

is going to be baptized. Bessie's household is piously aflutter over this news, but Dudley (lured over to take the call, apparently) has had it. He respectfully asks them to exclude him from their prayers, and so would anyone.

Most of these pokes at Mormon life strike me as accurate — considered as criticism. The question is whether Scowcroft's basically realistic structure holds up under the burden of so many judgments that would seem to be true only in general. At times he seems so obviously out to "get" his Mormon characters that a double standard seems to be operating in his comedy, a somewhat contradictory point of view. The Mormons come in for a drubbing, but Dudley's bathetic self-pity, Tad's almost unbearable conceit, and April's wasted life are portrayed with indulgent good humor. If the epitome of satire, in Dryden's terms, is "the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place," then Scowcroft might be accused of decapitating his Mormons with a sledgehammer.

The problem is that Scowcroft's Mormons are not "characters" in the sense that, say, April and Tad are characters. His Mormons are too obviously embodiments of the many generalizations "about" Mormonism that lace the book from first to last — some of which I have already quoted. Others include: "The Mormon God is very long-suffering when it comes to listening to prayers"; "Why, when you say *no* to a Mormon, does he always hear *yes*?"; "In the Mormon bed, God is always there"; "the schizophrenic combination of cosmopolitanism and provincialism in Mormon society," etc. As if to compensate for all this footnoting, Dudley is given to say, late in the novel, that "The Mormons aren't the only ones like this"; and Tad replies, "Yes. Isn't it sad?" But if this is true, why all the emphasis on these as *peculiar* Mormon defects in the first place?

On the whole, Scowcroft has written a skillful and often quite witty novel. The troubling thing is that our novelists, both pro and con, still have this tendency to first "explain" what Mormonism is, and then to construct somewhat wooden characters to fit the generalizations. In *The Ordeal of Dudley Dean*, the Mormons must dance to the tune of the footnotes, and the result is a slightly incongruous comic structure in which Mormonism is only the dear, demented backdrop against which the meaningful action takes place.

REFLECTIONS ON *THE LION OF THE LORD*

Klaus Hansen

The Lion of the Lord: A Biography of Brigham Young. By Stanley P. Hirshson. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969. xx + 391 pp. + xxvi. \$8.95. Klaus Hansen teaches history at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. He is the author of "*Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty*." Although we reviewed Mr. Hirshson's book in our last issue, we feel Professor Hansen's review explores important questions about the nature of Mormon historiography not covered by earlier reviewers.

Not many years after Voltaire delivered himself of his much maligned observation that history is a pack of tricks we play on the dead, historians

began to attempt to prove him wrong by telling us about the past, in the words of the eminent "scientific" historian Leopold von Ranke, "as it actually happened." In order to achieve this high goal they have demanded, with increasing success, the opening of archives of governments, churches, and other organizations traditionally closed to them because of the skeletons in the institutional closets or the continuing demand for the promotion of historical myths. The apogee of this almost naive faith in the power of the historical record came with the Bolshevik revolution, when the Russians opened up their archives under the assumption that the truth was more potent than the sword. And yet it is precisely the Russian experience which has dampened the historical profession in its optimism regarding the eradication of historical legerdemain, for the historiography of few modern countries can stand as a more blatant monument to the correctness of Voltaire's cynicism.

Although the historians of the "free world" have severely condemned Soviet historiography, they have also become increasingly aware that the elimination of conscious or unconscious bias can be a knotty problem in the reconstruction of the past of any society. Historians of Mormonism might well reflect on this lesson as their demands for a policy of easier access to the Church Historian's Office are meeting with increasing success. Although such a change is of course encouraging to students of Mormon history, they should restrain their enthusiasm by keeping in mind that whether they like it or not, their image of the past is perhaps as much a result of the historian's point of view as of his sources. Stanley Hirshson's *The Lion of the Lord* provides a striking example of this caveat.

