

riverside baptismal service, complete with the singing of hymn number 196, "We Thank Thee O God for a Prophet" (in English), and the immersion of the happy couple (albeit without the validating baptismal prayers). Rolf cheerfully notes that he can now call his wife "sister." But their happiness is short lived; Mormonism only temporarily retards their decline, which finds its nadir in Rolf's suicide.

The young widow is still attractive, in spite of her five children, and she finds a suitable mate in a fellow Mormon. The two are married, and she emigrates with him to America. The final scenes of the film show snapshots of an idealistic family life in a utopian setting, but the viewer suspects that it is only the beginning of a second decline.

*Mahlzeiten* can be judged from at least two viewpoints, an artistic one and a pragmatic one. Artistically the film is on firm footing. It is certainly one of the best productions currently being shown in Germany, which does not guarantee it immortality, but which does set it apart from the trivial works to which movie goers are so frequently subjected on both sides of the Atlantic. Pragmatically, the film probably neither harms nor enhances the Church's image in Germany. Rolf's religious conversion in no way accelerates his decline, but many German Saints will object to the idea that their Church attracts the kind of people portrayed in the film,<sup>3</sup> and some Mormon viewers may feel that the sanctity of religious conversion is violated by its inclusion in a profane motion picture. I believe, however, that most spectators will agree that Reitz uses the Mormon scenes honestly and artistically. Religion unfortunately does not always supply the solutions to all of life's problems. I found in *Mahlzeiten* a sensitive, meaningful study of one family's unsuccessful search for fulfillment.

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<sup>3</sup>Deviant or criminal behavior by members of "sects" is given wide publicity in Germany's sensationalistic press. Typical is the coverage given a thirteen-year-old Mormon girl's suicide by *Bild-Zeitung* (Oct. 14, 1965), Germany's most popular newspaper. *Bild*, which enjoys a daily circulation of over four million copies, laid the blame for the girl's death at the feet of her father, who allegedly spent too much time at church and too little at home.

## MORMON LIVES

*Davis Bitton*

*Melvin J. Ballard: Crusader for Righteousness.* (No author given.) Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1966. 293 pp. \$3.50

*B. H. Roberts: A Biography.* By Robert H. Malan. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1966. xii + 151 pp. \$2.95. David Bitton, who teaches European history at the University of Utah, has an avid interest in Mormon history and has published in this area in *Dialogue*.

Among Mormon leaders of the past generation few were as charismatic as Melvin J. Ballard and B. H. Roberts. Both, in different ways, were significant in the shaping of twentieth-century Mormonism. Both deserve solid biographies. Unfortunately, the recent works which treat the lives of these two General Authorities do not fill the need. In fact, they perpetuate, at least to some extent, the superficiality which we have come to expect of Mormon biography.

*Melvin J. Ballard: Crusader for Righteousness* is divided into two parts. The first part, about one hundred pages in length, narrates the main events of Ballard's life, with the emphasis on his activities as a churchman. Practically nothing will be found here of his childhood experiences, his personal prejudices, his professional or family life. Even his adult life receives far from comprehensive treatment. The ten or eleven years between his return from his first mission and his subsequent call as mission president, for example, are jumped over in a single page.

Substantial excerpts are included from family journals and reminiscences, including the missionary diary of Ballard himself. Although some of these excerpts provide revealing glimpses, it is regrettable that the editorial procedure is not described and that the location of the primary documents is not indicated. Were the papers quoted precisely as written? Or were spelling errors and the like "corrected"? Are ellipses carefully indicated? In the absence of rudimentary documentation these passages drawn from unpublished sources can be used only with serious reservation.

Even the authorship and sponsorship of the biography, which it is the function of the title page and preface to describe, are far from clear. Seemingly, the work was sponsored by the Ballard family, but specific responsibility for selection and editing is not specified. The actual writing of the narrative chapters was apparently that of Bryant S. Hinckley, whose earlier work on Ballard, published in 1949, is now warmed over and preserved.

