

pleasant surprise to most *Dialogue* readers.) Russell F. Ralston, an apostle, believes for example that his church is too provincial. Maurice L. Draper, a member of the First Presidency, in defending his church's position on monogamy, never implies that he is speaking for the Lord or that any disagreement with him is tantamount to heresy. In the long run this attitude will serve the RLDS organization well. So, one hopes, will *Courage*.

James J. Strang and the Amateur Historian

Klaus J. Hansen

The King Strang Story: A Vindication of James J. Strang, the Beaver Island King. By Doyle C. Fitzpatrick. Lansing, Michigan: National Heritage, 1970. xxviii + 289 pp. \$7.95. Klaus J. Hansen, who teaches social and intellectual history at Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, is the author of *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1967).

In the field of Mormon history, perhaps more so than in other areas of historical inquiry, some excellent contributions have been made by "amateurs," as the holders of the Ph.D. are inclined to call those who encroach upon the preserves of the possessors of that sometimes overrated union card. Among the most prominent names that come to mind are Fawn Brodie, Juanita Brooks, Dale Morgan, and Wallace Stegner. But lack of "the degree" is of course no guarantee against the writing of poor history. Doyle Fitzpatrick's *The King Strang Story* is a case in point.

In fact, the book is so bad that my first reaction was that any kind of review, even a critical one, would give it a dignity that it didn't deserve. Yet a *caveat emptor* is clearly indicated. The author has obviously spent a great deal of money on this handsomely produced, extensively illustrated volume. In all fairness, if I am telling prospective buyers not to throw good money after bad, I should give my reasons.

The volume consists of three parts. The first 132 pages are an attempt to narrate briefly the history of James Strang. The second part, titled "Miscellany," consists of "a sampling of Strangite Impostures," [sic] George J. Adams and John C. Bennett, and "a sampling of Strangite defenders," George Miller and Wingfield Watson, plus a list of Beaver Island residents. The third part consists of the author's reviews of Strang's diary, works about Strang and Beaver Island, and Richard Burton's *The City of the Saints*.

The author has announced the purpose of his work in the subtitle, *A Vindication . . .*, and in the preface, where he states that "prior to 'The King Strang Story,' no individual outside the church itself, has deliberately and publicly championed Strang as a man of good quality. . . . The primary purpose of this narrative is to set the record straight."

Mr. Fitzpatrick has gratefully acknowledged the assistance of numerous individuals in his project, among them Governor William G. Milliken of Michigan — who assures us on the dust jacket that the book "is well documented and well written" — though the author hastens to add that if the

book "is a reservoir of worthy information," this is not "the responsibility of those listed in the Acknowledgment." Since the book contains so many errors of fact and interpretation, of grammar and logic, that to discuss them fully would require a book as long as Fitzpatrick's, one hopes that the author is willing to absolve those who assisted him of these as well — which raises the question precisely what it is he is thanking them for.

In an introduction to the first part, the author attempts a brief synopsis of the birth of Mormonism: "On the 'Hill of Cumorah' near Palmyra, New York, began the most controversial period in American religious communal living, now commonly called Mormonism." "The origin of the Mormon Church appears to have been little more than a semi-religious group of six men, the minimum number to obtain a New York charter, described more accurately, a secret society." The author believes that "many who felt Mormonism born of incredulity [*sic*] also felt it developed into fiction from the visionary parents of Joseph Smith." Consistent with the theme of "incredulity," the author asserts that the witnesses of the Book of Mormon "repudiated their testimonial."

These lapses help explain Fitzpatrick's failure to relate the Strangite movement effectively to Mormonism as a whole. Yet a perusal of the Strang Papers at the Beinecke Library of rare books and manuscripts at Yale University suggests that it is as impossible to understand Strang without the larger Mormon context as it is to understand Mormonism as a whole without Strang. Since the author has benefited so little from these indispensable sources, with their informed and sophisticated introduction by Dale Morgan, one wonders why he went to the expense of having them microfilmed.

