven and receiving direction from above.” He read his Bible constantly, for “in the Bible God speaks to men, and we must search the Scriptures to know the will of God.”⁷⁷ Like the apostles, he had been given the power to “intercede” between Heaven and those on the earth.⁷⁸ While Creffield no doubt did believe that he had received messages directly from God, he was also deeply influenced, and led to reject the Army, by the teachings of Martin Wells Knapp, a holiness preacher based in Cincinnati. Knapp was a one-time Methodist Episcopal Church pastor whose career was in many ways a microcosm of the holiness movement itself. He experienced sanctification in 1889 and organized a series of revival meetings in Cincinnati before establishing his own organization in 1897. Although Knapp died in 1901, his International Apostolic Holiness Union continued to operate. The Union later merged with others to form, in 1922, one of the largest holiness breakaway churches, the Pilgrim Holiness Church, which is now part of the Wesleyan Church.⁷⁹ It was Knapp’s journal, published by God’s Bible School in Cincinnati, in which Creffield published “He’ll Not Compromise,” and Creffield was a principal member of a small group of Knapp followers in The Dalles in 1902. Although others in the group at The Dalles later insisted that Creffield became too radical, he continued to look on Knapp as an inspiration and had his Corvallis followers sing hymns composed by Knapp.⁸⁰

Sect members absorbed Creffield’s teachings fully. Their theology stressed sanctification and living a life of holiness. Frank Hurt, for example, claimed that he “became sanctified” after he left the Salvation Army and joined Creffield, and he referred to the group as “the holiness people.”⁸¹ O.V. Hurt offered an impassioned defence of the group during his brief

time as an active member, in which he sought to place it in the mainstream of holiness tradition. "They preach the faith of John Wesley," he insisted in an interview with the *Corvallis Times* in late 1903; the sect, he assured readers, was composed of men and women "sincere and honest in their belief" with views "but slightly in advance of what has been the foundation of many new sects."⁸² Many members matched Creffield in their ardency. "We take the Bible in its entirety," Sampson Levins told a Portland *Evening Telegram* reporter, "and do not, like other Churches, admit a member because he pays the membership fee." The qualification for membership was simple – "one must be saved." That meant having received the Holy Spirit, and the person seeking admission would have to be sure that he or she had done so. "It is," Levins continued, "the old religion from the time when Christ was on earth."⁸³ Frank Hurt explained to the same reporter that he had left the Salvation Army "because I found it had compromised with the world." There would be no compromise with the Creffield sect: "To follow the Bible in its entirety is our object, to do as the book bids is our one purpose."⁸⁴

While Creffield was Joshua from early on, his group of followers had no formal name. They referred to themselves as "come-outers" or "God's anointed," and Frank Hurt and Sampson Levins both said they preferred "Church of God."⁸⁵ They also called themselves "apostles," probably because like the original apostles they believed they were blessed with the Holy Spirit. In 1904 officials gave the name of the religion as "Creffieldism," among other things. But the name that was most commonly used, for them if not by them, after the fall of 1903, was "Holy Rollers," an epithet possibly derived from the practice of rolling on the ground, or, some claimed, because members were required to sign a document known as a "holy roll" once sanctified. The Creffield group did not care for the name, but it stuck.⁸⁶ Later, especially given the widespread notoriety of the Creffield sect, it became a general term of abuse for radical holiness groups.⁸⁷

Many holiness people of the period were criticized for the wildness and "fanaticism" of their meetings, wherein nothing was allowed to "hinder the freedom and spontaneity of the message directly inspired by the spirit."⁸⁸ The Creffield sect was no exception. Meetings were held frequently and lasted many hours. When the group was at the Hurt house in the fall of 1903, these meetings took place at 6:00 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. and involved "testimony" and prayer, often for many hours on end.⁸⁹ But such bland words do not capture the enthusiasm of the participants. Members were exhorted to open themselves to receive the Holy Spirit, and they

engaged in a variety of ecstatic and enthusiastic practices. They rolled on the ground, shouted about God and the spirit, and went into long trances. Contemporary accounts made much of these behaviours, especially the rolling on the floor. Adherents would “spend hours tumbling about the floor,” they would “roll on the floor, groan, scream, pray, shout and otherwise give evidence of great bodily and mental agitation.”⁹⁰ At other times they would “lie on the floor for hours” and while doing so “would pray continually” or “shout so that they could be heard half a mile away.”⁹¹ Esther Mitchell believed that she should spend every minute of her time in prayer, and Frank and Mollie Hurt were said to “often spend entire days and nights lying flat on the floor, face downward, praying to the Lord for further light.”⁹² This was in conformity with “teachings of the Bible, which say that one should fall on one’s face to call for different things.”⁹³ Such practices were not restricted to meetings; according to Burgess Starr, his wife, Donna, “took to rolling around the floor of their home all night,”⁹⁴ and a number of people continued their ecstatic practices after being institutionalized.

