

mend the kind of straightforward account produced by the Troehs for a good intro-

ductory grounding in how the RLDS conference system works.

Not Quite a Complete Meal

An Abundant Life: The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown edited by Edwin B. Firmage (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), xiii, 152 pp., paperback, \$9.95.

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LAST NIGHT I HAD PIZZA FOR DINNER. Though I liked the taste, I felt I'd not had quite a complete meal. I also enjoyed *An Abundant Life*, the oral reminiscences of Hugh Brown Brown, a great modern Church leader, but I had the feeling there, too, that something was missing.

At President Brown's suggestion, his grandson Ed Firmage undertook to write his biography and interviewed him during 1969 and 1970. Firmage subsequently became involved in other work, however, and turned the project and the transcripts over to professional historians Eugene E. Campbell and Richard D. Poll, who in 1975 published *Hugh B. Brown: His Life and Thought* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft), just after President Brown's death.

Since that admirable biography of 320 pages told President Brown's life story in much greater detail, using much of the material from these same transcripts, and since the first and last chapters and all but one of the letters included in the memoirs have recently been published separately (see *DIALOGUE* 21 [Summer 1988]: 17-50; *Sunstone* 11 [November 1987]: 7-11), I have to ask: What justifies the separate publication of these raw materials?

I can see four reasons. First, the biography was published thirteen years ago and is now out of print. A new life story, even if not so complete, can introduce readers to this remarkable man.

Second, here President Brown tells his story in his own words. What it therefore

loses in objectivity, it gains in additional insights about the man.

Third, the book preserves many of the strong personal anecdotes Hugh B. Brown used repeatedly in his career as a great public speaker. Examples include his mother's advice to ask, "Father, are you there?" (p. 13); experiences as the victim of misunderstanding (pp. 58, 85-86); calling a cigar smoker as bishop (p. 71); oppression by an evil spirit before being called as a General Authority (pp. 112-13); prophecies of his call (pp. 114-15); and twenty-odd others. This fund of stories will enrich the public speaking of another generation.

Fourth, this book offers some new materials. Hugh B. Brown had lifelong association with Church leaders, and he mentions some of their human frailties in these memoirs. But he had no trouble believing that God works through imperfect men, even imperfect prophets. As a gauge of his own character, he was able to give great men their due without unfairly discounting for their shortcomings. He mentions that one was "very severe in his judgment and very exacting in his demands upon his family" but "loved deeply . . . [and was] very just and fair" (p. 11). Another was at times "self opinionated" and "rather sharp" in business but also "kindly . . . [and] a great leader" (pp. 14-16). One president of the Church offended his counselor by making decisions without consulting him (p. 131). A counselor in the presidency "was a one-man show and very self-confident . . . but he and I were very fond of each other" (p. 132). Another leader brought "tremendous pressure to bear" upon President Brown to concur in a decision, but they later became reconciled (pp. 142-43). "Although I have had some rather difficult experiences since I became a General Authority by reason of some mis-

understandings and disagreements, it has been a truly wonderful experience" (p. 115), he recorded in summary.

In 1935 Hugh accepted an interim appointment to the Utah Liquor Control Commission at the urging of the Church president and then was released as stake president because the president's counselors insisted the positions were inconsistent, especially when opponents floated false rumors of bribery (pp. 85-86). According to President Brown, "Despite their having, in a sense, forsaken me in the storm, I did not in any way lose faith in the church as such, although I did have some reservations in sustaining some of the members of the First Presidency who had taken such an active part in getting me released from the stake presidency at such a crucial time" (p. 86). He later spoke of the same two men with great respect and affection (pp. 113, 121, cf. p. 114).

He recognized his own frailties, mentioning his "possibly overbearing attitude" (p. 13), and indicating that he had to work hard on humility (p. 123) and curbing his temper and his tongue (p. 133). "I do not mean to intimate that a man would have to be perfect to be a General Authority of the church. But he should always be moving toward perfection, curbing his natural desires, his weaknesses, and tendencies toward self-aggrandizement and to be worthy of the companionship of the Holy Spirit" (p. 126).

The book's most significant new information comes not from the transcripts, but from the editor's Afterword, where we learn of President Brown's failed efforts to bring about a change in the priesthood policy concerning blacks (pp. 141-43). The Afterword, with only slight changes, previously appeared in the November 1987 issue of *Sunstone* (p. 7). This information was not included in the 1975 biography because it would have disclosed serious disagreement among the General Authorities on one of the most delicate of policy questions at a time when apparent agreement was highly important. The biography

focused rather on President Brown's insistence that any priesthood restriction be kept clearly separate from the question of political civil rights and respect for individual dignity and worth.

