

has been kind. As we read in that hymn, "Let each man learn to know himself." To us has Providence been kind. Consider all of those things.

(From *Matthew Cowley Speaks* [Salt Lake City, Deseret Book Company, 1954], p. 437; pp. 133-135. Reprinted with permission of the publisher.)

THE MIRACLE OF FORGIVENESS*

Richard H. Cracroft

In *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, Elder Spencer W. Kimball, acting president of the Council of Twelve, has written an often moving, spiritually refreshing, and highly readable book. In attempting this book-length examination of the principle of forgiveness, Elder Kimball seeks "not . . . to entertain," but to entice many to "repent of their sins . . . and to purify and perfect their lives." In twenty-three lucid chapters, he extolls the priceless gift of repentance for a troubled world, a gift of peace to the "anxious, restless, frustrated, perhaps tormented soul." The gift is not a dole, however, and Elder Kimball divides his book into three basic parts which probe the effort necessary in identifying the nature and the guises of sin; understanding the unvarying steps to repentance; and, finally, recognizing and avoiding the allurements which nudge, push, then hurtle a mortal down that well-traveled Broadway. Elder Kimball concludes his work with a discussion of the Church's role in bringing the sinner to his knees and a reminder of God's infinite mercy and joy in sanctioning the transforming miracle.

In developing his ideas, Elder Kimball fortunately transcends the mediocrity which has beset the works of too many Mormon writers who, in their sincere zeal to preach the gospel to a wider congregation, have published poorly edited paste-and-scissors pastiches of their discourses. Such works, bought dutifully by many, but read, one must suspect, by few, too often amount to little more than a rehash of principles on which church members are essentially in agreement; and the active member, finding at least one or two such books in his Christmas stocking, vaguely and perhaps guiltily feels that he has read or heard it all somewhere before. These generally lifeless works likely do not transform as many lives as the more carefully written,

**The Miracle of Forgiveness*. By Spencer W. Kimball. Bookcraft, 1969, xii, 376 pp. \$4.95. Richard H. Cracroft is a member of the Department of English at Brigham Young University.

carefully edited classics of such writers as B. H. Roberts, James E. Talmage, or John A. Widstoe.

Perhaps it is for these reasons that Elder Kimball once determined he would never write a book, doubtless recognizing the responsibility of lending his name and office to any work which might fall short of literary and doctrinal excellence. But *The Miracle of Forgiveness* is no such embarrassment to its author. Elder Kimball has *written* a book, from start to finish, and in planning, organizing and writing this book he has made a respectable and significant contribution — not only to the many who will be comforted and dis comforted by his message, but to modern church literature in general.

Certainly the book has its flaws, but they are minor and infrequent, and are, it would seem, the result of trying too hard rather than not trying hard enough. Too often, for example, Elder Kimball follows the general practice of strengthening his already well-established points with bits and pieces of the writings of such *literati* as Dante, Tagore, Samuel Johnson, and Oliver Wendell Holmes. This piecemeal ladling too often violates not only the author's context but the context of the doctrine being examined: Often the quotation seems grafted on rather than arising naturally from the discussion. And in rendering these quotations, Elder Kimball is often guilty of introducing bits of poetry or quotations with the familiar "somewhere-I've-read" apologies. In most cases, moreover, the passage quoted does not contribute tellingly to Brother Kimball's presentation.

In fact, when Elder Kimball begins to slough off these too-glaring and self-conscious concessions to literature and literary techniques (which he does increasingly as the book progresses) his book soars far beyond the standard products of the Deseret Book-Bookcraft syndrome. When Elder Kimball allows himself to write enthusiastically of his nearly three decades as a member of the Council of Twelve, when he begins to relate a few incidents from the thousands undergone as a respected counselor and admonisher of sinning saints, the book becomes exciting. Wisely keeping his citation of scripture and the writings and discourses of other church leaders to a minimum, Elder Kimball fuses doctrine and experience in the time-honored LDS fashion, and the result is edification and, refreshingly and inadvertantly, entertainment. The book is packed with material such as this anecdote in which he recalls his labors on behalf of an errant young man in Mesa, Arizona:

I found him only a little sorry he had committed adultery but not sure that he wanted to cleanse himself. After long deliberation in which I seemed to make little headway against his rebellious spirit I finally said, "Goodby, Bill, but I warn you, don't break a speed limit, be careful what you eat, take no chances on your life. Be careful in traffic for *you must not die before this matter is cleared up. Don't you dare to die.*" (His italics.)

Although there is a kind of gallows humor here, even the flintiest of sinners would find it difficult to resist such a warning.

