

Reviews

Edited by Edward Geary

THE FARM BOY AND THE ANGEL

Leonard Arrington

The Farm Boy and the Angel. By Carl Carmer. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1970, 237 pp. \$5.95. Leonard Arrington, a distinguished Mormon historian, is a professor of economics and history at Utah State University.

Readers of *Dialogue* who have been searching for a sympathetic, readable, and reasonably accurate introduction to Mormonism to present to their non-Mormon friends may well consider Carl Carmer's *The Farm Boy and the Angel*. This appreciation of "The Mormon Vision and the Winning of the West," parts of which previously appeared in *American Heritage*, can be easily read in an evening and the tone is neither syrupy nor disdainful. The narrative — or, more properly, the panorama — spotlights episodes and incidents that have inherent dramatic power; Mormon history flashes by at an exhilarating pace.

The earlier chapters, which describe Joseph Smith's First Vision, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the organization of the Church, the conflicts in Missouri, and the assassination of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, touch these familiar incidents with new suspense. The latter portion of the book, which treats the Mormon trail, the early days in the Salt Lake Valley, the matter of polygamy, and the Church today, is less successful, but it still contains vivid "local color," some well-placed anecdotes and quotations, and some original description.

Latter-day Saint scholars will find nothing "new" in the book, either in the presentation of fact or by way of interpretation. The author is a distinguished poet, lecturer, and folklorist and does not pretend to convey the complexities and intricate details of the Mormon experience. (Bibliographers

would classify Carmer as a friendly non-Mormon.) Yet the text is a masterful literary evocation of the moods and emotions of Mormon history. For example, as the sad and forlorn little procession, carrying the bodies of Joseph and Hyrum, approached Nauvoo in late June 1844, it encountered a heavy and intolerable sound: "The sound was a composite of measureless cries of sorrow. Swelling and receding, it was a vast ululation of lament" (p. 122).

Carmer's description of the inherent tragedy in many early Mormon experiences, and his attempt to take Joseph quite seriously, causes the Prophet to be portrayed too solemnly. Joseph the frolicsome — Joseph the light-hearted friend of backwoods farmers and vagabonds — Joseph the exultant playmate of children — seldom makes an appearance.

The Farm Boy and the Angel concludes with a section "from the Author's Notebook," which contains some examples of pioneer vocabulary, folk expressions and idioms, specimens of Mormon humor, popular pioneer medical remedies, and Mormon proverbs and aphorisms. A new one to this reviewer was the complaint of a down-and-outer that a successful man needs three wives — two to beg and one to sew sacks!

A POVERTY OF INVENTION: A REVIEW OF *SING WITH ME*

Ruth Stanfield Rees

Sing With Me: Songs for Children, The General Church Music Committee. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co. \$2.95. Ruth Stanfield Rees, the mother of four children, is working on a Ph.D. in musicology and participates in many aspects of the church music program.

*"If there is anything virtuous, lovely,
or of good report or praiseworthy,
we seek after these things."*

—Joseph Smith

*"For . . . the French contrive music in the
newest manner for the new times,
while the English continue to use one
and the same style of composition, which
shows a wretched poverty of invention."*

—Tinctoris (c. 1476)

Like the sacramental prayers, the use of hymns is fixed in the Mormon worship service, and like Scripture, the hymns are used uncritically. But unlike the sacramental prayers or the Scriptures, a great deal of time in our services is devoted to hymns. Therefore, compiling a hymnal is no small matter. The "compleat" hymnal, we expect, would be doctrinally sound and very practical. We would also expect such a hymnal to be virtuous, lovely, of good report and praiseworthy.

Sing With Me, the new songbook for L.D.S. children, is for the most part doctrinally accurate and contains many usable pieces, and in this respect it is a welcome improvement over *The Children Sing*. Some of the new