

Mormon history. In the Preface, they state, "We have tried to look at the trial as a significant legal event in Mormon and American history." Though the book will undoubtedly have a greater drawing among Mormon historiographers than strictly American historiographers, the authors' goal, in this reviewer's opinion, has been admirably achieved. First, because they have examined a trial which provides an insight into the nature of law, justice, and civil disobedience, not only on the pre-Civil War, western frontier, but in the American democratic society. Second, because they have provided much new and needed information regarding an important aspect of Mormon history.

For those who like their history salted with a little philosophy, this book is suggested reading. For those who like Mormon history, philosophy, and the law, this book is a "must."

This book has not been the authors' first venture into Mormon legal history. *Carthage Conspiracy* picks up where Oaks left-off in an article titled, "Suppression of the Nauvoo Expositor" (*Utah Law Review* 9 (1965), 862). Hill has written an article titled, "Joseph Smith and the 1826 Trial: New Evidence and New Difficulties" (*BYU Studies*, Winter 1972, p. 223). If the authors are open to suggestions for their next book, may I suggest they begin where Hill left off with Joseph Smith's 1826 trial.

## A Quality Lacking

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*Polygamist's Wife*. By Melissa Merrill, as told to Marian Mangum. Salt Lake City: Olympus Publishing Co., 1975. 167 pp., \$7.95.

"Oh Mother, Father will look so pretty for his wedding!" In these words this book begins and one feels instantly the poignant picture of the woman, Melissa, pressing her husband's suit, a job she had done many times before, "but this particular evening he would wear the well-worn garment to marry another woman. . . . We were entering the practice of polygamy and Frank was taking a second wife." From this time forward Melissa's somewhat ordinary life—a very young bride who on the day of her marriage was having morning sickness, and mother of four before she was twenty-five—would take on a very different tone. From this time forward she would live outside the law of her country and her church.

The book, which is a compelling chronicle of one woman's experiences in modern day polygamy, is well worth reading. It is a true story, dictated onto a tape using the personal journal which Melissa had kept over the years. The narrative moves well, with almost no editorializing, as it recounts the day to day crises and tedium of caring for a large family with meagre supplies, constantly on the move, and with a husband who provides only sporadically and then not too amply. From the pages of this extraordinarily well edited account of constant struggles which grew more difficult as Frank took other wives, a tender, loving woman emerges. It must be noted that Melissa loves "not wisely" and perhaps "too well." One keeps turning the pages, sometimes in disbelief, sometimes in anger, sometimes in sympathy, sometimes in tears, but driven to the last page hoping against hope for a turn

in her fortunes, almost praying for a stiffening of her will so that she will act as an individual agent.

Readers will find many things of interest in these pages. Here is a first-hand picture of polygamy as it is being practiced today in Utah, and since Melissa moves to the midwest and the northwest with her husband, there is the implication that it is being practiced widely throughout the United States. The thoughtful reader, moreover, will find almost a fascination in Melissa's willingness to accept and participate in a life which brings almost unrelieved tedium and which grows worse with the addition of a third and fourth wife.

But this is not a book to be read out of curiosity only. There are some significant implications in the way Melissa has lived her life to date. Perhaps the mosaic of women's problems and discussions today gives added import to at least one quality of mind lacking in Melissa's actions. Melissa loved Frank and believed his counsel. She accepted his religious convictions relative to the Society and to polygamist marriage. She gained comfort from his blessings, and she tried mightily to live according to his light. And therein lies the sorrow. Melissa did not think for herself. She did not take responsibility for her own actions. She followed Frank without question and he led her out of the Church which she loved to a life of hard, hard work and poverty and sorrow for her children's missed opportunities. In exchange for her dreams she got a clandestine existence outside of the law, a part-time husband who lived a double standard (he kept a well-furnished locked room for himself while Melissa and the children struggled with practically nothing). Instead of a husband supporting her, she got the chance to provide for him, share his love and attention with other wives, bear him twelve children, and struggle to keep food on the table and a roof over their heads, and suffer the estrangement of family and friends. Through it all Melissa did not measure Frank's direction against anything. She did not bring her own inspiration and the pure, hard light of discernment to bear upon the conditions of their life. She did not think for herself. She did not analyze the effects on her children. She did not accept the responsibility of her own actions.

This is not the narrative of a strong woman. Therefore, it seems to me, it lacks the courage and the conviction of those earlier polygamists who peopled Utah and wrested the harvest from a desert valley. Those women chose their lot by following men of religious conviction and many suffered heartache in the sharing of their husbands with other wives. But there were some significant differences. By and large, those men did not fail to support their families. Those men and women lived within the law of the Church and in fact when they entered into the practice they believed they were within the law of the land. They were not hidden. The whole world associated Mormons and polygamists, and the Mormon polygamists stood before the public criticism to defend their views. But today's polygamists are not Mormons. They do not defend their views in the open. And in this one woman's experience, at least, there is a significant lapse in the man's willingness to assume full responsibility for the care of his families. They do not follow the Prophet.

So this story stops. Of Melissa's twelve children, the last seven have no legal birth certificates and she is having trouble getting public welfare aid. One of the older boys is in the reform school. She is determined to get a divorce. Her overwhelming desire is to make an honorable life possible for her children. ". . . I think for the first time [I] take pride in my own strength. . . . When it comes right down to it, I've really never had anyone else to depend on. Why should I need anyone now?"