Elder Kimball is obligingly personal throughout the book, granting here and there warm and satisfying insights into himself as a human being, insights cherished by Latter-day Saints. For example, he relates at one point how he sharply rapped his forehead on a low-hanging branch while mowing his lawn. He learned his lesson — until the following spring, when he repeated the rap. Comparing his experience to that of the sinner who fails to learn from his wrongdoing, Elder Kimball comments wryly, “He who cannot learn by others’ mistakes is stupid. He who cannot learn by his own mistakes is a fool.” At other times he shows himself as a young boy who “cussess” wayward cows, quarrels with his brothers, and thinks forbidden thoughts — *until* he is moved by the scripture proclaiming that the Lord will judge a man by his secret thoughts and actions. Such admissions and insights are too few, but they lend a warmth and humanity to the book which enhance his message; indeed, the slight smudges on the halo enlarge the man without diminishing the saint.

Throughout, however, Elder Kimball’s message is clear: he, like the Lord, will not tolerate the sin, but he will love the sinner. This gentle but authoritative tone becomes a pattern in his correspondence (from which he quotes frequently), a pattern of practical advice coupled with spirituality. President Kimball clearly feels comfortable in blending the short and the long range to achieve happiness in human relationships. He writes, for example, to a young LDS wife of her marital discord:

When I talked with you, I understood that you had forgiven each other and would start from there to build a beautiful life. Apparently, I was mistaken. All my warnings and pleadings seem to have fallen on deaf ears. . . . I have never been able to feel that you had wholly purged the selfishness from your own soul. . . . The disease [of mutual selfishness] is not cured by the separation or the divorce. . . . The cause must be removed. Being young, both of you are likely to marry again. Each of you is likely to carry into the next marriage all the weaknesses and sins, and errors you have now, unless you repent and transform. And if you will change your life for a new spouse, why not for the present one?

The book cites numerous examples of all kinds of persons entrapped in a variety of sin, and the reader gains new insight into the resiliency of the General Authorities as they counsel, perhaps in the space of one hour, the adulterous High Priest and the innocent missionary; as they counsel the fornicator and, a few minutes later, ponder the prospects of the millennial Kingdom. Elder Kimball tells of an embittered stake president who fell into apostacy because he felt he had been released too early; of the sweet acceptance of Matthias F. Cowley on his being dropped, late in the last century, from the Council of Twelve; of the lady who rejoiced at not being recognized by Elder Kimball, crying, “If you can forget me and my transgressions, I have new hope that my Father in Heaven may forget.” And he tells of

aiding in the reconciliation of two prominent yet feuding Latter-day Saints in the eastern part of the United States. Finally, despairing of bringing the pair to terms, Elder Kimball was moved to recall for them the passage in the Doctrine and Covenants which reads: "he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord. For there remaineth in him the greater sin." The response was immediate:

Shocked, the two men sat up, listened, pondered a minute, then began to yield. This scripture . . . brought them to their knees. Two a.m. and two bitter adversaries were shaking hands, smiling and forgiving and asking forgiveness. Two men were in a meaningful embrace. This hour was holy.

Although Elder Kimball deals with the whole range of sin, including sins of omission, lethargy on the part of church members, and even the sin of being a slothful student, he seems most deeply concerned with the variety of sexual temptations and sins, which, in his experience with members of the Church, seem most devastating. He focuses intensely on masturbation, homosexuality, and premarital and extramarital sexual relationships. He speaks candidly to those involved in such sins and to those who are being or probably will be tempted. On all who have sinned he "frowns," as does the Lord in Edward Taylor's poem, "with a smiling face," offering no slick way to repentance, but assuring all of the efficacy of the miracle of forgiveness to be found at the end of the precarious path. To such, and to all, he offers a penetrating "Test of Conviction," a series of questions by which one may gauge one's own sincerity and his degree of repentance. The questions range from "Do you wish to be forgiven?" to "Have you confessed your total sins?" and, finally, "How much suffering have you endured? Is your guilt swept away?"

Although Brother Kimball denies any "claim to originality," his book is a rich old wine in refreshing new bottles (though he might object to the image). He avoids the patent interpretations and illustrations by showing the application of the time-honored principles in our own day, and he graphically portrays for a sobered reader the modern-day Saints of our own wards and stakes enduring the age-old miseries evoked by the burden of age-old sins. Elder Kimball reminds us that though there may be nothing new under the sun, there is manifold and heartbreaking repetition of the old.

His book is therefore a "gentle invitation" to Latter-day Saints to examine their lives. It is a movingly unpretentious call to repentance from an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, an exhortation couched in controlled and reasonable tones; and his message, clear and simple, reminds each Latter-day Saint, in an age fraught with intra-church and social strain, of the central issue in each of our lives.