

palsy will never become football quarterbacks, and tone deaf students will rarely become virtuoso musicians. Besides, if everyone were committed to denying every other facet of their lives in order to be able to throw a discus 198'8", or design lunar landing components or medical computers, this world would soon lose the variety that makes it enjoyable. On the other hand, there is little danger that most of us are going to over-exert ourselves, and this book's pulsing message of dedication, self-denial and discipline is timely for a permissive generation.

*No More Strangers* has better balance in the selection of respondents and succeeds well in conveying its message. However, there is something almost pathetic in the compulsion felt by a number of these converts to convince the reader of their conversion experience, as if this were seventeenth-century New England, and each of these a Michael Wigglesworth being given a hearing by the Puritan fathers to determine worthiness for admission as a full Church member. This need to feel that they are in fact "no more strangers" is probably better understood by the convert than by those comfortable Saints who trace all of their ancestors back to Nauvoo.

A noticeable defect in the style of *No More Strangers* is the tendency for the editor's introduction to each autobiography to give too much of the respondent's story. This book (and for that matter, *Win If You Will* also) would have been strengthened by having an introduction at the beginning that briefly discussed each informant, followed by the autobiographies presented without editorial comment as separate chapters.

In dwelling on the slight defects of these two works, which are bound to be more noticeable to the hyper-critical reviewer than to the gentle reader, there is the danger of downplaying their quality. Both have a worthwhile message and convey it in a highly interesting manner. Both are sufficiently successful in presenting the experiences of modern day builders of the Kingdom that they will be well received by Church members.

## Joe Hill's Governor

F. ALAN COOMBS

*William Spry: Man of Firmness, Governor of Utah.* By William L. Roper and Leonard J. Arrington. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press for the Utah State Historical Society, 1971. 224 pp. \$6.50.

Let us begin by accentuating the positive, even if it proves impossible to eliminate the negative in discussing William Roper's and Leonard Arrington's biographical study of William Spry, Utah's Governor during the period from 1909 to 1917. The first full-scale study of Spry's life and contribution to the history of the Beehive State, it helps to fill a void that has heretofore existed.

Spry's story is worth re-telling. Born in England in early 1864 of artisan stock, he immigrated to Utah with his parents when he was eleven years old, shortly after the family had converted to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-

day Saints. Young William's formal education ended when he was thirteen as he left school to accept employment as a stable boy for the wealthy Salt Lake City entrepreneur William Jennings. Spry's subsequent rise to prominence clearly followed the outlines of the Horatio Alger tradition. After working as a section hand for the railroad and a "striker" in a blacksmith shop, he was ready to undertake a mission for his church to the Southern States Mission. It was an era when anti-Mormon feeling ran high in the South and mob violence was a constant possibility. Apparently Spry performed his duties with skill and courage, for he was called to assume the position of mission president in 1888. After devoting nearly six years of his early manhood to missionary service, he returned to Utah to settle down.

On July 10, 1890, Spry and his bride, Mary Alice Wrathall, were sealed "for time and all eternity" in a ceremony at the Logan L.D.S. temple. He procured employment at Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution until the Panic of 1893 forced the department store to cut back its labor force. Then, after trying his hand at stockraising, Spry successfully sought his first public office, being elected Tax Collector for Tooele County in 1894. Membership on the Grantsville City Council and the school board followed and in 1903 Tooele County sent him to the State Legislature. After a short term, he was named President of the State Land Board in 1905. By that time he had also been chosen Chairman of the Republican State Committee and was obviously one of the most promising young men in Utah politics. Under the friendly auspices of Senator Reed Smoot and the "Federal Bunch," Spry was appointed United States Marshal for Utah by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906.

It was from that position that William Spry was picked to become the G.O.P. gubernatorial candidate in 1908; the "Federal Bunch" was concerned over the challenge it faced from the American party in the Salt Lake City area and had decided that Spry, already noted as a conciliator, would be a more popular nominee than incumbent Governor John C. Cutler. Elected handily over his opponents in November, Spry commenced a period of eight years as Governor, highlighted by three issues of paramount importance: (1) liquor control, concerning which his firm stand on behalf of local option may finally have cost him his job; (2) the construction of a beautiful new state capitol building; and (3) the "Joe Hill" murder case and execution. But in 1916 he found himself shunted aside by the political powers in his party in a manner strongly reminiscent of their treatment of Governor Cutler. Two years later Spry bid unsuccessfully for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives and was not to return to public office until 1921, when the new Republican President, Warren G. Harding, tapped him to become Commissioner of the General Land Office. Once again he went about his duty with industry and rigorous honesty, notwithstanding the wrongdoing that sometimes infected the highest echelons of the Interior Department. Spry finally fell victim to a paralytic stroke in December, 1928, and died after a second attack the following spring.

This is not a difficult book to read and it is remarkably free from typographical errors. The University of Utah Press is to be complimented for a handsome job of printing and binding. The ample illustrations add to the overall attractiveness of the volume. Unfortunately, a reviewer cannot fully discharge his responsibilities by limiting his comments to such superficial praise.

