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*On the Potter's Wheel: The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball* Stanley B. Kimball, ed.

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STANLEY B. KIMBALL, ed. *On the Potter's Wheel: The Diaries of Heber C. Kimball*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books and Smith Research Associates, 1987. xxvi; 224 pp. \$59.95.

Reviewed by Paul H. Peterson, assistant professor of Church history and doctrine, Brigham Young University.

Editor Stan Kimball, perhaps unwittingly, makes some pretty strong claims about this newest edition of the diaries of Heber C. Kimball. "In some instances," he declares, they "are the best, and occasionally the only, contemporary account of the events they chronicle" (ix). "Without his writings," he adds, "any understanding of early Mormonism would be incomplete" (x).

It may be that such assurances lead the reader to expect more than Heber C. Kimball's diaries can deliver. Most of the diaries have been published previously. More importantly, like many pioneers, Heber noted significant events but seldom analyzed or reflected upon them. In places the sparseness of comment leaves little more than a fast-paced itinerary. The editor notes that Heber did not like to write. I think that it is a fair assessment.

But that is not to say that *On the Potter's Wheel* is not important or illuminating. While it is a kind of hit-and-miss potpourri, it is also vintage Heber C. Kimball, recording events and occurrences of divine import and bearing testimony to the Lord's frequent intervention and watchful care in the dispensation of the fullness of times. And who better to edit and comment on the legendary Heber's writings than scholar-great-great-grandson Stanley B. Kimball, a noted historian and author of an important 1981 biography about his illustrious forebear.

Heber C. Kimball produced four diaries between 1837 and 1847. With the exception of 1846–47 diaries that were written by scribes Peter O. Hansen and William Clayton, they are all reproduced here. In general, they deal with Heber's first and second missions to England, an eastern states mission, a visit to eastern cities, and accounts of life and events in Nauvoo just before and after the Prophet's death. All of the diaries contain helpful insights and occasionally new information. The later ones that describe the concluding labors on the Nauvoo Temple and the transmission of the endowment to the general Church membership are especially noteworthy.

In addition to the diaries, editor Kimball has reproduced what he calls a memorandum book along with two journal extracts from the *Times and Seasons* that detail the Zion's Camp march, Heber's call to the apostleship, and the death of David W. Patten. The



memorandum section consists of fourteen memoranda dealing with personal revelations Heber received between 1852 and 1864. They chronicle his perceived deteriorating relationship with Brigham Young (or at least his growing sense that he had outlived his ecclesiastical usefulness); the Church's tenuous relationships with the federal government; domestic challenges with plural wives; and a bout with sickness. Included among these entries are some predictions or prophecies Heber made. Some of these were fulfilled; others were not realized.

But more than any new information that one might find, it seems to me these diaries are important for two related reasons. They allow us to enter, however briefly, into an era and society that was profoundly different from our own, and they provide a poignant attestation to and appreciation for what can only be described as the incredible faith and devotion that seemed to characterize that first generation of Mormon leaders. Heber lived in an age when things religious both moved and excited the populace. In a day without competitive attractions such as cable television or sporting spectacles, a confrontation between a Mormon missionary and a sectarian minister might attract hundreds. There was more concern with the otherworldly, angels and devils, sin and salvation. It was an age when an Eleazer Miller was so full of the spirit he could burst out "in a voice so loud he could be heard for a mile and a half" (183); a day when the Lord's hand was ubiquitous, and divine implications were often read into seemingly ordinary occurrences. Thus when a large looking glass fell in the room of the First Presidency of the Seventy and shattered, it was thought by some to be symbolic of the seventies being scattered in all the world (159). Seemingly, it was a time when the veil between heaven and earth was generally thin and occasionally transparent. Perhaps the conviction that the Savior would come within one's lifetime made life more simple, answers more obvious, and bred a stronger confidence that one's direction and goals were on target.

Journal entries reveal that Heber, almost on a regular basis, received guidance through dreams (16, 68, 96, 110, 111, 141). The dreams took on myriad forms and images, but in most instances Heber was able to arrive at a meaningful interpretation. On a semiregular basis, he could obtain revelation by consulting with the Lord through a rod (65, 85, 98). From the time of his conversion to Mormonism, the Lord was ever approachable and not too far away.

Perhaps, however, Heber's ability to get divine direction so matter-of-factly was but a natural extension of his faith and absolute trust in the Lord. "I desire to [k]now nothing but Jesus and Him Crusified, for my trust is in The[e] O God" (5), he wrote before he

left for his first British mission. On a later occasion, he pleaded with the Lord to “keep me in thy own care, and leave not, for I am not anny thing of my self” (76). Heber’s loyalty to the Lord also translated into loyalty to Joseph and the Twelve. Two days after learning of Joseph’s death, he asked, “lord how can we part with our dear Br.” and pleaded, “O lord save the Twelve” (74).

Heber’s diaries teem with references indicating his love for first wife Vilate. Interestingly, though plurally married, he almost always was referring to Vilate when he wrote of “my wife.” On one occasion when she was sick, he administered to her and noted soon after that she had recovered. In his mind, her recovery could have but one explanation: “the Lord hurd” (123).

In his earlier biography and again here, Stan Kimball notes that Heber felt a gradual alienation from the Church he had served so faithfully. Especially in the Memorandum section can this disappointment be seen. But I wonder if his disappointments were even more deeply-rooted than his seeming inability to adapt to the more moderate course the Church was taking. Perhaps he was also perplexed by the realization that the oft-cursed enemies of God remained yet to be crushed and that the Saints still did not possess the kind of power that Heber envisioned they would have.

To assist the reader, editor Kimball has provided an introduction, a chronology, three maps, and introductory notes to each of the chapters. I found them all helpful. He provides comparatively little annotation in “deference to the growing tendency to display neither pedantry nor to expend undue time on insignificant events or obscure persons” (xix). For the historically literate, the annotation is sufficient; for others, it is not. The annotation that does appear is sensitive and accurate. This book is another in the Signature Press limited edition series and is attractively bound and printed. In short, this is both a handsome and important volume, and I would hope the \$59.95 cost does not limit its readership.