There are suggestions that the rolling on the floor was to atone for sins, and that may at times have been the case.⁹⁵ But it is more likely that the various ecstatic practices, some of which were not uncommon in the Salvation Army,⁹⁶ were for purposes standard to most holiness groups – they both facilitated the receipt of the Holy Spirit and were manifestations of that spirit’s presence. As Ann Taves demonstrates, all Protestant groups whose members experienced “fits, trances, and visions” explained them by references to “the ‘power’ or ‘presence’ or ‘indwelling’ of God, or Christ, or the Spirit.”⁹⁷ The spirit transformed Creffield’s group, as it did the followers of Bresee’s Church of the Nazarene, enlarging and strengthening their psyches and importing thereby a mystical element to Christian devotion.⁹⁸ There is no evidence, however, that Creffield or any of his followers claimed either the gift of healing or that of speaking in tongues, both, especially the latter, features of the Pentecostal movement.⁹⁹ In this sense the sect followed “mainstream” holiness, for most holiness groups disapproved of the idea of speaking in tongues.

Over time ecstatic practices meant more than inculcation with the Holy Spirit, as by the fall of 1903, and perhaps earlier, members came to believe that they, as well as Creffield, could have “direct communication with the almighty” while in trances.¹⁰⁰ Frank Hurt explained that “the Lord speaks to us as his children and reveals his will through the spirit that is in us.” One can sense the thrill that went through him as he went on: “We can feel the very will of God.”¹⁰¹ O.V. Hurt later said he had witnessed his

wife and daughters roll about the floor for hours and then “rise and claim to have received divine messages.”¹⁰² Frank Hurt stated in April 1904 that “at first messages were received from God by Creffield, . . . [but] now all receive direct commands from the Lord.”¹⁰³ The earliest reference to this direct communication can be dated to the period immediately prior to Smith Island, when James Berry was still engaged to Maud Creffield; Berry later claimed that she “did anything that came into her mind, saying that she had received a message from the Lord to do so.”¹⁰⁴

Other physical manifestations distressed contemporaries. When members of the sect were seen in public they looked haggard, hollow-eyed, and showed signs of “great mental or nervous excitement.”¹⁰⁵ Lack of food likely accounted for some of this; on occasions sect members would fast for days at a time.¹⁰⁶ Lack of sleep no doubt contributed as well, for receipt of the Holy Spirit frequently kept people up all or most of the night. As for “mental or nervous excitement,” it should not have been surprising to see it in people who believed they had received the Holy Spirit. Two aspects of the sect’s refusal to compromise with the world and members’ sense of being “God’s anointed” require extended discussion because they were crucial to the community’s reaction to the group. Like other holiness leaders, Creffield exhorted his followers to both abandon the worldly desire for material goods and to forsake relationships with those who were not in the sect. He apparently abhorred the Salvation Army’s practice of soliciting for funds: “it is not right to hold ice cream socials and other social gatherings where money is taken,” he told a reporter.¹⁰⁷ Frank Hurt offered a simple statement of the attitude to material wealth: “we do not believe that those saved and having their names inscribed in heaven should enjoy luxuries.”¹⁰⁸ But over time this forbearance amounted to much more than denial of luxuries. As a former follower put it after she had left the group, “to follow Creffield’s teachings to the letter . . . [a person] must wear old clothes, no shoes and stockings . . . eat only one thing at a meal . . . sleep on the floor . . . know what it is to feel cold and hunger.”¹⁰⁹ Not only clothing but also food, dishes, and furniture should all be as simple as possible, and many household items were deemed unnecessary for people who wished to eschew the trappings of “civilized” life. Louis Hartley’s complaints about the sect included the fact that his daughter Sophia had “destroyed her clothing” and that she and her mother had broken all the ornamental dishes, leaving him to eat off “the plainest” of them. In a 1906 petition for divorce from Cora, he complained that she had “burnt furniture, clothing, ornaments, watches, jewelry and generally everything necessary to the comfort of a well-regulated

household.”¹¹⁰ Adherents even refused to sit in chairs, for man, not God, had made such things, and there is one suggestion that they eschewed artificial light.¹¹¹

