

That is the reason Mormons will love this poetry and the reason it is different from the poetry of the world and the reason it is Mormon Art and the reason it is desperately cogent for our world right now—because the key of knowledge is not just *a* truth, nor just another truth, but *the* critical truth for us and the answer to the philosophical, political, social, and personal dilemma of our times, and it is the inner light and warm glow at the heart of Mormonism which illuminates all the other facets of the Gospel without which light these other facets, all those beliefs which have counterparts in other churches, become dead forms without power to save man because the Spirit is missing, and without this light factions appear in the Church, but with it we will have monolithic solidarity until it rolls forth to fill the whole earth.



AN EXPERIMENT IN MORMON PUBLISHING

Helen Hinckley

The Valley of Tomorrow. By Gordon T. Allred. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, 243 pp. \$3.50.

Strangers on Earth. By Sara and Irene Black. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1966, 361 pp. \$4.95. Helen Hinckley (Jones), has been widely published in the United States and Canada as well as in Church magazines and has been translated into such unlikely languages as Duth, Turkish, Swahili, and Urdu. She is a teacher of "Writing for Publication" at Pasadena City College and Director of Writers' Week in Pasadena.

The publishers of *The Valley of Tomorrow* and *Strangers on Earth* are moving to fill a very real need for suitable reading for young adults. Most books for younger readers are appropriate for all children, including Mormons. But when readers get into high school, beyond the horse story stage, beyond the age when writers, publishers, teachers and librarians feel a definite responsibility for the moral education of the reader, there has been little to offer the compulsive bookworm. In the days of Gene Stratton Porter and Grace S. Richmond any adult novel on the shelf was appropriate reading for this age level. This has changed completely. The emphasis of Latter-day Saint publishers has been upon instructional and study materials; so called "nonbooks"—collections, anthologies, commentaries, sermons—have poured from our presses. It is a reason for cheering that both Bookcraft and Deseret Book Company have recognized the need for books that may be read for enjoyment.

When Marvin Wallin of Bookcraft decided to do something about publish-

ing material for the high school age reader he commissioned Gordon Allred to write a book which would be “realistic, believable, positive, wholesome, faith promoting and testimony building.” If anyone could write such a book it would be Mr. Allred, who is a devoted Latter-day Saint and a gifted writer. Mr. Wallin distributed copies of *Valley of Tomorrow* to L.D.S. seminaries, together with a questionnaire for each reader. Some responses were “didn’t seem possible or real,” “stories like this are always being told but never seem to happen to a close friend . . . who can testify and verify similar incidents,” “It seems to be just another story the author has twisted to fit his purposes,” and “too pat”; but the overwhelming majority of both young readers and seminary teachers found that they could identify with Kelly and his problems, that the story was realistic, that it was faith promoting, and that they were better for having read the book. Although sixteen-year-old Kristine Haynes of Yuba City, California, thought the book would make dull reading for non-Mormons, she wrote, “When his [Kelly’s] bishopric went up into the mountains to pray it made me feel the wonderful power of fasting and prayer. I specially liked the Bishop; he is the kind of man I expect a Bishop to be. He was my favorite person in the book.”

But a reviewer must ask whether or not writing with such clearly defined purposes can produce excellence in literature. Compare *Valley of Tomorrow* with Irene Hunt’s *Up a Road Slowly*, last year’s Newbery Award book, and the difference between a teaching instrument and a book of high literary quality becomes apparent. It is not the fault of the author that the book seems contrived, pat, preachy. Gordon Allred is a very fine writer, indeed, whose skill, evident in his excellent outdoor stories, is apparent in parts of this book. Latter-day Saint novelists must ask themselves if they can set themselves a “lesson”—in this book Mr. Allred has a whole host of “lessons”—illustrate the lesson with character and plot, and still come up with a book that is comparable in literary excellence with the books the young people are reading from the high school reading lists. Excellent books are expected to make “moral declarations”; for example, Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* or Conrad’s *Lord Jim* (both on high school lists), but specific teaching of doctrine is something else.

A passage from Gustave Flaubert’s *Intimate Notebook* is relevant to Mr. Allred’s dilemma in writing his book.

If you begin your book telling yourself: it must prove this or that, the reader must come away from it religious, or ungodly, or erotic—you will write a bad book, because in composing it you have offended against truth, distorted the facts. Ideas flow spontaneously, following an inevitable, natural course. If, for any purpose whatever, you try to make them take a direction that isn’t their own, everything is wrong. You must let characters limn themselves according to their own logic; action must develop of itself. Everything must grow freely, and you must do no forcing in one direction or another.

Strangers on Earth is an historical novel about a time and a place of which we know so little that the Latter-day Saint reader will be intrigued immediately—the colony of Cave Valley in Old Mexico just before and during the time of

Pancho Villa. Action and suspense are inherent in the material. But the reader wishes over and over again that the book was Sara Hancock Black's memoirs rather than a novel. (Sara Black was born in Cave Valley in 1893 and is evidently Faith Ann of the story.)

