

word itself the secrets of making gold. In the eighteenth century, however, Locke, Condillac, Rousseau, Herder, and others began to argue that language is not natural, but rather arbitrary. The sign is but a convention we agree on to designate some thing. They could point to language after Babel to make this point; for if the word "dog" partakes of the essence of dog-ness, then why do the Germans call the same animal "hund" and the French "chien"? If language is indeed arbitrary, then words no longer have magical power, for they no longer directly relate to the thing over which they are supposed to exert power.

For most of the eighteenth century this sense for language as arbitrary fit Freemasons' sense for their ritual just fine, for they saw their elaborate system of symbols as a rhetorical tool for teaching moral principles, and not as magically efficacious. But the lure of magic remained (as it does in any ritual system); and confidence men like Saint Germain and Cagliostro traveled through Europe revealing an esoteric, magical Masonry which promised wealth and supernatural knowledge untold. Pitched battles were fought between the two sides over the issue of metaphor versus magic. The metaphor camp interpreted their sym-

bols as we do the tropes of a good poem: as revealing knowledge not otherwise accessible, but knowledge still very much limited to the realm of human language. In the magic camp, however, the symbols became esoteric keys to supernatural power and glory: gold could be made from base metals, spirits could be called up from another world. The first group saw the second as fallen from the heights of rational enlightenment, given over to superstition; and the second group found their brothers caught in a sterile, non-transcendent world.

There is plenty of evidence that many of our ancestors saw symbols of the temple ceremony as veritable keys to heaven and as magically potent here on earth. In fact, most of us still harbor some superstition in that regard. But clearly, knowing a secret sign will do us no good now or later unless the sign has helped us know what lies behind it. Unless we have been taught and changed we are left holding worthless currency. (Otherwise any mass-murderer in possession of the often-printed temple ceremony has nothing to fear.) The power is not in the symbols, but in Jesus Christ, whose atonement can be read in any of the symbols if we read well and don't seek salvation in the sign itself.

## BRIEF NOTICES

*Studies in Scripture: Volume Seven — 1 Nephi to Alma 29* edited by Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 345 pp., index, \$15.95.

THIS VOLUME CONTAINS twenty-four exegetic essays on the Book of Mormon, coincidentally corresponding to two dozen known scribes of the text. It also offers a general conference talk by President Benson concerning the significance of the Book of Mormon and Oliver Cowdery's description of the restoration. All are replete with examples of prayer and spiritual prompting.

The annotated essays range in length from six-and-a-half to twenty-two pages. The twelve-and-a-half page "Creation, Fall,

and Atonement" by LaMar E. Garrard has thirty-six citations, primarily cross references, but is readable without considering the notes. At the other extreme several authors employ only one to three notations. Eighteen articles have been written by faculty members from Brigham Young University, and the editor contributed five chapters.

The series has already examined the Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, Old Testament (Genesis to 2 Samuel with I Kings-Malachi to be published in 1989), and the Gospels. A date for release of a study guide interpreting Alma to Moroni was not indicated.