Although anti-materialism formed part of Creffield’s teachings from early on,¹¹² it does not seem to have manifested itself strongly to outsiders until after Smith Island, and it became more extreme over time. By 1904 members were refusing to use any furniture at all.¹¹³ By then also, although we think not initially, anti-materialism had been extended to include food taboos. Pork was not permitted and, according to one report, members were to eschew all meat and other cooked food.¹¹⁴ From early on, not surprisingly, Creffield preached prohibitions against smoking and drinking, which Frank Hurt said were “filthiness of the flesh and in violation of the rules of the Bible.”¹¹⁵ Thus the Creffield sect members adhered closely to the popular holiness aphorism – “In the world, not of the world” – and in the process were heirs to a long tradition of asceticism and self-denial being used as “a transcendent method of attaining a higher level of spiritual connectedness with Christ.”¹¹⁶ Florence Seeley explained the link between true holiness and the rejection of material goods: “In time we will be restored to innocence and purity such as marked the condition of Adam and Eve, but in order to reach that state we must put away all that is sinful. To do this we must conquer our pride and everything that tends to make us proud, and this includes the destruction of clothing and ornaments.”¹¹⁷

One aspect of the rejection of fine clothing became particularly controversial. O.V. Hurt claimed in 1906 that “Creffield made the women burn all their clothes as a sacrifice and wear nothing but thin wrappers.”¹¹⁸ These “wrappers” were simple shifts, covering the women neck to toe but not otherwise restricting their bodies or their movements. A woman who claimed to have seen the garments described them as “‘Mother Hubbard’ dresses which were ankle-length with full skirts gathered into narrow yokes with long sleeves and high necklines.”¹¹⁹ This particular aspect of anti-materialism – an attempt perhaps to dress as people had done in Jesus’ day – would lead in time to broader concerns about accompanying immoral practices.

Anti-materialism was by no means uncommon within the holiness movement. Wesley had disapproved of adornment, and in many groups very strict codes emerged. Some holiness leaders were criticized for teaching that their members “should not sleep upon their beds, but make their couch on the ground . . . eat crackers out of the dirt . . . or go without food.”¹²⁰ Such codes were often in part derived from the fact that holiness

had its greatest appeal among the dispossessed, with adherents finding “virtue in the necessity of their condition.”¹²¹ But the codes were also fundamentally underpinned by strength of conviction. For people like the Hurts and the Hartleys, asceticism was a marker of true holiness rather than acceptance and valorization of a pre-existing socioeconomic condition.

Anti-materialism brought the sect much criticism. It was wasteful and destructive and, since it was accompanied by what more than one newspaper referred to sarcastically as “the Creffield plan that God will provide,” it offended economic morality.¹²² Creffield abhorred both money and the fact that most denominations solicited it, and he taught instead that God’s chosen children should not work, that God would take care of them. This was fundamentally opposed to early twentieth-century liberal economic ideas, which stressed self-reliance and material accumulation. Not surprisingly, in practice God’s provision meant living off those members who worked and using money and accommodation provided by O.V. Hurt. Some members did work and insisted on stressing that to the press,¹²³ but Creffield was often concerned about finances, especially early on, before he and others moved into the Hurt house. James Berry left the sect in part because a suggestion was made that he should sell his possessions and donate the proceeds to the group to build a “tabernacle.”¹²⁴

Along with rejection of material things went a second highly controversial teaching – rejection of relationships outside the group. In The Dalles in 1902 Creffield had taught that his followers should eschew relationships with non-believers, and in Corvallis he also wanted members to forsake all others, including their families, and devote themselves exclusively to the sect.¹²⁵ Members should not see their old friends. This philosophy was espoused in “He’ll Not Compromise,” Creffield asserting that “when you get baptized with fire, your friends become few.” Isolation from the rest of the community was manifested early, with the group making every effort to exclude “the public” from the Smith Island camp and their services. Over time this isolation became more pronounced. As the *Corvallis Times* put it, “the members of the sect are withdrawn from the world, and must have nothing to do with those who remain in the world.” Sophia Hartley did not believe that “there is a Christian in any of the other churches.”¹²⁶

