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Messages of the First Presidency James R. Clark, ed.

Dean C. Jessee

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Book Reviews

JAMES R. CLARK, ed. *Messages of the First Presidency, III*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1966. 401 pp. \$4.50.

In compiling the official messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Dr. James R. Clark has provided a unique perspective for the study of Mormon history that will be of great value to layman and scholar alike.

This volume consists of 104 documents covering that transitional period of Church history from 1885 to 1901. The flow of events is easily followed by their chronological presentation; and an excellent fifty-seven-page index provides opportunity for topical study as well. The reader is well rewarded to consider the explanatory notes that accompany each message, which include references for further reading and quotations from significant primary sources, such as the journals of L. John Nuttall, John M. Whitaker, and Wilford Woodruff.

The first eleven items cover the final two and one-half years of the life of President John Taylor. At that time he and other Church leaders were living in "exile" due to the intensity of the anti-polygamy crusade. Five of these messages were delivered to the Saints in general conference, in the absence of their Church leaders.

There are sixty-nine documents listed during the administration of President Wilford Woodruff, including those pertinent to the solution of the plural marriage issue and the political realignment of the Church.

The concluding twenty-four messages cover the three-year term of President Lorenzo Snow. One-third of these deal with financial matters of the Church, the reformation of which was the prime task of his administration.

The lack of reference to the polygamy question in the period of Lorenzo Snow is noticeable, inasmuch as it was the subject of an official statement by that Church leader on January 8, 1900. Rumors were that the Church was insincere in abandoning the practice of plural marriage in 1890 and that

polygamists were still violating the law pertaining to unlawful cohabitation. In his statement, President Snow noted that, ". . . the Church has positively abandoned the practice of polygamy Nor does the Church advise or encourage unlawful cohabitation. . . ."

In this same regard, it may be suggested that the quotation of part of President Snow's May 8, 1899, discourse at St. George, Utah, pertaining to the law of tithing, might logically be extended to include his solemn statement concerning the abandonment of the practice of plural marriage.

Two other messages that were overlooked in this period are noteworthy: The first is a statement by President Woodruff pertaining to the Church and politics, issued October 19, 1895, which is a precursor to the political "Manifesto" of April, 1896, in which he states that the holding of a Church position, ". . . does not require any man . . . to give up his political principles."

The second is a letter sent by President Woodruff at the request of the *New York World* in July, 1897, that appeared in an article entitled, "Fifty Years of Mormonism in America." Among other things, the President described his entrance into Salt Lake Valley with Brigham Young:

When we arrived at the spot where we could have a good view of the valley he wished me to turn the carriage, which I did, so that he could look without obstruction when the door was opened on the side. After gazing on the valley for a while he said: "That will do, drive on; this is the place. I have seen this valley before in vision."

A few other messages of rather minor importance have been overlooked, such as the call, in 1892, for a special day of thanksgiving; the reaffirmation, on October 15, 1892, of the *Deseret News* as the official organ of the Church; and the announcement of a special memorial day in honor of the dead of the warship *Maine*, on July 16, 1898.

Several messages have been listed and briefly described that were not available for publication at this time. One of these was written to Marriner W. Merrill, president of the Logan Temple, January 23, 1889, directing him to discontinue plural marriages. This letter provides a significant clue to the question of the actual terminal date of the practices which arises from

the statement of Wilford Woodruff in the 1890 "Manifesto," wherein he denied that any such marriages had been solemnized during the preceding year, as alleged in the Utah Commission report of that year.

Of slight annoyance in this volume is over fifty typographical errors—the most serious being the transposition of one line of type from its place on Page 310 to a place four lines further in the text. A note in the preface indicates that a desire to preserve the character of the original documents appears to increase the number of errors. Such errors, however, could properly be noted by a literary device, to distinguish them from later additions.

It may be further noted, that the statement on political policy found on Page 233, which was apparently taken from B. H. Roberts' *A Comprehensive History of the Church*, is missing a rather lengthy introductory sentence, when compared with the original in the *Deseret News* of March 25, 1892.

These faults in no way detract from the intrinsic value of this book, and certainly Dr. Clark is to be commended for his highly significant contribution.

Dean C. Jessee
Church Historian's Office