

truck, who then uses it to commit a crime which lands Larry in prison at the Point of the Mountain; Larry escapes and offends no one—is in fact ignored by police; Larry and Eldon go fishing to rest from offense; Larry enters a demolition derby staged by the garage owner and offends him and his henchmen with a spectacular crash—which batters him out of adolescence and into adulthood, and whereby he “clears his name”; Larry settles into convalescence with Eldon’s widowed sister Evelyn, and family life begins to heal the wounds of self-conscious romanticism that adolescence has inflicted upon him.

Having mentioned that Carlson’s language glitters (in keeping with Eldon’s maxim), let me quote Larry quoting Eldon: “His motto was simply, ‘If you want to read a good book, you have to write it.’” That concept, along with the following observation from Larry, governs his structuring of the book and frees Carlson from the necessity of a conventional plot: “Writers’ block (which troubles Larry at the time) is not really so much massive cerebral shutdown, as it is a toxic belief in all the bad things people have ever said about you”. Larry writes his book as an aftermath to the crash which breaks him of adolescence, and likewise smashes his writers’ block. The detoxifying wit glitters on the page. But the gold of the book is its record of Larry’s escape from the self-derived romantic

lunacy (which he credits to his worship of F. Scott Fitzgerald—hence the title) he has lived, a madness originating in what he calls “easy access . . . a source for a major portion of all the grief and regret that blindingly swarm this planet”. In his break-out from habits of easy excess, Larry reveals the sentiment with which Carlson hooks the reader.

The fishing scene celebrates rural, earth-grown values—wisdom, patience, careful work. Much of the wisdom (in scene and in book) comes from Larry’s father, memories of whom surface like a mythic trout, one Larry is trying to hook. His father’s maxim, “Blame is not important. Whose fault it is will not get anything fixed”, introduces the book and provides the easy-going tone, devoid of much rancor, in which Larry narrates. And the close, which finds Larry enjoying a present domestic bliss and projecting it into coming days, living a settled life with Eldon’s sister Evelyn and her son Zeke, is the fitting development of such solid values.

The sentiments, the concepts controlling the action, tone and outlook of the narrative, will interest a Mormon reader of the book, not the place, nor any possible gossip about its people, nor observations on its things. This is where the value of the book resides, for although its considerable charm will delight the readers, only its truth to those sentiments will bring them through.

## Brief Notices

### GENE SESSIONS

*History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* by Joseph Smith, Jr. Edited by B. H. Roberts. 2nd ed. rev. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978, seven volumes, index. \$12.95

This edition of the *History of the Church* in paperback is perhaps the best economic news scholars of early Mormon history have received in years. Page for page an exact reproduction of the famil-

iar hardbound set, this inexpensive boon to Mormon studies will make the so-called “Documentary History” the standard reference tool it should always have been, not only among scholars and teachers, but also for other Latter-day Saints interested in the fundamental beginnings of their religion and culture. While reducing the size of the page to 7 × 4 inches (the print does become somewhat small) and printing on stock

pulp paper, Deseret Book has managed to produce durable volumes that will withstand the wear of long use and constant reference.

Encased in a box and packaged similar to the popular "Reference Set" published last year, this new edition of the *History* will enable its students to mark, cut, and digest its contents without the anguish of a fifty to ninety dollar price tag. It is nevertheless painful to notice in their "Preface to the Study Edition of the History of the Church" that "The Publishers" continue to hope that Mormons will consider the *History* to be the exact words and journal of the Prophet, despite B.H. Roberts' careful announcement in his "Preface" that it is instead the product of many. While we await the work of Dean Jessee and Richard Anderson on the actual writings of Joseph Smith, we can still relish the use of this essential gold mine of early Mormon sources, and with more physical freedom than ever before. Perhaps we might even look forward to hearing the *History of the Church* quoted from the pulpit instead of its misused stepchild, *The Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, also recently reissued by Deseret Book.