This was not simply a matter of preference for people who shared one’s beliefs; it was a rejection of all who did not, no matter what the relationship between the believer and the non-believer. As her brother Perry later put it, Esther Mitchell “refused to have anything to do with the members of her own family, believing them to be defiled and accursed of God.”¹²⁷

A similar statement was made by George Mitchell's defence lawyer after a visit to Oregon in May 1906; women were told that "their husbands were defiled and impure and that the family relationship should no longer be continued."¹²⁸ Donna Starr refused even to shake hands with her husband when he visited her in Corvallis in 1903, "because she had been taught to have nothing to do with him on account of his relations with the wicked world."¹²⁹ Sarah Hurt claimed in June 1904 that her husband was "not related to her" and that "Christ [was] her husband."¹³⁰ This was a consistent feature of Creffield's teaching from the beginning and became more pronounced over time, extending according to one rumour to a ban on even touching the hand of "an ordinary sinner."¹³¹

Separatism was often the corollary of holiness; Christians who achieved true holiness could not live among those who had not.¹³² It was but a short step from separation from established churches to separation from family – although it was not a step that many holiness groups took in practice. The isolationism practised by Creffield's followers later contributed substantially to the community turning violently against the sect, for it also represented a rejection of that bedrock societal institution, marriage. Separatism encompassed matters as simple as a wife not cooking meals for her husband after a day's work and extended to the radical notion that husbands were not really husbands in the sight of God. Louis Hartley's divorce petition of 1906 complained, for example, that his wife "pronounces him unclean," and insisted that he was driven to divorce because she refused to "return to her marriage obligations."¹³³ As the *Corvallis Times* complained, "a bitter alternative was necessarily left to a husband whose wife was in the sect and he was not. She was out of the world, and he was of the earth earthy, and she would have nothing to do with him."¹³⁴ Sarah Hurt gave up caring for her adopted infant.¹³⁵ Fathers were not spared their children's contempt either; according to O.V. Hurt, his daughter Maud came to refer to him as "that old man Hurt."¹³⁶ Hurt summarized the overall effect of these teachings on Creffield's female followers: "They let their children, their husbands and their parents go uncared for and without a kind thought or word."¹³⁷

In telling his followers that they must reject their families Creffield made very large demands on them, as he did in insisting on radical changes in behaviours in other areas of their lives. Such demands increased over time as Creffield's teachings became more extreme. That they were largely obeyed suggests that over time the sect members developed an ever-increasing emotional and psychological reliance on him, to the point that it was possible to depart from Christian ideals and to lose sight of what it

was that had attracted members to “holiness” in the first place. We will see later that this replacement of the Christian message with a particular Christian leader may have led to extra-marital sexual relations and did lead to murder and suicide, all highly “un-Christian” acts.

The Creffield sect was an unusual phenomenon in 1903, not just in Corvallis but in Oregon generally. There were other holiness groups operating, including M.L. Ryan’s followers in Salem and the Knapp group in The Dalles. But the Oregon holiness movement consisted of isolated groups, most of which operated outside the notice of even the small town press.¹³⁸ The Creffield sect likewise escaped attention for many months, but gradually knowledge of it grew, and that knowledge created in turn uncertainty, confusion, and, ultimately, substantial hostility. But that is a subject for another chapter. We will also defer discussion of what in 1906, after Creffield had been killed, dominated discussion of the sect – the supposed sexual activity that took place between Creffield and his female adherents. We do so because the purpose of this chapter is to catalogue what we feel confident that we know about the sect as it operated in 1903, and we have doubts about whether sex was an aspect of the group’s activities and beliefs at that time. Moreover, explaining those doubts is better done after we have completed the narrative of Creffield’s time in Corvallis.

