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*The Golden Legacy: A Folk History of J. Golden Kimball*  
Thomas E. Cheney

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Thomas E. Cheney. *The Golden Legacy: A Folk History of J. Golden Kimball*. Santa Barbara and Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, Inc., 1974. xii, 155 pp. \$6.95.

Reviewed by Peter Crawley, professor of mathematics at Brigham Young University, and book review editor for *BYU Studies*.

The events surrounding the publication of *The Golden Legacy* well illustrate the controversy that followed J. Golden Kimball during much of his life: In 1973, Brigham Young University Press published the first edition and then recalled it after the sale of a few copies. The second edition, published by Peregrine Smith, Inc., is a reprint of the first except for two stories which are replaced by a single story not in the first edition.

In all, *The Golden Legacy* contains approximately 90 "J. Golden stories" and 100 extracts from Kimball's discourses, replete with damns and hells, and with earthy language that was less offensive two generations ago. Following an opening

biographical chapter that is largely built up from anecdotes and bits of Golden's sermons, the bulk of the stories and sermonettes are arranged more or less by genre in nine sections (e.g. Cuss Words and Coffee, Sermons, Salty Slips and Anachronisms), tied together by Cheney's running commentary that provides background and continuity. A concluding chapter succinctly assesses the strengths and uniqueness of Kimball's personality.

Probably the book will continue to generate disagreement among its readers. (Once when I attempted to purchase a copy I was told by the clerk that the book was "not factual"!) Most will find it very funny. And most will agree that the damns and hells properly belong there; a J. Golden Kimball story without an accompanying damn or hell is a contradiction in terms!

*The Golden Legacy* is not a folklore study in the usual academic sense. It does not concern itself (except at two points) with story variants or the story-telling situations; there is no clear effort to distinguish folk sources from edited secondary sources; and there is no systematic discussion of motifs or patterns in the stories themselves. It is also not a biography of Jonathan Golden Kimball. There is enough biographical detail to put the stories in context, but the principal questions raised by these stories go unanswered: How did a man like Golden come to be? How did these stories develop, and why do they continue to circulate? Nor is it strictly an explication of the wit and wisdom of J. Golden Kimball, since a number of the stories are obviously apocryphal. Cheney mentions that "The Dog and Pitchfork" also appears in the Abraham Lincoln tradition; and I have heard a "true" version of "A Small Stream" involving a local character from Parowan, Utah.

Yet this is an important book. First, it collects a large number of J. Golden stories, a basic component of the growing body of Mormon humor. But beyond this, it records, as the first part of the title suggests, J. Golden Kimball's legacy—the lessons that come from his extraordinary life. Appropriately these lessons are taught to us, not by a sermon, but by a collection of funny stories. What emerges from them is a picture of an earthy, honest man, reconciled to his humanness, who was exactly what he seemed, and who had enormous

concern for his fellow beings but little concern for what they thought of him. As Cheney comments, "his frankness freed him from suspicion." And he touched thousands of lives because the common Saints could see themselves reflected in the ungainly cowboy who rose to become a General Authority. It would seem to be a timely legacy for some of us in Mormonism who tend to mix an honest desire to be a light unto the world with the urge to create a public image. Hopefully, Golden's legacy will not be lost on us. At the very least, we can ease the burden of our public images by retelling J. Golden Kimball stories.