*A Topical Guide to the Scriptures of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1977, 500 pp., index. \$5.95 (pb)

In order to provide Mormons with cross references and notes for Bible study that would apply to the other three canons of the Church, the LDS Correlation Department decided some years ago to begin a "Bible Aids Project". Hoping to produce an edition of the Bible containing these study aids, the committee determined to publish separately a topical guide to scriptural passages on major gospel themes. The result is a 500-page compendium of one-line references to keyword passages in the four standard works for 640 topics, ranging from *Aaron* to *Zion*. An alphabetical index precedes the topical guide as a finding aid. Using a computer system, BYU religionists fed thousands of key words into a program which then provided the topical guide. Although the publisher chose not to list all of the computer's output, he hopes "that sufficient coverage is provided to

satisfy many needs, and to lead the careful student to additional research through the use of complete concordances." Thus, while limited in scope, the *Guide* is an immense timesaver and a worthy purchase in either paper or hardback.

*The Giant Joshua* by Maureen Whipple. Salt Lake City: Western Epics, Inc., 1976, vii, 309 pp., illust., maps. \$9.95

Still touted nationally as "the best Mormon novel to date," *Giant Joshua* has made a reprint appearance after a quarter-century career—a unique piece of literature. Published first in 1942 by Houghton-Mifflin and then in paperback by Dolphin Books, Whipple's classic tale of nineteenth-century Mormonism from the woman's point of view has lost little of its appeal. This handsome reprint is a welcome and continuing tribute to its author's vitality. Her deep interest in the gnarled roots of rural Mormonism form the texture of this novel about polygamy, Dixie and the forces behind Utah's settlement.

*Children of God: An American Epic* by Vardis Fisher. Boise, Idaho: Opal Laurel Holmes, Publisher, 1976, xix, 769 pp. \$11.95

If *Giant Joshua* is "the best Mormon novel to date," *Children of God* must be considered "the best ex-Mormon novel to date." As Joseph M. Flora indicated in his 1969 *Dialogue* article on Fisher's landmark novel (an abridged version of Flora's essay serves as the "Introduction" to this reprint edition), Fisher was to Mormon literature much the same as James Joyce was to Catholic literature. Appearing first in 1939, *Children of God* was popular on the national scene for several years. It created considerable controversy, particularly between Mormons and ex-Mormons who agonized over whether it was a brilliant exposé of the whole charade or a strange affirmation to the sentient truthfulness of the Restoration movement. Whatever it was and is, *Children of God* deserves reprinting. Flora's suggestion that Mormons "ought to understand and to sympathize with" Fisher and his outlook remains undeniably cogent.

*Essays on the American West, 1975-76* edited by Thomas G. Alexander. Charles Redd Monographs in Western History, No. 8. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978, 176 pp. \$4.95

Featuring three essays directly concerned with Mormonism in the West, this issue of the Redd Series presents articles developed from five lectures delivered at the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at BYU during the academic year 1975-76. Included are "Rites of Passage: Young Men and Their Families in the Overland Trails Experience 1843-69," by Howard R. Lamar; "Freedom and Individualism: The Historian's Conception of the Cowboy and the Cattleman," by Don D. Walker; "Ethnicity in Mormonism: A Comparison of Immigrant and Mormon Cultures," by Helen Z. Papanikolas; "Political Conflict and Accommodation in Utah since Statehood," by Keith Melville; and "Soul-Butter and Hog Wash: Mark Twain and Frontier Religion," by Jeffrey R. Holland.