THE APPEAL OF RADICAL HOLINESS: WOMEN AND RELIGION IN CORVALLIS

Contemporaries struggled to account for Creffield’s appeal to his followers. Most of the time they alluded to his having some kind of “occult” power, or an ability to hypnotize or exercise “mental telepathy.”¹³⁹ They also explained his influence over the women in his group by reference to their being “weak-minded,” reflecting both a long tradition of associating religious enthusiasm, especially among women, with weak-mindedness, and the more recent tendency of psychiatrists to draw a correlation between religious extremism and supposed female emotionalism.¹⁴⁰

Along with such explanations went a tendency to deprecate Creffield by insisting on his lack of sincerity, which made his teachings “false” religion. Before he was tried for adultery, the *Corvallis Times* confidently announced that Creffield, “the rogue,” would “play the crazy dodge and instead of his just desserts . . . be sent to the asylum.”¹⁴¹ This kind of assessment was wildly wrong. Creffield had an abundance of faith. He believed in his

teachings, in holiness and the possibility of its attainment, and he was willing to risk and sacrifice much to achieve it. Some press reports conceded that he was indeed “a sincere, if extravagant, religious teacher.” And even his critics acknowledged that Creffield was an impressive preacher. He had “a strong voice” and “a good flow of language”; he was “most forceful, convincing and magnetic.”¹⁴² He was also said to be well educated, at least in biblical matters, and in that area, according to O.V. Hurt, “few could hold their own with him in argumentation.” Hurt also observed that he had a “wonderful power” over his followers.¹⁴³

It is by no means surprising that Creffield’s critics denied his sincerity and attributed his success to hypnotism and the weak-mindedness of his female followers. As the *Corvallis Times* put it, what else but hypnotism could allow “this insignificant man” to gain such “control over daughters as to cause them to deny their parents, and such power over wives as to induce them to forswear their own marital relations.”¹⁴⁴ But if contemporaries evaded the hard questions, we cannot. The answers must lie in a combination of social context, individual predilection for religion, the power of Creffield’s preaching, and the indefinable sense of freedom and power that holiness gave to its most ardent adherents.

To a certain extent Corvallis was a promising place for Creffield’s religious outreach. It had a flourishing church community, and church members, including Sarah Hurt and her children, were sufficiently enthusiastic about their religion to support that ubiquitous feature of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American life, the revival meeting.¹⁴⁵ Nor were Creffield’s followers the only people in Corvallis who could be drawn to new religious ideas; both the Spiritualists and the Seventh-day Adventists established themselves in the town in this period and recruited local members.¹⁴⁶ But the general pervasiveness of Christian belief takes us a very small way in explaining Creffield’s success. Despite the important role Methodist missionaries played in its early settlement, Oregon had no substantial tradition of radical movements, religious or secular.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, church membership in the state as a whole was low and, as we have seen, the holiness movement had little impact beyond Creffield’s and Ryan’s groups and the followers of Knapp in The Dalles.¹⁴⁸ Ironically, given the storm that was shortly to break, a *Corvallis Gazette* editorial in July 1903 lamented the lack of enthusiasm for religion in the community, attributing it to loss of the fear of hell.¹⁴⁹

If Corvallis was not a hotbed of religious enthusiasm, the personalities of Creffield’s followers must to a large degree explain his success there, especially given his relative failure elsewhere. Many in the group had a

history of enthusiasm in religion through the Salvation Army. As the *Corvallis Gazette* recognized, they were “very conscientious” people who were “possessed of a sensitive religious nature”; such “well-meaning people,” it lamented, were “apt to be led astray.”¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the enthusiasm and ecstasy that characterized the sect’s practices were not untypical of the Army, and members therefore did not make such a great leap when they went from one to the other in response to the obvious power of Creffield’s promise of salvation.

If Creffield’s success can be explained through individual factors – the coming together of willing minds and a persuasive leader – we must still ask why so many of those minds were female. Historians have had little to say about the history of women in Oregon, and much of what has been written concerns the struggle for suffrage, achieved in 1912 after six referenda.¹⁵¹ While the state had relatively liberal divorce and married women’s property laws and tough sanctions against wife-beating,¹⁵² women’s roles in Oregon society were principally defined, as elsewhere, by duties of home and family. To the extent that women engaged in public activities, those were limited to involvement in churches or temperance organizations or the women’s club movement.¹⁵³ In short, what we know of women’s status and gender roles in Oregon does not help explain why Oregon women were more attracted to the sect than men.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, women were over-represented in church congregations of all kinds in the United States, and they seem to have been particularly attracted to evangelical religion and other radical movements, such as the breakaway holiness groups of the later nineteenth century.¹⁵⁴ The Creffield sect was thus not untypical. Historians have suggested a variety of explanations for these trends, some of which seem particularly well suited to explaining the female preponderance in this particular group. It has been argued, for example, that women’s social roles required a level of submissiveness to authority, and of piety, morality, and self-denial, that fitted the attributes of enthusiastic churchgoers. As Marks argues, late nineteenth-century Protestantism was gendered, imbued with female imagery.¹⁵⁵ One can certainly see many of these characteristics in the Creffield sect women, and they form a clear contrast with men’s cultural roles as competitive, self-reliant, and self-assertive. Maud Hurt’s and James Berry’s respective characters reflect these different world-views. It has been similarly suggested that religion provided for married women in particular a sense of importance within their own sphere, compensating in part for the loss of independence that marital submission to male authority entailed.