Most reviewers have made a great fuss over Hirshson's failure to consult the extensive holding of the Church Historian's Office. For example, in his by now famous review in *BYU Studies*, Leonard Arrington reveals a masterly knowledge of the materials Hirshson has missed. And yet, I believe, it may be possible to grant Hirshson extenuating circumstances. In spite of the recent thaw at the Church Historian's Office, much of the old conservatism still lingers, and I am inclined to give at least some credence to Hirshson's statement that "at the Mormon Church Historian's Office in Salt Lake City, . . . I received no help or encouragement. . . ."

An explanation, of course, is not necessarily an excuse. Still, I find Hirshson's cavalier and even disingenuous *reasons*, which are of course intended to anticipate and defuse the charges laid against him, far more shocking than his actual failure to consult the sources that he should have. Having, perhaps too easily, given up on the "help or encouragement" of the Church Historian's Office, Hirshson went the fox one better by deciding not that grapes were too sour but, rather, the figment of other people's imaginations. Previous investigators of the life of Brigham Young, he claims, "have scoured in the wrong places. The key to understanding him is not in the Rocky Mountains but in the Midwest and along the Atlantic Coast. . . ." The logic and the evidence he marshals for this assertion provide a glimpse of some of the methodological deficiencies that mar the volume as a whole: "It is my

contention and, surprisingly enough, that of several of the Mormon scholars to whom I have talked, that the widely circulated stories of secret materials in possession of the Mormon church are, if not false, exaggerations. The specialized studies by those who have had free rein in the historian's office — *most of them were church officials* [my italics] — support this view, for in my opinion they offer nothing startling." Professor Hirshson, of course, isn't naive enough to believe that if the Church has indeed secrets to hide its officials would *deliberately* publicize them, and that therefore their failure to do so is *unqualified* evidence that such sources don't exist. But he does believe that under special circumstances the argument from silence is inadvertent proof of his assertion. If "the church archives in Salt Lake City contain secret materials," he reasons, Joseph F. Smith, Jr., would have used them in his *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City, 1905), "which is based on readily available data." Even if for the sake of argument I would accept the debatable — not to say dubious — claim that President Smith behaved according to Hirshson's logic, is Hirshson indeed justified in elevating one very specific instance to a general principle? Clearly, Hirshson is violating here a very elementary rule of historical evidence.

Furthermore, Hirshson's reasoning implies a very narrow definition of the term "secret materials." I am of course, one of those who have contended that the Church Historian's Office as well as other Church depositories may well contain important secret documents whose release might have a profound effect on Mormon historiography if not on Mormon history. The possible, even probable, existence of further records of the Council of Fifty and the political Kingdom of God — beyond those to which I inadvertently gained access — is perhaps the most obvious example. Still, I am inclined to agree with Hirshson that it is possible to exaggerate the number and significance of such documents, at least according to his narrow definition. If I, as a historian, delight in a scoop of secret documents as much as any journalist, I also realize that most of my sources consist of rather unglamorous diaries, letter-books, account books, office journals, and so on, which in fact comprise the bulk of the Brigham Young materials in the Church Historian's Office. But certain senior archivists in the Church Historian's Office continue to feel quite as nervous about these materials as about sources that may specifically be labelled secret. If Professor Hirshson has indeed delved into the Mormon past to the extent that he implies he has, he should know that the Church like almost any other institution has attempted to create a deliberately propagandistic version of its own past, a version that can be sustained more easily by keeping evidence secret or by "editing" — in conformity with the "official" version — those sources made available to the public. Understandably, a church archivist or historian cannot always anticipate what kind of surprises may be contained even in a seemingly innocent source. But neither can Hirshson.

Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to make too much of Hirshson's failure to consult the Church Historian's Office, or even his failure to use crucial and readily available secondary works and periodicals such as *Dialogue*,

