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Out of the Best Books, Vol. 1 Bruce B. Clark and Robert K. Thomas

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BRUCE B. CLARK AND ROBERT K. THOMAS. *Out of the Best Books*, Vol. I. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1964. 485 pp., \$2.95.

Nearly all thinking persons agree that American education needs more humanistic training. The Relief Society has long ago recognized our present need in this regard. This organization has therefore given literary lessons to its members for many years. Indeed, fortunate were members of the Relief Society, and hence the membership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, when two Brigham Young University English professors, Bruce B. Clark and Robert K. Thomas, were commissioned to produce a "text" that could serve as the basis for their literary studies.

The title, *Out of the Best Books*, reminds us at once of a statement in the Doctrine and Covenants that reflects the well-established belief of Latter-day Saints since 1830, that all men need general education and cultural elevation. The subtitle, *An Anthology of Literature*, is too modest. A text that can boast an introduction as scholarly, as helpful, and as easily understood as that written by Professor Thomas, is more than an anthology or collection of pieces of literature. A further modifier of the title, "Volume 1," foreshadows other volumes to follow in a systematic series.

The main concern of Volume I is said to be "The individual and Human Values," which Professor Clark divides into "Faith in God and Man," "Right and Wrong Attitudes," "God Versus Evil," "The Place of Suffering in Life," and "Facing Death." With this careful and logical arrangement of values, a good course of study based on *Out of the Best Books* will make the students realize that all that can be called literature, prose as well as poetry, deals with life's values rather than with life's happenings only.

A "discussion" follows each literary selection, which contains pertinent data concerning the author, specific qualities of the work being analyzed, relative quality of the author's works, stylistic characteristics of the author under discussion, and makes a helpful comparison with other well-known, at times famous writers.

In such "discussions" Dr. Clark has probably wrought better than he knows. Tenaciously he holds to human values and discusses the various techniques of writing very little, some-

times not at all. This is noteworthy since, to date, too many commentaries on literature discuss too much the part played by form, and that not infrequently at the expense of that played by content.

If those who lead groups of students through a study of literature at the hand of Professor Clark apply the analytical philosophy of Professor Thomas given at the beginning of *Out of the Best Books*, the students will find their perception of beauty sharpened and their commitment to ennobling principles of living strengthened. Students who study literature inspired by this monumental work will never again be content with a superficial analysis or the mere "reading stories" approach to literature. Whatever success this text may reap eventually, its pair of authors will have earned all of that and more.

Gerrit de Jong, Jr.