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*Defender of the Faith: The B.H. Roberts Story* Truman G. Madsen

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**MADSEN, TRUMAN G.** *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980. 455 pp. \$9.50.

Reviewed by Thomas G. Alexander, professor of history and director of the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, Brigham Young University.

For the general reader as well as the specialist, Truman G. Madsen's biography of B. H. Roberts will fill a long-standing gap. *Defender of the Faith* provides a chronological treatment of the life of Elder Roberts from his birth in Lancashire, England, in 1857 to his death in Salt Lake City in 1933, highlighting in a sympathetic manner his childhood, conversion, gathering to Zion, youth, and Church service.

Son of a ne'er-do-well, B. H. Roberts lived a life in England that was virtually a page from a Dickens novel. After his mother joined the Church, the family was torn apart, and Roberts's mother left him in England while she emigrated to America. He and his sister eventually joined her, but not before he had been subjected to the worst that early nineteenth-century England had to offer. In Utah, B. H. endured the harshness of the nineteenth-century Utah mining

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<sup>1</sup>*Paradise Lost* 2. 232-40, in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merrit Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957), p. 329.

frontier until he returned to Centerville where he lived as a young tough until he was apprenticed to a blacksmith. Eleven years old before he learned to read, he experienced a conversion to the printed and spoken word which eventually made him one of the foremost scholars, writers, and religious leaders in the Church.

Perhaps most important in the biography are the details of Roberts's service as a missionary and his work as a writer on religious subjects. Madsen provides detail particularly on Roberts's southern mission of 1881–1886, when, at considerable risk to himself, he worked at cleaning up the remains of the Cane Creek Massacre, and his other missionary labors in the Northern States, the British Mission, and the Eastern States where he served as mission president during the early 1920s.

Roberts's writings on Church subjects were voluminous. They included his three-volume defense of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon (*A New Witness for God*); the monumental six-volume *Comprehensive History of the Church*; and his much-cited edition of Joseph Smith's Manuscript History and portions of Brigham Young's Manuscript History, now known to Church members as the seven-volume *History of the Church*.

The specialist will note in the biography a number of errors on Madsen's part that a greater knowledge of United States, Western, and Utah history and culture could have avoided. Half the population in Utah, for instance, was never dependent on mining (p. 71). There was no justice of the United States Supreme Court named Sumner Howard (he was justice of the Supreme Court of Arizona Territory) (p. 190). The crusade against the Church did not end with the Smoot hearings (p. 182). Cohabitation with more than one wife was not legal after Utah became a state (p. 245). The congressman who led the attack on B. H. Roberts was Robert W. Tayler, not Taylor (p. 262). B. H. Roberts did not nominate Clarence Bamberger, who was a Republican and political enemy (he nominated Simon Bamberger, a fellow Democrat who was elected governor of Utah) (p. 355).

Perhaps the most serious errors come, however, not with these details, which may have resulted from relying too heavily on work by research assistants or from typographical errors, but they are in Madsen's treatment of Roberts's political career. B. H. Roberts would undoubtedly roll over in his grave to hear himself called "an independent" (p. 271). His political opinions followed the Democratic Party quite closely, as a comparison of Roberts's views with the party positions will show. Far from acting "from the

wings," he played a central role in Utah Democratic Party politics as a stump speaker, political appointee, and active partisan. His attacks on Reed Smoot during the 1908 campaign, for instance, led to intense cross-examination before the Council of the Twelve, rather than simply the one or two "pulpit preachments" from Joseph F. Smith (p. 272). Other examples could also be cited.

Although it is wrong to expect an author to write the book the reviewer would like to have written, one often wonders about the rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of particular material. This is particularly true with regard to the controversial problems in which B. H. Roberts was involved. One wonders, for instance, why so much space should have been devoted to a consideration of Roberts's controversy with William Jarman which from the perspective of today will probably be viewed as antiquarian and why no space at all is given to the controversy over the Book of Abraham with the Reverend F. S. Spalding, Roberts's extensive work in the 1920s encompassing at least three manuscripts on problems related to the Book of Mormon (both of which are of vital contemporary interest), or Roberts's discussions with the First Presidency concerning the exclusion of the King Follett Discourse from the first edition of the *History of the Church*.

The value of the biography lies principally in the chronological treatment of the life of B. H. Roberts and in the inspiration it will provide to Latter-day Saints. It is difficult to conceive of a less auspicious beginning for a life which proved so productive and valuable to himself and his co-religionists. B. H. Roberts was undoubtedly one of the mighty men of Zion, and this biography will assist in perpetuating his memory in the collective consciousness of the Mormon people.