Samples of the style, which may give a good indication of the level of treatment, include the following: "However hard the trial, her courage was undaunted, her zeal undampened, her faith unruffled" (p. 23). "Thus did the Master Potter prepare the mold for the Melvin clay" (p. 26). "In due course that friendship was set on fire by the magic torch of love, and 'Melvin and Martha' became an eternal alliteration" (p. 33). The subject of this biography seldom stands forth as a flesh-and-blood individual. He passes, as in a medieval morality play, through the trials and tribulations of this vale of tears, with head held high and shoulder to the wheel, onward and upward into the great beyond.

The second part of the book is made up of sermons by Elder Ballard. These include the well-known "Three Degrees of Glory" and "God's Plan of Redemption." Also of interest is "The Sacramental Covenant," one of the few Mormon treatments of sacramental theology. Although isolated passages of interest can be found in the other sermons, most of them scarcely deserve to be immortalized in stone. It is hard to see what is gained, for example, by reprinting "Book of Mormon Evidences," in which pseudo-archaeology from popular magazines is purveyed as "proof" of the modern scripture. Also detracting from the value of this part of the book is the failure to indicate the date of delivery, the place or occasion, and the location of the original version of all of the sermons.

B. H. Roberts is of more historical significance than Ballard. He served twice as long as a General Authority. His own participation in plural marriage gave him the acute personal experience of spanning two quite different generations of Mormon history. And among Mormon leaders his versatility was un-

paralleled. He played an important role in missionary work, in journalism, in politics, in the office of the Church Historian, in the Y.M.M.I.A., and in the First Council of Seventy. To understand B. H. Roberts in the richness and complexity of his life development is to understand a good deal about modern Mormonism's "coming of age."

Since an adequate life of Roberts would require several years of intensive research, access to primary sources apparently not yet available, and probably at least 500 printed pages, it can come as no surprise that Malan fails to do justice to his subject. Perhaps we should be grateful for a work of 128 pages which at least will make Roberts better known to the limited reading public within the marketing range of Salt Lake City publishers. But how can one commend a book marred by shoddy proofreading, errors of fact, minor inconsistencies, and huge gaps made inevitable by the unfortunate topical organization? Nor is the bibliography reassuring. Several key items are omitted, and the excellent idea of including a listing of Roberts's own writings is vitiated by the failure to give adequate information on editions.

What one misses, above all, in this work is any real penetration. The narrative glides along with practically no mention of conflict, struggle, or development. Roberts was a fighter, and he was capable of growth. Yet, of many conflicts which made up his life Malan gives only a few attenuated glimpses. It is not in this book that we can relive, in the heightened emotional atmosphere of their times, the exciting experiences of Roberts's insistent efforts to obtain a hearing at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, of his temporary refusal to sign the "political manifesto" of 1896, or of his election to Congress in 1898 and the subsequent hearings which led to denying him his seat on grounds of polygamy. Not a word is heard of his doctrinal views, some of which were rather exotic. And not a word of the "parallel" between the Book of Mormon and Ethan Smith's *Views of the Hebrews* which Roberts prepared towards the end of his life. This document, which has been known about for many years, is published by at least one group as a means of embarrassing the Church. It is inconceivable that a serious study of Roberts should simply ignore it.

Until the appearance of a competent full-length life of Roberts, which we can hope will avoid the quicksands of a "sponsored" biography, Malan's book can be of some help, if used with caution, as a guide to basic facts. Meanwhile, the most insightful interpretation of Roberts's place in Mormon history is the essay by Sterling McMurrin [reprinted in this issue of *Dialogue*, p. 141] introducing the handsome reprint of Roberts's *Joseph Smith, Prophet-Teacher*, which, in a welcome change from Relief Society bazaars and ward suppers, has been recently produced as a building fund project by the Deseret Club of Princeton University.

It is to be expected, naturally, that the "faith-promoting" function should loom large in biographies of spiritual leaders. But there is always the danger that the biographer who regards this as his primary task will simply leave out events which complicate the picture. The medieval writer of saints' lives, as Père Delahaye has said, was "not bound to draw a portrait of which every detail is in precise accordance with the truth," but was "free to omit those