The appearance of the book in paperback is a welcome way to keep price within reason, and the photographs are excellent. But I have two major criticisms. First, the editorial work left something to be desired. Second, in an understandable attempt to attract readers, the publisher has engaged in somewhat sensational advertising.

While the memoirs do not purport to be scholarly, a few things deserved noting. Just as the one editorial interpolation reports the 1978 revelation on priesthood, so the four pages President Brown spent discussing plural marriage after the Manifesto of 1890 should be clarified by reference, if only in the introduction, to articles such as D. Michael Quinn, *LDS Church Authority and New Plural Marriages, 1890-1904* (DIALOGUE 18 [Spring 1985]: 9-105).

A number of irritating typographical, spelling, and factual errors were left in the text. For example, the statement appears that there were no Church members within 120 miles of Cambridge, England (p. 21). The Atlantic Ocean has become the Pacific (p. 90); and the Mayo Clinic is placed in New York (p. 109). Perfection is too much to expect (as anyone who has published knows), but these are not just proofreader problems, they are the editor's responsibility. Since the memoirs were oral, we cannot attribute erroneous homonyms to President Brown.

In addition, there are a number of awkward phrases and sequences that I, as editor, would have smoothed out. I would not fault the editor if these problems resulted from a conscious choice to leave the memoirs as President Brown dictated them, but comparing chapter one with *Hugh B. Brown: The Early Years*, published in the Summer 1988 issue of DIALOGUE and covering the same material, shows that the editor felt free to make changes not only in sequence but also in phrasing.

The errors in the main text are unfortunate, but the four-page index is a disaster, with at least two dozen errors marring its generally helpful listing. I do not wish to make too much of the issue, and the editor assures me that the errors I listed for him will be corrected in the third printing, but I mean to emphasize that careful editing and indexing are very important to many readers.

Though the book offers significant new information, it hardly warrants being merchandised as a book "for those who want all the facts" (ad in *Sunstone*). The publisher's press release stated that the memoirs tell of President Brown's "troubled youth and physically abusive father" and his "liberal views on birth control, marital sexual relations, divorce, political extremism, science, intellectualism, and race relations" and "shed light on the inner workings of the Mormon hierarchy" ([Provo] *Herald*, 30 October 1988, p. 51). Though the memoirs do reflect these topics, the advertising sensationalizes them as major themes rather than items referred to only in passing.

The book tells nothing of a "troubled youth" as we normally use that phrase. Times were hard, and a great deal was asked of young Hugh in working on farm and ranch, but his life was arrow straight. He relates that he decided very early to do nothing to disappoint his beloved mother (p. 2), and he kept to a life of strict rectitude, without dishonesty, smoking or drinking, or sexual involvements (pp. 7, 9).

His father may have been physically abusive by our standards, but though Hugh called him "harsh . . . [with] awful temper . . . [and demanding] immediate obedience," he added that he "loved his family sincerely and did everything he could for us" (pp. 1-2).

Hugh's social views may have been liberal, but hardly extreme. Artificial birth control, he said, "we cannot officially endorse," because it would send wrong signals (pp. 119-20), though he did foresee a day when the policy would be modified. He noted that it is dangerous to try to regulate the private sexual conduct of a married

couple (p. 119). The Church has tried that and is now more discreet in its concerns about marital relations, as President Brown advised. As to abortion, Hugh B. Brown would have added to rape, incest, and danger to the mother—grounds now recognized by the Church—"the possibility of a grossly deformed birth" (p. 119).

Nothing in the book suggests a special view of divorce. When Elder Brown advised President McKay on applications for cancellation of sealings ("temple divorce"), he simply implemented President McKay's criteria. The only indication of "liberalism" was his bland statement that "a certain flexibility is required."

As a Democrat, Elder Brown opposed the widespread identification of the Church in recent decades with Republican political positions. He decried political extremism, such as judging people's loyalty by how high they bear "some anti-Communist banners" (p. 130).

His defense of science was rather a defense of the honest search for truth, not a judgment that scientists are always open-minded. His plea was always for inquiry, openness, and humility. Here he made important contributions. In 1969 he told a group of BYU students, for example, "We are not so much concerned with whether your thoughts are orthodox or heterodox as we are that you shall have thoughts" (reprinted in *DIALOGUE* 17 [Spring 1984]: 77). His most-used quotations ring with integrity and inherent authority. Chapter nine contains a marvelous summary of his broad-gauged philosophy of life. This really is "liberal," in the best sense of that word.

Finally, he was indeed liberal with respect to race relations. While other Church leaders were content to await the day of change, President Brown's statements made it clear that any priesthood restriction based on race had no bearing on the entitlement of every person to full civil rights. And his groundwork made the eventual wholehearted acceptance of the extension of temple blessings to all worthy men and women in 1978 much easier than it otherwise might have been.