

David discuss in their letters. David gives Charley some pointers about how to land a wife. Eventually, Charley suggests to David that he has decided that he will never marry. David accepts this and no longer encourages Charley to find a mate. From the letters that have survived, it appears that Charley is homosexual. It also seems clear that David can talk more freely with Charley than with his mother or older brother. It is to

Avery's credit that she addresses this relationship in an informed, reasonable, and sensitive manner. Church leaders today, from bishops to presidents, could learn from David's non-judgmental understanding of Charley's struggle with his sexuality.

From Mission to Madness is a touching story of a gifted but tragic figure in Mormon history, told very skillfully by a talented writer and historian.

Evidence without Reconciliation

The Creation of the Book of Mormon: A Historical Inquiry. By LaMar Petersen (Salt Lake City, Utah: Freethinker Press, 1998), 283 pp.

Reviewed by Polly Stewart, Professor of English, Salisbury State University, Salisbury, Maryland.

ONE CANNOT READ OR WRITE about the Book of Mormon without acknowledging a position with respect to its truth claims. Even to profess no stake in any such claims is to take a position. People who write about the Book of Mormon are generally, in LaMar Petersen's words, "violently partisan" (p. 103) because the Book of Mormon is something about which it is impossible to be neutral. While Petersen's book is wholly about the Book of Mormon's truth claims, its approach is nonviolent, presenting evidence and letting the evidence speak for itself—a technique that ultimately gets us no nearer the truth than the most exquisite theological argumentation, because on this question a reader's mind is, cannot help being, already made up. The value of Petersen's

approach in this compelling but thankless endeavor is that it presents evidence about Joseph Smith's whereabouts and activities during the crucial years between the First Vision (1820 or 1823) and the establishment of the official record of the revelations authorizing the foundations of the faith (1839-41), not from on high, but from the scullery, as it were—a documentary account of insider perceptions of the Book of Mormon's development within its folk-cultural milieu. Petersen documents, for instance, how Joseph had his visions just at a time when many people were having visions; found a seer-stone just when the finding of seer-stones was rather common; and put the stone to the same use (finding precious metals) as did others of his day, for treasure-digging was something of a national pastime. Joseph and his father and brothers dug for treasure as a family enterprise conducted under the folk assumption that buried treasure, whether you find it by seer-stone or by other means, will slip away, sinking farther into the earth and out of reach, if you are not morally fit to attain it.

A folklorist will inevitably see in other aspects of the history and background of the Book of Mormon examples of Northern European folk motif and structure: repetitions of the number three (the Three Witnesses, Joseph's three visitations from the angel in one night, his three attempts to lay hold of the golden plates in the Hill Cumorah, the angel's repossession of the plates three times during Joseph's earthly custody of them); the cave as a repository for treasure; and the polarizing of scriptural, doctrinal, and experiential worlds into opposites (e.g., sin/suffering followed by redemption, white and delightful vs. dark and loathsome, and the unceasing battle between good and evil both in the world at large and within every person). While the later church took a rigid stance with respect to the truth of the claims made in its foundational documents, Joseph himself appears not to have been troubled by inconsistencies among, or absence of support for, these documents as they were produced, thus causing generations of the faithful (including our author) to resort to anguished or obsessive searching for the truth. All four appendices in the present volume, following the seven chapters of the main body of the book, are documents of various people's struggles. Martin Harris, who endured decades of vilification and rejection by both insiders and outsiders in the early church, maintained his faith and reasserted it late in life—ironically a devout believer who yet reminisced about Joseph's ability to find lost objects and precious metals with his seer-stone (Appendix A). LaMar Petersen—reared in the bosom of the church and personally conversant from his childhood on with luminaries who occupied church offices in the early part of the twentieth century, married in the temple by

George Albert Smith, and a devoted (though nonaffiliated) Mormon scholar with a vast command of primary documents—published in 1957 a pamphlet pointing out a number of inconsistencies in the early documents (here shortened and printed as Appendix B).

Petersen also reminisces about his childhood friend Omer Stewart, who, in 1933 as a returned missionary and student at the University of Utah, conducted an undergraduate project comparing Book of Mormon passages about flora and fauna with actual scientific data about New World biota and found that the data did not sustain the scriptural claims. The two friends were unable to account for this finding, so young Petersen arranged an audience with Apostle James E. Talmage to resolve their confusion. Alas, the only critique Talmage provided was about 1) the loss of a returned missionary's testimony and 2) comma splices (Appendix C). The fourth appendix, an update of Stan Larson's 1996 volume *Quest for the Gold Plates* (Freethinker Press), concerns the career of Thomas Stuart Ferguson, a believer who tried fervently (and ultimately vainly) during the mid-twentieth century to reconcile Book of Mormon claims with archaeological findings from Central America.

These appendices, which take up a good half of the book, are not foregrounded in the introduction, but are left to speak for themselves. They will speak eloquently to any devout Mormon who has experienced the either/or problem of faith, for each of the four is a record of someone's struggle to find truth in the Book of Mormon after intellectual battering of one kind or another. In his concluding remarks, Petersen notes that even though of late the church has modified its either/or stance, the Book of Mormon itself

marches on, text and theme, in its Manichean glory, a challenge to the credulity of the faithful. And the thousands of textual changes, large and small, that have been wrought in the sacred scripture from the earliest days up

to as recently as 1981 (111) will continue to invite scrutiny by those for whom any change in a document based upon claims to divine authority will throw into question the integrity of the whole document.