Other explanations are also persuasive in accounting for both the intensity of the beliefs of Creffield's followers and their willingness to flout social, economic, and gender conventions. First, the theology of more radical groups, including "come-outer" sects, was egalitarian, in the sense that it taught that the only real distinction between people was that between the saved and the unsaved. Divisions based on race, class, and gender were downplayed, which appealed to those who otherwise had lower status based on these grounds. As Haynes puts it, "religious ardor functioned as a common denominator in leveling sex and class differences."¹⁵⁶ Women in the Creffield sect, whether married or single, responded to the message that men and women were equal in the sight of God and equal in their capacity to know and love God, while working-class women, like the Seeleys, as well as men like Levins and Campbell, could hold their heads up in the company of their social "betters," even feel superior and self-righteous compared with the unsaved. Second, radical religion appealed to a set of values different from those stressed in mainstream culture. As with the Creffield sect, pre-millennialism was often accompanied by a critique of the market economy and acquisitiveness, which were men's spheres. At the same time, if women were expected to embrace emotional expression and value relationships, holiness offered them a legitimate outlet for the former and the best of all relationships – a direct, personal one with God.

Studies of women and religion also stress that holiness and similar movements gave women power, independence, and a freedom to act not found elsewhere in their lives. They were often expected to preach or testify, and in a group like the Salvation Army, they held important positions of authority. In the Creffield sect human authority rested in Creffield and, to a lesser extent, Brooks, and the only people who spoke extensively to the press were Frank and O.V. Hurt and Sampson Levins. But Sarah Hurt had a kind of spiritual authority and, more importantly, all the women could commune with God, were equal by his laws and equally valuable to him as adherents. And there is ample evidence that if following Creffield did not give the women status within the group itself, it freed them from pre-existing constraints. They defied and denied the authority of husbands, fathers, and employers, they participated equally with the men in the group other than Creffield, and they behaved in ways otherwise unthinkable. As Winston argues with reference to the Salvation Army, giving oneself to God "validated the emotional aspects of religion and justified female preaching by emphasizing the unfettered prompting of the Holy Spirit." Blauvelt makes a similar argument, that religion "gave women a new set of values often at odds with their husbands' . . . and imbued them with a

self-confidence and sense of righteousness that enabled them to stand up to human authority.¹⁵⁷ In the Creffield sect working- and middle-class women alike found the freedom of adherence to God liberating from the bonds of social and gender convention. Whatever the cause, Rose Seeley certainly remembered her time spent camping on Smith Island as an intensely happy period.¹⁵⁸

It is impossible to explain precisely why the women in the Creffield sect were so attracted to it and why they took up Creffield's teachings with such fervour, especially in the absence of their own testimony. But some combination of the power of his preaching, their personal affinity for radical religion, and the more general explanations explored above likely provide the answer. While membership entailed submission to God and Creffield, it also brought a feeling of power, worthiness, and agency. The women who followed Creffield received the enormous power of the Holy Spirit without a male authority figure acting as intermediary. They could also testify and seek to persuade others of its glory. Their sense of their place in the world ultimately derived not from Creffield, a male authority figure like a husband or father, but from the knowledge that they were sanctified and that whatever the world thought of them, they were at one with God. These women did not join political struggles for suffrage and temperance, and they did not follow the path of many lower-class girls and experience the new freedom that came from working in the expanding cities of the Gilded Age. But they differed little from the thousands of girls and women who joined the Salvation Army in part because it offered a degree of freedom and some excitement;¹⁵⁹ the excitement in their case was the thrill of sanctification, and the freedom was the hope of everlasting life.