

Part of my motivation in this thinly disguised plea is selfish. It does get a bit lonely here in some ways without the constant opportunities for deep gospel brotherhood and the life-filling satisfactions of a full Church program that a Mormon community provides. But I guess I would make that fact part of my appeal — that the Church needs building in areas like this in order that the young people growing up and living here may have an even better opportunity to develop all dimensions of their faith. Small branches are extremely good for building a certain kind of humble interdependence and embattled faith, but some

of the programs of the Church which diversify our talents and strength and broaden our vision of the Gospel are crippled by lack of numbers and training. At the same time, centers of Mormon population, especially in Utah, are flooded with talented, experienced people with plenty of opportunities to take the Gospel for granted. Many of you could find at places like St. Olaf College and the Faribault Branch the satisfaction of being greatly needed and the challenges to faith and action which continuing commitment and growth seem to depend on. I'm asking you to come for your sake and ours.

SOUNDING BRASS AND TINKLING SYMBOLS

Failure in the Home

Victor B. Cline

A few days ago I was chatting with a good friend, a psychotherapist of rather remarkable competence and ability. This man, a very active and deeply committed Mormon, has been especially effective in working with disturbed young people and seemed to have a knack for reaching them when everyone else had failed. He looked quite depressed. Deep circles under his eyes suggested much worry and little sleep. In a weary voice he confided that he was having considerable problems with his own teen-age son. The boy, previously a very active member of the Church, was now smoking pot, going with a wild crowd, having scrapes with the law and in general creating considerable distress for this man and his wife. As he put it, "I wonder if it's worth it all. I feel like a hypocrite — telling other people how to raise their children and deal with their family problems — when I can't even handle my own."

But the simple truth was that this man was an excellent father, his counsel was wise and prudent, he had a great capacity for love, a remarkable ability to care for others and to reach out and heal. And yet he had a private grief within the bosom of his own family which he felt inadequate about and at moments unable to cope with.

Several weeks later I was having lunch

with a group of social workers whose primary responsibility was working with troubled families. During the course of the good food and pleasant conversation one man commented that he had been seeing an increasing number of very rebellious, "acting out" adolescents who came from quite solid and healthy home backgrounds, where the parents were effective, thoughtful and loving, where it would be difficult to lay most of the "blame" for the youngster's delinquencies on a disturbed family background. His remarks triggered an almost instant assent from the other counselors present, who acknowledged similar experiences. As we wrestled with this problem we half-heartedly concluded that it was the deviant peer culture that must shoulder most of the blame. But nobody fully believed this, either, because we all knew just too many young people who were exceptions to this rule and who lived in or on the edge of a deviant peer group without succumbing to its pathology.

One fall day a few weeks later a vice president of an eastern university, a friend of many years who was a non-denominational Christian, confided to me acute distress about the fall and loss of his only daughter, a rebellious teenager who had run away from home and was living a rather tragic life.

Thinking of my experience with the psychotherapist and social workers I suggested to him that it might just be that Mormon theology had a partial answer to his grief and the universal question which has echoes and parallels going back long before King David's cries of anguish for his rebellious son Absalom or Adam's undoubted concern about Cain.

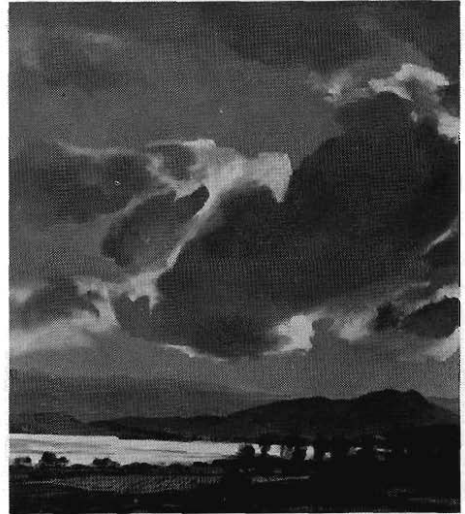
If we were intelligences in the pre-existence, with the power to decide, to choose, to be valiant in the eternities-old struggle between good and evil, that would certainly suggest the possession in our pre-existent life of temperament, personality traits, dispositions, character, fidelity or fickleness, etc. This would add a third dimension to the nature-nurture or heredity-environmental arguments concerning the determinants of personality in this earth life. It would suggest that we bring something in the way of a rudimentary personality organization with us at birth as part of our spirit nature, in addition to and above our genetic endowment. Of course the succeeding experiences of childhood and adult life in our earth environment would certainly introduce the potential for growth and change. And this could be in the direction of maturity and health — or toward pathology or a corrupt nature.

I remember with a certain sharp clarity a day over eleven years ago when the obstetrician announced, with some embarrassment, that contrary to his expectations, my wife would shortly give birth to twins. Fifteen minutes later as we looked at these exact genetic duplicates on the delivery room table, it was strikingly obvious, even then, that in temperament and disposition these were two very different people. The identical genetic bodies with extremely similar intra-uterine environment were obviously inhabited by quite different and unique spiritual and intellectual organizations. And as the years have slipped by I have found myself secretly watching them at play, under stress, in pain, interacting and challenging others as they coped with life's vicissitudes. The significant differences in their personalities from the very beginning kept suggesting an even earlier beginning someplace, somewhere.

It's so easy to find flaws in any family situation to explain why children go astray. But it's not so easy sometimes to explain health and character in the presence of obvious pathology in a particular family

situation. I remember distinctly one mother's grief as she contemplated the dissolute life of one of her children. She kept tearfully saying over and over again, "What did I do wrong?" until she was asked, "Aren't you the same mother to six other children who have all turned out quite well? Who do you blame for that — were you really that different a mother to the one child who chose a more rebellious route?" She had no answer. Her tears ceased as she reflected in thoughtful silence.

Some children it seems almost effortlessly raise themselves. They are attractive and have an aura of goodness and love which draws everyone to them. Others seem constantly to stumble, to be frightened and overwhelmed by every obstacle. Others take



a more rebellious course. Of course all need our love and counsel but in unequal amounts. When one father I know was asked which of his eleven children was his favorite, he replied with a smile, "The one nearest to me." It is unreasonable to attribute all successes or failures to the parents, even though the parents as teachers and models of adult life certainly do play a great role in the child's later adjustment and development.

It may be true as our late President David O. McKay often said, that "No success can compensate for failure in the home," but this statement, *incorrectly interpreted*, has caused more parental grief than almost any I can remember. It is probably as true, however, that "No parent has really failed until he has stopped trying," as one general conference speaker recently noted.