

REVIEWS

Brief Notices

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IN THE FALL 1983 COLUMN, we surmised that Merlo Pusey's history of the George A. Smiths represented, by virtue of its flavor, a respectable and even successful attempt at "family-authorized" biography. Subsequently, a missive from the Pulitzer Prize winner came to hand pointing out that no one had paid him to write it and that such a charge constituted a serious insult.

Should an accomplished scholar participate in subsidized writing projects? Like most debatable issues, it is not an easily resolved one, which is why it came up in "Brief Notices" in the first place. The most urgent aspect in the matter revolves not about "fiscal salvation" but around the problem of censorship—he who pays the fiddler names the tune. Yet some of the most respected writers in Mormonism—Leonard Arrington (David Eccles), Richard Poll (Howard Stoddard), and even Gordon B. Hinckley (James Moyle), to name a few—and a host of lesser lights (such as Gene Sessions) have, without even the pretense of shame, penned biographies with family money and approval. In the end, the only way to approach the issue is on a case-by-case basis, applying without prejudice (if possible) the standard measuring sticks of quality—readability, scholarship, impact, and contribution.

A current opportunity to measure a family-authorized, big-gun biography comes with Davis Bitton's *The Redoubtable John Pack: Pioneer, Proselyter, Patriarch* (Salt Lake City: The John Pack Family Association, 1982, xi+232 pp., illus., biblio. \$?). At least two historians in Utah turned down the project (one because of other commitments and the second due to then-current family frugality and hints of censorship) before the University of Utah pro-

fessor and former Assistant Church Historian agreed to take it on. With that knowledge, reading the book without crippling bias looms as a formidable if not impossible task. It becomes even tougher because the cover photograph of Pack looks just like Gabby Hayes. But Bitton's competence as a historian and writer overcomes most such obstacles as he follows his important and long-neglected subject through fifty years of sacrifice for Mormonism (1836–85) and the establishment of one of the premier families of Salt Lake City. Pack's story carries its share of turbulence and controversy which Bitton treats frankly and fearlessly. Nevertheless, even without the acknowledgment in the front that it culminates a family project, the volume possesses all the hallmarks of a family-subsidized work. The hero, for example, is never just "Pack" but always "John" or "John Pack"; the book contains an overabundance of boring and extraneous material on Pack's ancestors and family.

In the soil of that issue, however, grow thornier problems: Bitton mentions in the preface a distaste for fictionalized history but indulges in the reconstruction of dialogue and color. He decides not to footnote the book in favor of a brief and generally inadequate bibliographic paragraph for each chapter. He also fails to provide an index. Certainly the primary audience for a family-authorized biography is the family itself (undoubtedly pleased in this case with a fine volume), but the author has unnecessarily slighted his colleagues in the family's favor, colleagues who would have the book on their shelves for reference and corroboration, for which it unfortunately has few uses. So, is *The Redoubtable John Pack* a redoubtable work of solid

history? Therein lies the rub of the whole family-subsidy issue.

Whatever the answer to the family-subsidy question may be, even the court scribes in ancient Mesopotamia realized that someone had to foot the bill. One willing source for writers in modern Mormonia is the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at BYU under editors Thomas Alexander and Howard Christy. Although some have carped at the center's reinforcement of the old-boy system in Mormon studies through its repetitive selection of authors and lecturers, the Redd operation has rather consistently sponsored quality monographs and lectures that have added immeasurably to the literature of the West, and particularly of the Mormon role. Numbers 12 and 13 in the Redd Monographs in Western History series are no exception: *The Twentieth Century American West: Contributions to an Understanding* (1983) and *After 150 Years: The Latter-day Saints in Sesquicentennial Perspective* (1983). Edited by Alexander with the assistance of John Bluth and Jessie Embry respectively, both volumes contain almost uniformly excellent essays that tap, in many cases, new stores of information and insight. Standing out among the articles is Dean May's "Demographic Portrait of the Mormons, 1830-1980," a study that will become an indispensable reference tool for all serious students of Mormonism. Also impressive among others are Edward Geary's work on Mormon Country (helping to explain why the Saints really were different from their pioneer contemporaries) and Lee Scamehorn's timely historical analysis of the western coal industry.

