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Brother Brigham Eugene England

Eugene E. Campbell

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ENGLAND, EUGENE. *Brother Brigham*. Salt Lake City, Bookcraft Inc., 1980. 247 pp. \$5.95.

Reviewed by Eugene E. Campbell, professor emeritus of history, Brigham Young University.

“Too many books about Brigham Young have been written without love or faith” (p. vii) is the assertion of the author of this latest volume on some aspects of the life of the great Mormon leader. Dr. England’s justification for adding another title to the extensive list of books about Brigham Young is that he is viewing the Mormon leader through the eyes of faith and love, but with more objectivity than earlier works by family members who used a similar approach. Professor England has also had access to “numerous unpublished diaries and letters by Brigham Young’s contemporaries which give important details and assessments from those who knew him best” (p. vii), as well as the aid of research historian Ronald Esplin, who has been classifying and cataloguing the Brigham Young papers and documents in the Historical Division of the LDS Church for several years (pp. vii–viii).

The result is, in the words of the author, “a small volume of rather personal essays that can only begin to touch the dimensions of such a large life (p. viii).” Two of the dimensions he has chosen to omit are Brigham Young’s dealings with the Indians and his “staggering achievements as a good husband to sixteen plural wives and an excellent father to forty-six children” (p. viii). (Since Brigham had twenty-seven wives and fifty-six children, one wonders if Dr. England has purposely omitted the other wives and children or if he is

suggesting that he was a good husband and father only to the ones enumerated. However, in the case of the children he may have counted only those who survived childhood, and it is true that only sixteen of the wives had children.)

The omission of these two rather controversial aspects of Brigham Young's career, especially his role in the promotion and practice of plural marriage, which the author feels is "too important and difficult to try to include here" (p. viii) is a key to the nature of the book. It is a very positive view of the most admirable characteristics of the pioneer leader, with very little criticism.

Episodes and aspects of Brigham Young's life included in the essays are Young Brigham, Brigham in England, Brigham and Joseph, Brigham as Moses both in Crossing Iowa and into the Desert, Brigham's Gospel Kingdom, and Brigham as President of the Church. Also included is a center section of photographs showing how the Mormon leader appeared at various stages in his life. Chapter notes and an index make up the last twenty-five pages of the book, and, as usual, Bookcraft has done an admirable job of printing and binding.

The volume is filled with quotes, primarily from the *History of the Church*, *Journal of Discourses*, and the "Manuscript History of Brigham Young," plus personal letters, Brigham Young Papers, and Dr. Leonard Arrington's publications. These quotes are often followed by the author's interpretation and justification of the Mormon leader's words.

Professor England is aware of much of the current scholarship that is revising many questionable concepts in LDS Church history, but there are mistakes. He accepts without question the exaggerated numbers of Mormons driven out of Missouri (12,000) (p. 32) and the Eliza R. Snow story of nine babies being born in the snow and rain one night at Sugar Creek (p. 109). He describes Miles Goodyear as an Englishman (p. 137) (Miles Goodyear was born in Connecticut but had an Englishman as a partner). He also accepts the "outer cordon" concept fostered by Hunter, Neff, and others that Brigham Young "had ringed the kingdom with colonies at strategic points of entry" (p. 162) even though this concept has been seriously challenged if not disproven by this reviewer. But these minor errors fade into insignificance when the major problem of the book is considered—namely, the one-sided, noncritical view of almost every issue and event. He accepts, apparently without question, the rationalization that the "central purpose" of the Zion's Camp march was to test the loyalty of the participants (p. 25). He also cites as a

fulfillment of Joseph Smith's prophecy the terrible cholera that afflicted many in the camp and caused the death of eighteen of the volunteers, ostensibly for fault-finding, although the Prophet's chief antagonist, Sylvester Smith, was not afflicted with the disease (p. 24). Heber C. Kimball's assertion that "the Lord fought in our defense" as an explanation for one of their enemies being "killed by lightning and another had his hand torn off by his horse" is accepted by Dr. England without comment (p. 24).

President Young is portrayed as a man with acknowledged faults, the most serious being his lack of control of "this unruly member, my tongue" (p. 141). But despite his use of strong rhetoric, threatening the seizure of property and even the decapitation of uncooperative Saints, the people knew that President Young was engaging in hyperbole and continued to follow his advice. In Dr. England's words:

Confident that President Young was receiving divine direction concerning this whole unified spiritual and physical kingdom and receiving it according to changing circumstances as they developed, they could accept, with clear-eyed but persistent obedience, the directions from their prophet on all aspects of their lives, from health remedies to architecture to marriage choices, and then adjust with equanimity when directions changed, even reversed, as conditions changed. These people were not dupes or fools; they were willing to give such power over their lives only to one whom, on *continuing evidence*, both of his enjoyment of the gifts of the spirit and of his practical success, they trusted was indeed God's spokesman. [Pp. 156-57]

He was constantly in touch with God and always concerned with building not only a Zion, but a "Zion people" by "planning in terms of the divine potential of every human being in this earthly school" (p. 156).

An interesting example of Brigham Young's interpretation of events is cited in the call of the Mormon Battalion. He recognized that it "provided an opportunity which did indeed benefit the Saints . . . and moved effectively to reverse the fear and resentment of his people against the government" (p. 128). He asserted that it was important to raise the five hundred man "requisition" because he was convinced that it was one more test "provided by the Lord to *try* the Saints as well as help protect them." He later believed it was Senator Thomas Benton of Missouri who conceived of this plot and "damned President Polk for his tyranny in drafting out 500 men to form a Battalion, in order that women and children might perish on the Prairies" (p. 126). No attempt is made by the author to reconcile the conflicting opinions nor to try to ascertain President Polk's motives in calling the Battalion nor Senator Benton's role in the affair.

Despite the historical shortcomings and apologetic interpretations, the author's essays present a considerable amount of new material on Brigham Young as revealed in his letters and sermons. Dr. England is a skilled writer and presents his point of view in an interesting manner. It is written for Latter-day Saints, and it seems likely that most will enjoy his choice of subjects as well as his interpretations, for they are presented by a believer to believers with both love and faith.