*Prophetic Warnings to Modern America* by Duane S. Crowther. Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1977, xii, 415 pp., illus., port. \$9.95

As Mormonism's self-appointed fortuneteller, and now in possession of his own publishing house, Duane Crowther continues to add to his list of works examining prophecy as the key to the future. In this one he discusses "the evidences of the moral decay which will lead to a loss of [America's] freedoms" if there does not soon occur some great and unlikely "repentance on a national scale." Sounding much like a late-night fundamentalist Christian radio program, *Prophetic Warnings* neglects the international church flavor of modern Mormonism to propound a kind of "Moonie" philosophy about God's one and only country. His simplistic interpretations of complex prophecies are designed, he explains, to outline "specific actions which Latter-day Saints can undertake to reverse the tide" of evil in the United States. He promises that those who read his book will then be able either to turn back "the judgments or shield the righteous [themselves, of course,] from their full impact." It is

unlikely, however, that a shield the size of Crowther's book could do much to protect his readers from the bewilderment that will ensue when they realize that a flimsy comprehension of the complex progression of events leading into the future offers little real safety, even to the righteous.

*That Day in June: Reflections of the Teton Dam Disaster* edited by Janet Thomas. Rexburg, Idaho: Ricks College Press, 1977, vii, 309 pp., illus., map. \$5.00

The first of what will probably be a small deluge of books on the events surrounding the breaking of the Teton Dam in southeastern Idaho in June 1976, this one presents a hefty sampling of reminiscences concerning the experiences of the flood victims. Most of the stories included are either faith-promoting, exciting, or both, indicating considerable editing for content. There is little about the incredible graft and selfishness accompanying the courage and altruism. We await works on the disaster by Bruce D. Blumell, who conducted a painstaking oral history survey during the immediate days following the collapse of the dam, and F. Ross Peterson, who is working with a national press on a history of the event.

*Zion Town* by Phebe Thurber and Gay Taylor. Salt Lake City: By the Authors, 1976, Intro., 183 pp.

Samuel Taylor describes his wife Gay as "the one with talent" in the family during the course of his long introduction to this novel she adapted from early drafts by Phebe Thurber. Like *Giant Joshua*, it is a novel about nineteenth-century rural Mormonism and about polygamy, but it displays little of the consistent quality and emotion for which Whipple's work, despite its shortcomings, became famous. Critic Linda Sillitoe faults *Zion Town* particularly for its tendency to make the "talents" of its author "forever present in the story," so that it reads as if it is not only about the nineteenth century, but written in it as well. "Narration tells the reader whatever he needs to know," Sillitoe has observed, "rather than letting him witness or experience it with the characters." The explanatory

and descriptive passages are often stilted, awkward, moralistic, or tedious." Although the dialogue offers some spicy moments, the rest of the volume leaves a bland taste that is quickly forgotten.

*Government Impact on Family Life* edited by Bruce A. Chadwick. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977, 55 pp. \$1.95

Drawn from the papers presented at BYU's Fifth Annual Family Research Conference, this small paperback publication illuminates the views of such scholars as Robert J. Levy and Theodore Caplow, who "share personal and intellectual perspectives on such subjects as federal policy and family life, divorce and the marital partnership, rights of children, and rights of parents."

*Rocky Mountain Rendezvous* by Fred R. Gowans. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977, 312 pp., illus., maps. \$8.95

For a fleeting period of about fifteen years before the advent of the immigrant movement of the 1840s, the greatest social and economic gatherings in the West were the meetings of the trappers, and

their helpers, wives and Indians. Each rendezvous gave the soon-to-vanish mountainman a chance to trade furs and news and to bluster with his fellow nomads of the West. Gowans has done a creditable job of portraying these events primarily through the journals and diaries. An attractive book available in both cloth and paper (\$4.95) it is worth purchasing for the fine collection of photographs and maps alone.

*For God and Country: Memorable Stories from the Lives of Mormon Chaplains* by Richard Maher. Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1976, 228 pp., illus., port. \$5.95

A convert from Boston, Massachusetts, Richard Maher is a manufacturing engineer turned seminary teacher with a flare for amateur oral history. Designed strictly as a faith-promoter, his book on LDS chaplains unfortunately does little to illuminate this crucial aspect of Mormon relations with the military, or to analyze the issues incumbent to Mormon pacifism, Mormon militarism, and the unresolved conflicts between. Such section headings as "A Sailor Healed Through Faith" and "Prayer Stopped Their Profanity" illustrate the anecdotes Maher chose to include in his book.