an omission of which he seems unaware since he does not attempt to justify it. Frankly, judging from the use he makes of the materials he has collected, it is doubtful that he would have benefited from the riches of the Church Historian's Office. Ultimately, Hirshson's major flaws are a matter of point of view and of methodology. The puzzling fact is that Hirshson fails to make adequate use of his extensive research. Having spent endless hours in the Newspaper Annex of the New York Public Library and the vast holdings of bound newspapers in the New Jersey Historical Society, Hirshson has amassed an impressive and unprecedented number of journalistic accounts about the Mormons "in the files of the . . . Eastern newspapers prosperous and wise enough to keep correspondents in Utah, to send their best reporters to Salt Lake City . . . , and to interview leading Mormons who came east." That kind of material, in Hirshson's hands, unfortunately leads to an incredible confusion between belief and fact. Many Gentiles *believed* that Brigham Young was a murderer, or a thief, or a swindler, or a liar, or anything else the imagination can supply — just as the Saints believed him to be the very pillar of rectitude, honesty, charitableness, and so on. But what was the real Brigham like? The following illustration of the misuse of historical evidence, a passage taken from the celebrated Richard T. Burton's *The City of the Saints*, is but one of numerous examples revealing that this distinction was lost on Hirshson:

It is believed by Mormons, as well as Gentiles, that Mr. Brigham Young has, in the states, newspaper spies and influential political friends, who are attached to him, not only by the ties of business and the natural respect for a wealthy man, but by the strong bond of a regular stipend. And such is their reliance upon dodgery — which, *if it really exists* [my italics], is by no means honorable to the public morality of the Gentiles — that they deride the idea of a combined movement from Washington ever being made against them.

Then comes Hirshson's clincher: "Young used the tithe well." As Leonard Arrington said, "This biography is based on hearsay." Arrington has counted "498 footnote references to New York City newspapers and 101 references to other eastern newspapers," and pointedly suggests that by way of analogy, perhaps "the key to understanding Robert E. Lee is not in Virginia, but in the Yankee correspondents' reports about him in the Big City newspapers."

It seems to me, however, that Hirshson's sources might have provided the foundation for an imaginative effort of a very different kind. If the study of symbol and myth has become perhaps an overworked field in certain areas of American studies, this cannot be said in regard to Mormonism, and much can still be added to the pioneering contributions of Leonard Arrington, John Haupt, Kenneth Hunsaker, and D. L. Ashliman. What a singular opportunity for Hirshson to have said something significant not just about Brigham Young, but about those who responded to him — to have written a more sophisticated companion piece to Preston Nibley's study, which is essentially a catalogue of the image of Brigham Young in the *Mormon* mind.

But it is perhaps unfair to ignore the rule that the reviewer should not stray beyond the bounds set by the intentions of the author. Even by these limited standards, however, Hirshson does not come off very well. Claiming to be "one of the few non-Mormons of this century to deal seriously with Young's religion," he has adopted a tone of almost mocking condescension, standing in sharp contrast to those non-Mormon scholars like Thomas F. O'Dea, P.A.M. Taylor, Mario DePillis, and Jan Shipps, whose serious intent — obvious in the work itself — needs no reaffirmation in introductions. If Mr. Hirshson has read his anti-Mormon literature he cannot have missed the almost obligatory professions of serious and scholarly intent gracing the prefaces of even the most blatant diatribes and exposés. But, perhaps, it is possible to quibble too much about tone, "favorable" image, and other subjective terms.

On a more objective level, Hirshson claims, "in contrast to . . . [his] predecessors," to "have tried to present Young's early years in perspective and [to] have emphasized his Western experiences, which fully illustrate his powers of leadership. This later period shows that as perhaps no other American of his time Young covered numerous fields: religion, government, exploration, history, business, and sociology." Although I am inclined to agree with Hirshson's assessment, I want him to show me precisely how he arrived at these conclusions. That, after all, is what a biography is largely about. But in view of the niggardly manner in which Hirshson supports these assertions, it appears that his own estimation of Young may well be as much a matter of faith as that of any uncritical Latter-day Saint.

Because of Hirshson's heavy emphasis on Brigham's domestic affairs and the joys and trials of polygamy — and that in a most non-analytical and strongly anecdotal manner — it appears that the real intent of the author was to provide, behind a scholarly veneer, an entertaining and readable book that sells. Now, I do not share the opinion of those who — perhaps judging from their own prose — believe that history in order to be scholarly has to be unreadable and who, conversely, follow the corollary that therefore books like Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History* cannot be good history because of their brilliant style. I can only applaud if Hirshson may well have tried to do for Brigham Young what Mrs. Brodie did for Joseph Smith. But unfortunately Professor Hirshson has not yet learned that it takes more than clever phrases and a racy topic to write a lively book. As a result, Hirshson's book is not only poor history, but incredibly dull. If, as a reviewer, I had not had the obligation to read it to the bitter end, I don't believe I could have finished it for boredom.