But judging from the use the author makes of the sources that he does cite, quote, and discuss, it is doubtful that this omission is of great moment. Though he repeatedly insists on the need for a sympathetic re-evaluation of Strang, we learn, in fact, less from him than from those older, essentially sympathetic studies by Milo Quaife (*The Kingdom of Saint James*, New Haven, 1930), and O. W. Riegel (*Crown of Glory*, New Haven, 1935). In fact, Fitzpatrick uncritically cites and quotes these works to such an extent that he undermines his own revisionist intentions.

The most glaring example of the author's inability to use sources critically is the manner in which he handles one of the most important documents that would justify, in fact require, a reinterpretation of Strang. This, of course, is *The Diary of James J. Strang* (East Lansing, Michigan, 1961), as deciphered and edited by Mark A. Strang, a grandson of the Beaver Island prophet. Milo Quaife had published Strang's diary in *The Kingdom of Saint James*, but had been unable to crack the cipher in which Strang had recorded certain passages. Mark Strang was able to provide a key to his grandfather's code, thus giving historians important clues to young James' secret dreams and ambitions. These, however, contradict the image of Strang that Fitzpatrick wants to present to his readers. Like Mark Strang before him, he makes a great deal of a mistranslation in Quaife's edition: "In the last year I have learned all I profess to know. That is, that I am *eager* [my italics] and mankind are frail, and I do not half know that: — nevertheless I shall act upon it for time to come for my own benefit." Mark Strang believed that this error led "later writers to arrive at distorted opinions

of Strang's character." Fitzpatrick agrees: "The correct word '*ignorant*' [my italics] changes the meaning completely and enhances a truer image of Strang. Perhaps this knowledge will alter the thinking of many historians who have failed to research Strang thoroughly."

If the fate of Strang's image hinged on this word alone, then Fitzpatrick would indeed have a case. The irony, of course, is that as a result of the labors of Mark Strang precisely the reverse is true. Lacking access to the coded versions of Strang's diary, Quaife and Riegel made the Beaver Island prophet far less ambitious than he really was. A few quotations from the decoded version, omitted by Fitzpatrick for obvious reasons, will speak for themselves:

"... I have not made more improvement in preparing for my great designs (of revolutionizing governments and countrie[s]) than I have but yet I feel as if I had gained some." "... but the dreams of empire are so thoroughly imprinted on my mind as not to be easily erased." "I ought to have been a member of Assembly or a Brigadier General before this time if I am ever to rival Caesar or Napoleon which I have sworn to."

Ironically, Mr. Fitzpatrick failed to see that an honest acknowledgment of these dreams need not necessarily stand in the way of a "rehabilitation" of Strang. Surely, these were the same kind of dreams that motivated, to some degree, the prophet Joseph Smith. But historians who take Smith seriously need not feel compelled to hide his ambition and his dreams of power. Neither need they hide his bent for the theatrical, which he shared with Strang. Who is to say that a prophet, in nineteenth-century America, didn't need a flair for histrionics? If Joseph had only been the kind of man acceptable to polite society! The wish became the father of the thought, and apologists created an emasculated prophet who never could have accomplished what he did. Fitzpatrick's Strang fits into that same mold.

I have reason to believe that the Strangites (yes, they're still hanging on!) would not be entirely satisfied with Fitzpatrick's image of their prophet, even if the book were professionally more competent. They seem to understand that a "rehabilitation" will have to take into account the existence of the political kingdom of God, which appears to have been another source of embarrassment to Fitzpatrick. Let the reader smile at the desperate vanities of this reviewer. But a few years ago I believe I contributed, if modestly, to helping revive the Strangites. After the publication of a little piece of mine in *Michigan History* in the fall of 1962, under the title "The Making of King Strang: A Re-examination," the editor informed me that the Strangites had inquired into the cost of reprinting a thousand copies. The reason for their interest was that I had dignified King Strang's theatrics — he had himself literally crowned king, with a retinue of nobles, to rule over a political kingdom of God — by pointing out that the man whose successor he claimed to be, Joseph Smith, had done precisely the same thing, though with more secrecy, in Nauvoo. Clearly, Strang's kingdom was far less of an aberration and followed Joseph's much more closely than Utah Mormons had been willing to believe, a fact which gave the small band of Strangite hangers-on a great deal of comfort. Obviously, by hiding or ignoring these crucial facts, Fitzpatrick is working against his own avowed intentions, much like his Mormon apologist counterparts.