

## REVIEWS

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### Brief Notices

#### *Gene Sessions*

ONE OF THE GREAT JOYS of writing about books in a forum such as this comes from the fan letters that inevitably follow each edition. Some time ago, for example, we awarded the Milk the Mormons Award to Richard Eyre for a couple of volumes he had cranked out on how to be a perfect hubby and papa. We subsequently heard from Brother Eyre: he responded to news of the coveted honor in glowing terms, stopping just short of suggesting that we do not know who our fathers were. Now we notice another of his masterpieces. With his companion Linda, Rick has produced the ultimate guide for *Teaching Children Responsibility* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982, viii+241 pp., illus. \$7.95). Linda, of course, is one of the most important wives in America. Among their splendid qualifications to engage in counseling Mormon parents are Linda's titles of Utah Mother of the Year (1981) and Outstanding Woman (NCW, 1982), and Rick's authorship of thirteen other books, his status as former mission president, degrees in something or other (family life? child psychology?) and a whole bunch of sweet kids. In addition to all that, Rick is an advisor to Ronald Reagan on child and family issues, although it is hard to tell whether that position is a result of genuine qualification or is supposed to be a qualification itself. In any case, the book amounts to an excellent rehash of old family home evening manuals and promises to sell very well, mostly to mothers-in-law. Most importantly, the Eyres' book reminds us of a pervasive truism in the current Mormon book market — all an LDS author needs to be an expert in any field are brass, a typewriter, and a few connections. We now have every-

thing from ex-English instructors writing history to seminary teachers doing archaeology. But as Jimmy Carter once said (and epitomized so well), "Why not the best?"

In case Mormon parents fail to receive all of Eyre's books as gifts and, worse still, fail to read them, they will likely be forced to buy Douglas H. and Donlu D. Thayer's *Greg & Kellie* (Salt Lake City: RIC Publishing, 1982, 75 pp., n.p.), a dual novella about two Provo kids who end up pregnant, or at least one of them does. First, we meet Greg, a typical priest whose parents have failed to listen to the Eyres, as he makes plans to tell his folks and the bishop about his fall from grace. It is just wonderful how everyone in the story understands Greg, from his friends to Kellie's parents. They make everything so easy under the circumstances. His half of the story ends with a warm feeling in his stomach and tears in his eyes as he tells Kellie he loves her and that everything will be all right. Kellie's half is just as maudlin. She is everyone's cheerleader/beauty queen with long hair, panty hose, and Herbal Essence shampoo. But she, too, finds only understanding and kind assistance from everyone who comes to know of her predicament. Her story also ends with a warm feeling in her stomach and tears in her eyes as Greg tells her he loves her and that everything will be all right. The purpose of this book is obviously to help kids in a similar fix; but if youngsters who are not there yet read it instead, they might decide to take the plunge just to get all that love and understanding.

BYU Family Studies Professor Brenton G. Yorgason wrote about purer teenage relationships some five years ago in *From First*

*Date to Chosen Mate* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977, ix+137 pp. \$5.95). This perennial gift for the Mormon kid on his/her pubescent birthday has become an enduring best-seller that has now inspired two sequels full of similar pablum. Yorgason, now teamed with colleague Terry R. Baker and sociologist Wesley R. Burr, continues to advise Mormon couples with another of his monotonous "from" books. This edition's Milk the Mormons Award, therefore, goes jointly to *From Two to One* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1981, 141 pp. \$6.95), a thoroughly boring set of homilies about pursuing an equally boring courtship, and *From This Day Forth: The Joy of Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982, 280 pp., index, \$8.50), a wedding-present type book full of surefire ways to turn into Richard and Linda Eyre. While we cannot complain about these authors' qualifications to write on their subject, such volumes must certainly embarrass them among colleagues outside Mormondom.

Three other currently hot Mormon books follow the same formula Yorgason and his cohorts have employed to win their coveted Elsie. As a matter of fact, one of these almost inspired the creation of a new award for Mormon books, perhaps a Pull the Latter-day Leg Award. Essentially copying the counsel contained in *From Two to One*, a collection of essays entitled *Between Ring and Temple: A Handbook for Engaged L.D.S. Couples (and others who need a review)* (Salt Lake City: Olympus Publishing Company, 1981, 171 pp., bibliography, \$7.95) contains perhaps the funniest passage in a supposedly serious book in all of modern literature. In the midst of an essay about what to expect from sex, we read:

One partner, at that moment of tender sharing, may nibble excitedly at the ear lobe of the other. The thoughts of the "nibblee" may run something like this. "How silly and distracting and even painful is this nibbling at my ear lobe." From the "nibbler" another thought pattern. "Why isn't my partner experiencing even greater excitement. My room-

mate told me there was nothing more sexually exciting than ear lobe nibbling." (p. 90)

All potential nibblees (hopefully unrelated to Hugh) will anxiously devour the rest of this book looking for equally delightful tidbits of advice to help their coming marriages wax strong.