Lesser sins are perhaps the inevitable result of a treacherous topic that can easily lure the unwary into traps of theology, doctrine, and folklore — though some non-Mormon scholars have successfully avoided these. Irony becomes poetic justice when Hirshson lectures William Mulder on his failure to understand correctly the term "Zion," claiming that the author of the classic account of Scandinavian immigration to Utah "mistitled the book *Homeward to Zion*." Several such gaffes reveal that the author is less than

at home in Mormon culture.

Finally, I wish to pick one nit because it had a kind of cumulative, annoying effect on me. The footnotes contain frequent references to the "Beinicke [sic] Library," though in one notable exception the name of the donors of the famous rare book library at Yale is spelled correctly.

By way of a postscript, it may be appropriate to amplify further on some of the questions Hirshson's book has raised explicitly and implicitly with regard to the Church Historian's Office in particular and the enterprise of Mormon history in general.

Every so often I am asked if my research into Mormon history hasn't strengthened my testimony — a rhetorical question which I am generally expected to answer with a resounding *yes*. My questioners, of course, assume either that the Church has no skeletons to hide or that, in the unlikely event that they do, it would be much better to exhibit them in public. I suppose not a few Mormons would be taken aback by Joseph Smith's remark to Brigham Young that "If I were to reveal to this people what the Lord has revealed to me, there is not a man or a woman that would stay with me." A historian who would make it his business to juxtapose myth and reality in Mormon history might not expect results quite that dramatic, yet the fact is that an unvarnished version of the history of the Church that lets the chips fall where they may is potential dynamite. If historians, therefore, do not necessarily agree with the still relatively conservative and restrictive policies of the Church Historian's Office they should at least understand that these proceed from an internal logic.

That logic, of course, is not without its own paradox, for those who believe that access to the sources of the Church Historian's Office ought to be restricted operate on the assumption that people tend to react rationally and predictably. But if in the minds of some people apostasy might well be a rational response to an unvarnished history of Mormonism, Mormons, of all people, ought to remind themselves that religion is not based primarily on reason or logic. To a professional historian, for example, the recent translation of the Joseph Smith papyri may well represent the potentially most damaging case against Mormonism since its foundation. Yet the "Powers That Be" at the Church Historian's Office should take comfort in the fact that the almost total lack of response to this translation is an uncanny proof of Frank Kermode's observation that even the most devastating act of disconfirmation will have no effect whatever on true believers. Perhaps an even more telling response is that of the "liberals," or cultural Mormons. After the Joseph Smith papyri affair, one might well have expected a mass exodus of these people from the Church. Yet none has occurred. Why? Because cultural Mormons, of course, do not believe in the historical authenticity of the Mormon scriptures in the first place. So there is nothing to disconfirm.

Therefore, the Church Historian's Office could relax completely and allow unlimited access to its holdings without fear of potential repercussions from either orthodox or cultural Mormons. If as a historian I would ap-

plaud such a policy I deplore the *reasons* that make it possible, for I believe that it merely highlights the melancholy fact that too many Mormons, whether "orthodox" or "liberal," regard their history as irrelevant. It is perhaps a supreme irony, then, that the implications of the old restrictive policy of the Church Historian's Office reveal the members of that organization — much maligned by certain professional historians — as upholders of a waning belief in the power of history, although, admittedly, it was they who, in the late fifties and early sixties, presented obstacles rather more formidable than those faced by Hirshson to those very scholars who inaugurated the "new" Mormon history. To some degree, Hirshson's failure must be measured against the work of these historians. In the strong reaction to *The Lion of the Lord* I see another auspicious sign that for the future of Mormon history, Voltaire's cynicism may not be justified.