

In this vision, the rule that we must follow is the individual experience of the Atonement and the recognition that we are all interdependent in surprising ways. God, Dutcher suggests, may be willing to pay ridiculous prices for healing his children. His troubled children will remain able to do little more than guess at the shape of their lives, confident only in his unconditional love and its expression in divine grace.

A Woman of Influence

Carol Cornwall Madsen. *An Advocate for Women: The Public Life of Emmeline B. Wells*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press/Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006. 490 pp., \$24.95.

Reviewed by Deborah Farmer Kris, English teacher, founding member of the Exponent II Blog

Historian Carol Cornwall Madsen has penned what is, remarkably, the first rigorous biography of one of the most influential Mormon woman of the nineteenth century. Emmeline B. Wells served as editor of the *Woman's Exponent* for nearly forty years, as Relief Society general president, and as Utah's foremost leader for women's suffrage. She worked closely with five Church presidents, met with four U.S. presidents, and developed an international reputation for her indefatigable work on behalf of women's rights. When Wells was yet a young woman in Nauvoo, Eliza R. Snow prophesied she would "live to do a work that has never been done by any woman, since creation" (27). That public work provides the content for this book.

Madsen, with her strong credentials as a scholar of Mormon women's history, is perhaps uniquely suited to write these volumes. Wells provided a treasure chest for research, including forty-seven volumes of journals and forty years of editorials. Brigham Young had "charged Emmeline to write the life stories of the Latter-day Saint women and to keep their collective history, which transformed the *Exponent* into an indispensable witness of women's part in early Mormon history" (115). In addition, Madsen's book fulfills an injunction from Wells herself: "Although the historians of the past have been neglectful of woman, and it is the exception if she be mentioned at all; yet the future will deal more generously with womankind, and the historian of the present age will find it very embarrassing to ignore woman in the records of the nineteenth century" (v).

This volume is the first in a planned two-volume biography. Madsen spends much of Chapter 1 justifying her choice to separate these books along the public/private divide rather than chronologically. She clearly agonized over the struc-

ture of these volumes and concluded that Wells's complex life lent itself to this duality. Indeed, Wells even created two literary pseudonyms: "the sentimental 'Aunt Em' who authored most of her poetry and nostalgic New England sketches, and the 'strong-minded' Blanche Beechwood, an ideologically liberated equal rights advocate" (3). This first volume focuses on Wells's vast involvement in government, politics, and activism. Is this split effective? Yes, largely. While biographies of male LDS leaders tend to follow the structure of their public career, hyphenated with details of the home front, biographies of LDS women frequently focus on the private sphere, viewing public forays as an outgrowth of the domestic life. Wells's inexhaustible public involvement almost demands a volume such as this. By excising all but the barest details of Wells's experiences as a wife and mother, Madsen has room to show the reader the greater historical canvas on which Wells painted. In many ways, Madsen has written a history of women's suffrage and the politics of polygamy using Wells as a focal point.

Madsen begins by providing a brief life-sketch of Wells, just enough to scaffold later details. Chapter 3 describes how the *Woman's Exponent* emerged as a voice for Mormon women in Utah and a tool for combatting anti-Mormon sentiment in the East. Wells used a full third of *Exponent* editorials to argue for women's right to vote; and under her leadership, the paper took its place as one of the leading suffrage magazines, exchanging articles and correspondence with publications such as the venerable *Woman's Journal*, published (1870–1914) in Boston by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell. Other editorials covered a range of women-related issues, with Wells counseling women to "obtain as much education as possible, to eschew feminine artifices, and to seek an egalitarian relationship in marriage so that each spouse might have the freedom to develop individual capacities and interests" (50).

Because of polygamy, Mormons found themselves at odds with "Victorian morality." Wells helped articulate an LDS vision of womanhood that also stood in contrast to the demure "ideal" of femininity. She put forth that the "real" woman was "stoic and sure of her convictions, cultivating self-reliance, intellectuality, personal integrity, self-respect, and competence, while claiming equality with men" (56). That Brigham Young and subsequent Church leaders supported the publication and publicly urged women to subscribe lent further credence to the perception that Wells was an official spokesperson for LDS women.

Eliza R. Snow is perhaps more familiar to today's LDS community, thanks in large part to her hymns. Wells and Snow were colleagues and friends, relentlessly devoted to supporting Mormon women. As Madsen notes, however, Snow sometimes expressed distrust toward women's rights activists, while Wells had no such misgivings. Wells's vision for women led her to align herself with and befriend leaders such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. She even visited the home of Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell,

expressing her affection for them despite their ardent anti-polygamy stance. While the treatment she received at the hands of anti-polygamy suffragists might have turned others away from national organizations, such setbacks seemed to reenergize Wells's efforts.