Unfortunately, the other two books of similar genre are funny only in their silliness and insipidity. Clark Swain, *Enriching Your Marriage: A Tune-Up for Partners in Love* (Bountiful: Horizon Publishers, 1982, 188 pp., biblio. \$7.95), brings all of his skill as a marriage counselor and family life professor at Boise State to waste as he tries to satisfy the Mormon book market's apparently insatiable appetite for perpetual rehash. From front to back, Swain's book contains not one original nor really meaningful bit of insight into the salvation of the troubled American marriage. Reading his book is analogous to taking sugar pills for an imagined ailment. If your marriage is actually healthy, it may feel better for your having read Swain's book, but if it is really in any sort of trouble, go see Swain in person and forget his book. To illustrate the point, save two dollars and buy instead *Man and Woman, Joy in Oneness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982, 50 pp., index, \$5.95) by a California housewife named Ester Rasband and get basically the same stuff minus the pretention.

A happy sequel (for a change) in the Mormon publishing game is Mina S. Coletti and Roberta Kling Giese, *Family Idea Book 2* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982, vii+266 pp., index, \$5.95), a follow-up volume to their highly successful handbook for family harmony and good times. Colletti and Giese once again display a genius for coming up with ideas to make modern family life not only less stressful but also a great deal of fun. They make no pseudo-serious claims for family panaceas, although following their suggestions ought nevertheless to guarantee that things will get a lot better even in the shakiest of families.

If all else fails in the modern family adventure, Mormon parents can encourage the kids to follow the example of one of the celebrities in William T. Black's second book on *Mormon Athletes* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1982, xviii+279 pp., index, illus. \$7.95). Here we get short bios of a few dozen LDS jocks of both genders (although Tina Gunn is about the only female of any real note included). Danny White, Dick Motta, Merlin Olsen, Don Fullmer, and Doug Padilla are representative of the athletes Black surveys. The only problem with this sort of stuff comes from these demigods' humanity. What happens to the Mormon kid who has decided to worship good old Father Murphy and then discovers that big Merlin lost his devotion to Mormonism somewhere between Logan and Hollywood? Hero worship remains an important and perhaps salutary part of American life, but when heroes must fit religious prescriptions, a certain amount of danger ensues for the worshipper.

Even the scholarly world suffers from incurable hero worship. Witness Pulitzer Prize winner Merlo J. Pusey who after several years of research produced *Builders of the Kingdom: George A. Smith, John Henry Smith, George Albert Smith* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1981, xiv+378 pp., index, illus. \$10.95). One of the self-proclaimed toughest reviewers on the scene (myself) got all the way through the book before discovering that even Pusey-class writers fall victim to the enticements available in doing family history. (*Utah Historical Quarterly*, Fall 1982, pp. 385-87). Perhaps a family-authorized biography provides a fiscal salvation that society would not or could not give its scholars. Perhaps Eyre, Yorgason and Swain deserve more credit than we gave them. Perhaps the rest of us, who snootily seek meaning and substance in Mormon literature, are the real fools, inasmuch as we earn little for our labors. But it is comforting to believe that . . . we have sufficient for our needs.

## Not Without Pain

*From Housewife to Heretic: One Woman's Struggle for Equal Rights and Her Excommunication from the Mormon Church*, by Sonia Johnson (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 406 pp. \$14.95.

Reviewed by Irene M. Bates, mother education teacher in the Pacific Palisades Relief Society, Social Services coordinator in Santa Monica Stake, and currently researching a book on patriarchs to the Church.

SONIA JOHNSON's highly literate account of her journey *From Housewife to Heretic* is so involving the book is hard to put down, and for this reader at least left a heartache that lingered long after finishing her story. More than a record of the author's activities and conflicts in the campaign for

women's rights as a member of the Mormon Church, this is an inside view of one woman's loss of innocence. Sonia Johnson is far from unique in facing that experience, often the price of maturity, but few of us could trace it with her skill and passion or with the kind of clarity afforded by her new and "purer" cause. It is compelling drama with touches of wry humor and an abundance of absorbing detail which enriches and validates the author's observations. But this is Sonia Johnson's story, and she forces her readers to remember that in her uncompromising judgments.

The real strength of the book lies in the quality and vividness of expression which allow the reader access to the author's deepest feelings and insights. At times the book is emotionally devastating. Its flaws