It takes tremendous skill to turn memoirs into fiction. The writer, bound by his "memories," isn't free to let the story build itself, follow its own course. Too frequently it is apparent that the plot is contrived and superimposed upon the material, too frequently personal or family interest in certain incidents, in certain attitudes, in certain people, keeps the author from being selective in character and detail. In *Strangers on Earth* the hero, David, doesn't enter the story until chapter eight and then in an episode which could have been used as a flash-back in a much later chapter. Perhaps the authors thought of Faith Ann's parents as the principal characters of the book and wanted to trace them from their coming to the Valley to their being expelled. This organization would have been perfect for memoirs but not for a novel since Joel and his courageous wife are background characters after the real story begins. All through the book there are incidents which have had special meaning for the Hancock family, one supposes, like the attempt on the part of Manuela Trujillo to buy the blond child. These incidents would be suitable for memoirs but they don't lead anywhere in the novel.

In spite of the excellent material, *Strangers on Earth* lacks suspense. Of course Hernandez will "come to realize," of course Stendal left his home under a cloud and will return to justify himself, of course Faith Ann will marry David in spite of the obstacles the authors dangle in the way of this union. The real interest of the story lies in Sara Black's vivid memories of the place and the period. The contrived plot and sub-plots that these memories are bent to serve weaken the impact of historical truth.

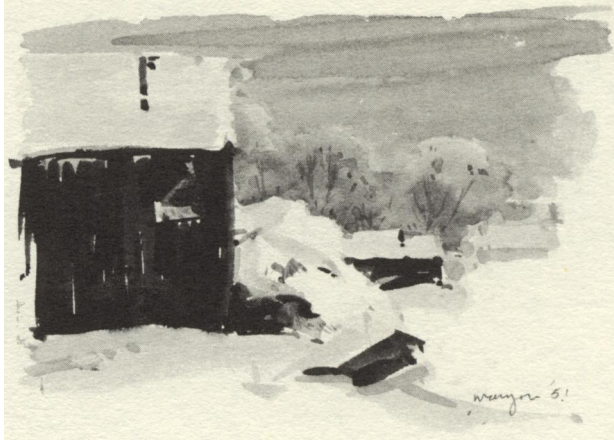
We can all be grateful that before her death Sara Black, with the cooperation of her daughter, wrote this material into a book for us, even though she did not choose the best form for its telling. It is hoped that her notes have been preserved and will be available to students.

We can be grateful, too, to Bookcraft and Deseret Book Company for making a beginning in the much needed area of entertaining books for young people. Should these publishers wish to make an additional contribution toward putting excellent Mormon material into the hands of readers—children, young adults, and adults—they might read carefully all Mormon books brought out by Eastern and West Coast and University publishers, select those that are honest, not sensational, and promote them with all the zeal that they put into the promotion of their own publications. This seems a great deal to ask, probably too much of companies that after all must guard their dividends, but doing this would bring many excellent books to the attention of readers, would encourage our best writers who are now published by national presses to use more Mormon materials, and lessen the risk the Eastern publishers run in publishing non-sensational Mormon material since they could count on Church readership added to the conservative readership they now depend on.

Quite the opposite attitude has been taken in the past, if I may judge from

my own experience. The Deseret Book Company has been most cooperative in handling my books with Iranian backgrounds, but in March when I enquired regarding the sale of my *Over the Mormon Trail* in an Ogden bookstore the head of the department told me that the book wasn't even listed on the Deseret Book Company's distribution list. This is a carefully researched book which was published in Chicago and which has been read by perhaps a hundred thousand boys and girls in school and public libraries throughout the United States and Canada.

Bookcraft and Deseret Book Company have certainly made a start in the right direction. Perhaps it is now up to the readers to applaud this start through support of these ventures.



SHORT NOTICE

Highlights in the Life of President David O. McKay. By Jeanette M. Morrell. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Co., 1966. xiv, 318 pp. \$4.95.

Readers often judge a book by what they expect or hope for rather than by the author's stated objective. The President's sister's objective was "to share with others some highlights in my brother's life as I have viewed it," and this book does just that. Anyone who expects a penetrating biography or a Carl Sandburg style evocation will be disappointed, though one day either would be a marvelous undertaking for a biographer. Instead Jeanette McKay Morrell has selected from the extensive and intensive life of an outstanding man a number of events and highlighted them, for the most part in chronological order.

Some readers may feel that the author's repeated expressions of praise were unnecessary inasmuch as merely recounting the life of President McKay is praise enough. But the book does make a fine contribution in gathering together key events in the life of the Prophet. Much of the material could have been found in the public press by the diligent sleuth but was not readily available for the general reader until now.

Some "highlights" for this reader:

—Quotes from President McKay's personal journals, demonstrating his mastery of the language. (It is known that the President has kept extensive journals, some of the contents of which, it is hoped, will one day be published.)