Madsen effectively traces Wells's passion for equality to her understanding of LDS Church doctrine and belief in the restoration of *all* things. When Joseph Smith organized the Relief Society and "turned the key" to the women, Wells felt that this event "marked the beginning of the redemption of womankind and the restoration of primeval equality" (83). In the pages of *Exponent*, she told her readers that "the bonds of female servitude began to loosen in 1842 and from that time on 'men no longer held the same absolute sway'" (83). From Wells's perspective, it was no coincidence that the Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention occurred a mere six years after the organization of the Relief Society. Joseph had helped open the doors of heaven for women worldwide. Thus, Madsen argues, Wells's public activism had as its seed a deep spiritual conviction.

Madsen carefully traces Wells's journey as an enfranchised, disenfranchised, and re-enfranchised Utah citizen. In addition, she outlines the complex relationship between polygamy and women's suffrage—a treatment worth the price of the book. Wells frequently found herself responding to anti-polygamy forces that wanted to strip Utah women of their right to vote, suffrage organizations that shunned Mormon women because of polygamy, activists who warily embraced Wells despite polygamy, and women such as Susan B. Anthony who came to view Mormon women as key allies and helped them navigate the turbulent political waters. While this book describes Wells's public defense of polygamy—namely that it promoted self-reliance and decreased subordination—it also alludes to her personal difficulties in living this principle, a topic that will surely be addressed in more length in the next volume.

I found the structure of the book problematic in only one respect. After nearly 350 pages describing Wells's role in the battle for suffrage—culminating in the passage of the nineteenth amendment shortly before her death—Madsen backtracks in the last few chapters to describe Wells's involvement in the National and International Councils for Women. The chronological jump felt disjointed, as several of the themes—including suffrage and polygamy—had already been covered in depth. Two of these final chapters were originally written as stand-alone articles and perhaps should have been integrated more fully into the text. However, they do provide a fascinating glimpse into Wells's effort to defeat B. H. Roberts's congressional campaign. Roberts, a member of the seven-man First Council of the Seventy, had incurred Wells's displeasure because of statements he made against women's suffrage during the statehood debate. Surprisingly, when Wells counseled with President Lorenzo Snow, he encouraged her to have women work to defeat Roberts, either "publicly or privately" (396). Rob-

erts's subsequent victory made international headlines because he persisted in living a polygamous life after the Church had renounced public support for new plural marriages (1890) and Utah had joined the Union (1896). Wells found herself negotiating her distaste for Roberts's politics and her defense of Mormon women who were further marginalized at national meetings because of the polygamy question.

Madsen's book contains scant information about Wells's tenure as Relief Society general president. Indeed, her work with the Relief Society is mentioned almost exclusively as it relates to Wells's suffrage work: providing funds for her numerous travels, linking her to membership in various women's organizations, and giving her a platform from which to educate and organize Mormon women in the fight for the vote. Indeed, when President Lorenzo Snow and Relief Society President Zina D. H. Young died within months of each other, Wells felt some concern that Church leaders would neglect this work. She confided to Susa Young Gates, "I doubt very much if Prest. [Joseph F.] Smith has as much confidence in what women can do, as Prest. Snow. . . . There are so many things that want righting" (438).

Even as a generation of national suffrage leaders was passing on, the aging Wells found herself likewise missing the company of LDS women who had worked with her to shape what it meant to be a Mormon woman—"such women as Aunt Zina—Aunt Eliza [R. Snow], Mother [Elizabeth Ann] Whitney" (438–39). I assume Madsen deemed much of Wells's work with Relief Society to fall in the "private" sphere and will therefore address this topic more fully in her next installment. Madsen's work is a gift to Mormon women's history, and I wish her Godspeed on the second volume.

Colonizing the Frontier between Faith and Doubt

Levi S. Peterson. *A Rascal by Nature, A Christian by Yearning: A Mormon Autobiography*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006. 465 pp., \$29.95.

Reviewed by Michael Austin, who teaches English and serves as the dean of Graduate Studies at Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, West Virginia

It would be difficult for me to overstate the influence that Levi Peterson has had on both my spiritual and my intellectual development. "The Confessions of St. Augustine," which I found by accident a few months after returning from my mission, was the first Mormon story that I ever read that did not come from the pages of the *New Era*. A year later, "A Christian by Yearning" became my first exposure to the liberal Mormon community at the same time that it reassured me that I was