Speaking of a timely work, perhaps no subject needs treatment in Mormon literature more than counseling. With a vast cadre of farmers, lawyers, custodians, physicians, store clerks, and businessmen performing pastoral duties among the Saints, any step is in the right direction that provides solid information on how to handle an increasingly complex counseling load. Willing to realize that bolstering "inspira-

tion" with professional acumen is not a heretical idea, BYU professors R. Lanier Britch and Terrance D. Olson have collected some two dozen essays into *Counseling: A Guide to Helping Others* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1983, 238 pp. \$8.95), a volume that ought to grace the desk of every bishop, stake president, and General Authority in the church. Perhaps the most salutary aspect of *Counseling* resides in its constant reminders that there really do exist some problems that require professional intervention, that love and the Spirit still apply if priesthood authority steps aside when necessary. This volume symbolizes nicely a long, often painful trend in the Church toward a more sensible (in contrast to the nineteenth-century) attitude among Mormons concerning the uses of professionals in traditionally ecclesiastical jurisdictions. Even fundamentalist Mormons seem willing, for example, to consult freely with physicians while holding strictly to the line of everything else the late prophets had to say, although the AMA might want to quibble over whether some of those physicians qualify for the title.

Some Mormons of a more liberal persuasion still choke at accepting a group of professionals the prophets of yore usually classed with liars, thieves, and politicians. When James H. Moyle went to John Taylor for a blessing prior to his departure for law school in the early 1880s, the old man consented but informed the lad that he was going straight to hell. Fearing that most Mormons and Christians in general hold Taylor's opinion, BYU Press has published a superbly researched and written treatise *On Being a Christian and a Lawyer: Law for the Innocent* (1981, 249 pp., biblio., index, \$?), by Thomas L. Shaffer, professor of law at Washington and Lee University and formerly of Notre Dame. Shaffer's brilliance and eloquence notwithstanding, the book holds little appeal for anyone outside the legal profession, something the author no doubt intended. Its pages crammed with lawspeak, the volume hopes

to direct Christian attorneys along a path of "advocacy" that violates neither the lawyer's principles nor the client's theology. Perhaps the most meaningful section of the book for the lay reader comes in Part 3 in which Shaffer handily circumscribes "lawyer culture," that tangle of thinking that so often makes truth into a lie and the basest falsehoods into virtuous verities. Perhaps the Reuben Clarks and the Christine Durhams have convinced most modern Mormons that one can truly be a Christian and a lawyer at the same time, but do not look for proof in Shaffer's book unless you happen to be an attorney yourself. But in that case, why bother? Any lawyer worth his or her salt could convince himself and a jury that he is a lawyer and also a Martian.

An attorney with the amazing ability to convince a publisher that he is a lawyer and a theologian happens to be the recipient of this quarter's Milk the Mormons Award for the gift book most likely to remain unread. Paul James Toscano, *Gospel Letters to a Missionary* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1983, 155 pp. \$?), consists of a series of verbose epistles to some elder named Larry. The reader never figures out who Larry might be, but there can be little doubt that the young man needs a lot of review over what he should have learned either during Primary or while taking the missionary lessons. Thoroughly old-hat in content and condescending in tone, this issue's winner of the coveted Elsie is so boring that anyone who gets all the way through without falling asleep and dreaming that he is in sacrament meeting on high council Sunday ought to receive free legal consultation from Toscano. Perhaps no other book in recent memory has translated so many tired quotes and homilies into new-sounding verbage: For example, "Our job is to teach correct principles and let people govern themselves" (p. 110) and "Life — even a life dedicated to the Lord — is no picnic" (p. 147). A lawyer's world is a world of precedent, but must precedent also govern so thoroughly his thinking?

The Pull the Latter-day Leg Award for the most pretentious volume filled with hogwash goes to Lex de Azevedo with (in tiny letters so guess who really wrote it) Chris Conkling, *Pop Music & Morality* (North Hollywood: Embryo Books, 1982, xii+125, notes, \$?). Because of stuff like this, word recently spread through the seminary system that certain rock songs played backward contain nasty messages. The good brothers sternly admonished the kids not to listen to rock in general because of such hidden evil. After hearing that a sister had taught a similar lesson in my ward's Relief Society, I asked my daughter and her friends for a list of songs purportedly containing these messages. Considerable effort turned up two singles, "Another One Bites the Dust" and "Stairway to Heaven," both of which I acquired and recorded backwards. An assembly of teenagers and I then listened to them repeatedly and could discern nothing except English recorded backwards, including the reverse of "another" sounding with some imagination like the last two syllables of "marijuana." This, the seminary teachers had told them, was actually a message urging them to smoke pot. My colleagues in the psychology department inform me that they know no evidence suggesting that the human mind can translate words recorded backwards, even in the subconscious. While the book outlines more sensible cautions, it still hammers at this and other alarmist themes, claiming contrary to my own experience that "Stairway to Heaven" does indeed contain "clearly" the backwards message "Here's to my sweet Satan" (p. 71). Why in the world such concerns should occupy the minds of Mormon leaders and parents is a colossal mystery. But what is even more mysterious is why any semi-reasonable person would believe that kids who are enamored with rock might (A) read this book, or (B) be persuaded by it even if they did.

Barbara and Briant Jacobs, *Missions for Marrieds* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1983, viii+130 pp., index,