The reader should heed the information given in the Preface that "this

biography of William Spry was initiated and solely financed by the governor's eldest daughter . . . and her husband." Such a method of financing research and publication is not automatically a sign of either bad biography or bad historical evaluation, but in this instance one has to wonder if it is not partly responsible for the almost total absence of any critical edge. Having been shown a nearly faultless William Spry, we are left to suppose that the only possible explanation for his failure even to recapture the Republican gubernatorial nomination in 1916 was to be found in the treachery of his party associates and the general perversity of an unthinking electorate. It is hard to say if Will Spry, like Ben Franklin, would have wanted his portrait done "warts and all;" it is hard to say because the Will Spry presented in this volume is so perfect he scarcely becomes a real, flesh-and-blood human being.

It is not that the authors did not try to add human interest and personality to their account. Indeed, in so doing they fell headlong into the trap that waits to ensnare every biographer — the trap that might be labeled "personal irrelevancy." One sign of this difficulty is the unbalanced character of the narrative. Roughly eight chapters are devoted to Spry's early life for which "hard evidence" is necessarily sketchy and the authors, too often uncritically, have relied on family lore and anecdotes to plug the gaps.

Then, when more solid documentary evidence for the early period of Spry's life is available, the authors can hardly resist the temptation to include it in the story, regardless of its importance. Is it really vital that the *S. S. Wyoming* that brought the Sprys to this country in 1875 was 366 feet long and 43 feet across the beam or that three elders on board (but, so far as we know, not William Spry) sighted an iceberg during the crossing? One might suppose the important point is that the Sprys got here. Does it reveal some otherwise undecipherable trait in the Governor's character to report that in 1920 he purchased a Premier automobile "with a magnetic, semi-automatic gearshift, that kept Salt Lake garage mechanics busy. . . .?" To a biographer who has become totally involved with his subject, such detail has a fatal fascination and it can be assumed that Spry's descendants will also find it interesting. But for the ordinary reader, it may seem at best unnecessary and at worst the kind of intrusive antiquarianism that obscures the more historically significant points to be made about Spry and his career.

A certain amount of detail, of course, is both necessary and desirable, if it serves a larger purpose. Even occasional irrelevancies can be excused if they are counterbalanced by thorough treatment of crucial questions. In this volume, however, there are few glimpses into the inner workings of Utah politics in the Progressive Era and for the most part even the examination of Spry's record of legislative and executive accomplishment is cursory. Probably most disappointing is the discovery that the authors have devoted fewer than ten pages to the eight years Spry served as Commissioner of the General Land Office during a turbulent era in the development of public lands policy.

The one event in Spry's career that is treated at length is the famous (or infamous) Joe Hill case. Approximately one-third of the text is directed toward a reconsideration of that episode. One must sympathize with Governor Spry in this instance; no man enjoys being misrepresented, much less having scores of threats made on his life and the lives of other members of his family. One can also conclude, as the authors do, that Joseph Hillstrom (or Joel Hägglund)

probably did shoot and kill that Salt Lake grocer and his son and that the I.W.W. did cynically exploit Hillstrom's execution in order to make him a martyr and strike a blow at the "system" they abhorred. What troubled this reviewer, however, was the failure on the part of the authors to recognize that just as important as the question of Joe Hill's guilt or innocence was the question of whether he received an absolutely fair trial or whether, partly because of anti-Wobbly sentiment in the area, certain of his civil liberties were violated and his guilt was not *proven* beyond a reasonable doubt. The student of this dramatic episode in Utah history should ask himself if, with the same elements of objective circumstantial evidence against him, a hypothetical son of a member of the L.D.S. Council of Twelve would ever have faced the firing squad. Instead, the insensitivity of the authors to the deeper implications of this case for the cause of Justice and their obvious resentment of the Wobblies and all they stood for unintentionally give the reader some insight into the mood that must have prevailed in the Salt Lake Valley in 1915.

Other shortcomings could be noted. Footnoting and documentation is not as thorough as it should be for what purports to be a serious work. One wonders why, if Woodrow Wilson's intercession in the Joe Hill case aroused the wrath of Utahns to such a degree, Wilson carried the state with ease a year later while Spry was being retired to private life. But there is no need to dwell on minor defects. While the suspicion lingers that few people outside of Governor Spry's own family will want to read this volume from cover to cover, it can be of limited use to the research scholar. Moreover, if the sources available on Spry's career are as uneven and often unrevealing as this treatment would suggest, the job of providing him with a biography will probably never have to be done again.

## Our Uncle Will

THOMAS E. CHENEY

*Uncle Will Tells His Story.* By Juanita Brooks. Salt Lake City: Taggart and Company, Inc., 1970. 249 pp. \$12.50.

In the final chapter of this book appear the words:

Someone has said that writing a man's life is like sending a bucket into a deep well and drawing it out full, then dipping a cup into this, spilling some in the process, and drinking the bit that is left. It is so with this summary, for each chapter leaves more unsaid than it records. I read it over and think, 'why should anyone be interested enough to read this?' Except for my immediate family and friends perhaps no one else should care. I have never become famous; I never have become even moderately wealthy. I have a large family and many friends. My wealth lies mostly in my descendents.

The book is surely of more interest to the immediate family and friends of Will Brooks than to others. Yet the work is, as A. R. Mortensen says in the Forward, "the epitome of all of us whose roots go deep into the isolated and