

day Saints who group "ERA, abortion and homosexuality" in one catalog of sins, she knows what she knows. The Mormon women who became defensive in her interviews may have been imposing self-censorship. On the other hand, they may simply have been wary of popping out of one slot only to be crammed into another.

*Patriarchs and Politics* is a shallow book, but it raises important questions. We have given too little attention to the gender distribution of authority in the kingdom. But a rigorous analysis of the problem must include not just the priesthood councils, which exclude females, but all those other organizations and committees, at all levels, which include them. What happens when authority is shared, as presumably it is in the Mutual? What is the relationship between the auxiliaries and the priesthood—not just on an organizational chart but in reality? How do women function on ward councils? On the general correlation committee? What is the impact of their virtual isolation from the Mormon "civil service," including the church building department, the social services department and the seminaries and institutes? In the realm of publications, are the needs of women better

served by integration (*The Ensign*) or by independence (*The Relief Society Magazine*)? In missionary work, can the Church continue to "lengthen its stride" while ignoring the services of young women? Mormon theories of family life stress both specialization of function and shared decision-making. How are these sometimes conflicting modes reflected in the church structure? Can they continue to coexist?

A serious analysis of the "plight" of Mormon women must look at their options, not only in relation to men in the Church but in relation to both men and women outside. *Specifically* where are the gaps? Are they shrinking or expanding? What are their sources? But above all, it must listen to the women themselves, not only to those who feel squashed, but to those who find their lives enriched, uplifted and sustained by the programs and teachings of the church. How do they differ from their disaffected sisters? What problems and conflicts do they share?

It is easy to dismiss a flashy book written by a lapsed believer, especially when it couples self-justification with a good dose of the truth. Faithful Mormons should not reject *Patriarchs and Politics* without feeling some responsibility to provide better answers of their own.

## *Out of Another Best Book*

*The Joy of Reading—An LDS Family Anthology*. Edited by Robert K. Thomas, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1978. xii + 181 pp., biblio. \$4.95.

*Reviewed by Gordon Allred, professor of English at Weber State College.*

Latter-day Saints are fond of quoting a scripture from the *Doctrine and Covenants* that reads, "Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom"—an injunction repeated with minor variation at least four times. All too often, however, as with certain other scriptural imperatives, many of us find the recitation easier than the application. To quote the redoubtable Pioneer-Prophet Brigham Young on the matter of counsel in a somewhat different context, "Yes, you

were a great deal more willing to take it than to obey it."

We neglect reading for various reasons. In part from what may be a rather narrow interpretation of the phrase "best books"—those best books, in short, being limited primarily to the standard works and certain writings of the General Authorities. They derive, as well, from an understandable and in some ways healthy suspicion regarding the focus of much contemporary literature (amoral, hedonistic, ultimately despairing). And frankly many active Church members simply do not have the time to read much of what they might like to read.

In the face of these obstacles, *The Joy of Reading—an LDS Family Anthology*, compiled and edited by Robert K. Thomas, may strike that forlorn note of the voice crying

in the wilderness—eminently deserving, depressingly unappreciated. On the *other* hand (intonations from *Fiddler's Tevya*), the one thing we may be assured of is change, and changes are occurring in Zion that may at least justify a guarded optimism on the part of Dr. Thomas and Bookcraft Publishers. To put it simply, the LDS establishment is at long last seeing the beginning of a cultural renaissance, a sudden burgeoning of indigenous literature, art and music that has required a century and a half to germinate and send forth roots. One may reasonably hope, then, that the LDS aesthetic culture will henceforth flourish continuously and, like its faith, "spring forth into a tree having everlasting life."

An achievement of such magnitude, however, cannot long endure in isolation. Just as the sapling must ultimately draw sustenance from many parts of the earth, the tree of a new and thriving art must ultimately draw upon the world of which it too is a part. The nonreading Mormon by very definition will see little application here initially, but awakening to the artistic and literary offerings of his own culture, he may gradually acquire a broader perspective. The creative Mormon writer will have worked from that perspective all along.

This returns us to *The Joy of Reading*, an appropriate title to an appropriate anthology—one which, without sacrificing quality, will offer even the most cloistered and censorious little cause for complaint. Enclosed within its pages are two poems, two essays, and nine stories, "none beneath the attention of adults or beyond the interest of children" to quote our editor. Among its offerings are Saki's "The Lumber Room" and Saroyan's "The Fifty Yard Dash," both delightfully humorous; Kipling's "Mowgli's Brothers," a highlight in narrative entertainment; Eileen Kump's "Sayso or Sense," a sensitive Mormon story of frustration and reconciliation; Chesterton's "A Piece of Chalk," a pleasantly philosophical essay; Benet's "Freedom's a Hard-Bought Thing," a suspenseful and inspiring tale from days of slavery; and Conrad's "Lagoon," an exquisitely poetic account of romance and tragedy.

One may feel that the editor has relied so heavily on the "straight" traditional in his apparent effort to captivate the uninitiated that he misses a good opportunity by failing

to include some quality contemporary offerings, fantasy and science fiction in particular. (Tolkein? Bradbury? Asimov?) The genre has not only acquired literary legitimacy over the years but it now ranks tops in reader popularity as well. Perhaps, also, the *Joy* collection might be balanced a bit more in favor of Mormon authors, affording its audience ready identification and more involvement.

Such observations are admittedly subjective, and not intended to detract from the merit of the selections nor the credentials of the editor. Robert K. Thomas is eminently qualified as literary mentor to fellow Mormons. Professor of English and current Academic Vice President of Brigham Young University, Dr. Thomas is co-editor with Bruce Clark of the five-volume series *Out of the Best Books*, a former cultural refinement course for the Relief Society.

These qualifications are apparent in the editor's commentaries on *The Joy of Reading* selections, each one effectively designed to stimulate family discussion. Consider the following observation on "The Lumber Room":

For those who believe that this life is part of an eternal plan in which every member of the human family is a child of God, this story touches chords that need to be heard beneath its surface entertainment. For instance, if parents are arbitrary and expedient in dealing with their children, they really encourage a distrust of both their good sense and good faith. If the necessity for some regulations cannot be fully explained to small children, parents need to guard against abusing their roles as family law-givers by neglecting—or refusing—to justify rules to those who are old enough to understand. If parents' replies to "Why?" are always "Because I told you to" or even the softer, "Because Daddy or Mother thinks it best, dear," it is difficult for children to develop the discrimination they will need when parents are no longer an automatic hedge against bad judgment.

Professor Thomas writes with insight and precision, words calculated to express rather than impress. His appraisal of "A Piece of Chalk" is apt:

The good essay does not stop thought