

HUGH NIBLEY. *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*. Edited by Don E. Norton and Shirley S. Ricks. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994. xv; 541 pp. Bibliography, index. \$23.95.

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Since 1946, Hugh Nibley has been associated with Brigham Young University and has been prolific as a writer and lecturer. His candor, scholarship, and defense of the restored gospel mark his years as a teacher and researcher. His dry humor and keen insights are legendary to several generations of Church students and readers. All of these characteristics are apparent in this book.

This work is volume thirteen in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*. It contains nineteen chapters comprised of lectures, addresses, and previously published articles and responses from 1967 to 1992. The editors selected and classified the works into four parts under the headings of environment, politics, education, and leadership.

The chapters are classic “Nibley” in style, quotation, documentation, and reasoning. The chapters have a cumulative total of 1,280 endnotes and over 250 scripture citations. Comprehensive citations of texts and historical background are stock in trade for this scholar.

A difficulty for some readers that study *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints* will be the same one found in most books of this genre. Works that are compiled from an author’s sermons, lectures, or other writings are often not specifically joined or unified. Some readers will note that this book is not a coherent presentation of a singular theme as suggested by the title. While the editors have used appropriate groupings of Nibley’s presentations, some problems of redundancy occur as anecdotes or quotations are repeated in several chapters.¹

The title of the book may also misinform those not acquainted with the Nibley series. This volume could be more aptly titled “Brother Nibley Challenges the Saints” with a subtitle to reflect his extensive use of Brigham Young’s teachings along with Joseph Smith’s. If this volume is an accurate measuring stick, Nibley undoubtedly views Brigham and Joseph as the epitome of

modern prophetic leadership. Nevertheless, Nibley expresses what he views as the challenges facing a new century and uses the principles taught by these two giants only to buttress his opinions. As an illustration, chapter fifteen, "Mediocre Meditations on the Media," contains no reference to the teachings of the second president of the Church. Likewise, chapter twelve, "The Day of the Amateur," is a modern critique of the state of education primarily in the United States. In this analysis, Nibley notes the sad disarray of academia's (and much of society's) reliance on diplomas and certification:

Someone (this writer, in fact) has said that anyone can become a dean, a professor, a department head, a chancellor, or a custodian by appointment—it has happened thousands of times; but since the world began, no one has ever become an artist, a scientist, or a scholar by appointment. The professional may be a dud, but to get any recognition, the amateur has to be good. To maintain his amateur status, moreover, he has to be dedicated, honest, and incorruptible—from which irksome necessity the professional, unless he cares otherwise, is freed by an official certificate. (303)

This frame of reference will not disappoint Nibley fans but may be a concern for those hoping for a cohesive view of the teachings of Brigham Young.

Perhaps this volume's greatest contribution will be that of casting the personality and teachings of Brigham Young in a more accurate and favorable light for twentieth-century readers. With a confidence born of a scholar's lifelong study, Nibley characterizes President Young as

the one thing we have to be proud of at BYU, and he certainly is, in my opinion, the greatest leader of modern times. It would be hard to imagine any leader who faced more terrible obstacles and more hopeless odds than Brigham Young, or any leader who overcame them more brilliantly. What he did was marvelous, and it is also very relevant to our times. (449)

Thus Nibley commences "Brigham Young as Leader," employing 163 quotations from "one of the most discursive and lucid of men" to give a sense of Brigham Young's "running commentary" (450) and to highlight the principles with which he challenged and led the Saints: Leadership is the antithesis of compulsion. "God intends variety in all spheres of life" (457). Latter-day Saints should be self-directed, inner-directed, not other-directed. God, not man,

is in charge. "The Lord dictates, governs, and controls: I do not, neither do I wish to" (465).

Aspire to self-mastery and let contention cease are two themes developed at greater length in "Brigham Young and the Enemy" and epitomized by one of President Young's wry comments: "Some of the Elders would much rather fight for their religion than live it" (474). He also taught do not be in a hurry. Do not steady the ark. (An adjacent article entitled "Criticizing the Brethren" is drawn from the teachings of Joseph Smith). Finally, and most importantly according to Nibley, Brigham Young taught that "the living oracles of God, or the Spirit of revelation must be in each and every individual" (484). This point Nibley underscores in another article—"From Leaders to Managers: The Fatal Shift."

To Nibley, it is "plain enough" that Brigham Young's principles worked. He concludes:

How people flocked to him as a leader! In times of great danger and stress, he was the Rock of Gibraltar. This was a man you could trust: nothing would throw him off the track. . . . [H]e couldn't be moved at all, because he knew exactly where he stood, and he's told us why he couldn't be bought or intimidated. He simply wasn't impressed with anything else. Man didn't move him. (486)

This work will be a welcome addition to the collection of the reader interested in Nibley's thought and a valuable reference book to those seriously interested in the teachings of Brigham Young. It is readable and valuable because of Nibley's reflection on Brother Brigham's teachings as applied to dominant concerns of the last half of this century. The expectations of most readers of the Nibley series by F.A.R.M.S. will be amply fulfilled in this volume.

NOTES

¹Speakers often use the same stories to illustrate different topics. Nibley uses the following anecdotes in differing circumstances in this volume: Brigham Young dancing (181, 520), the burning of the Nauvoo Temple (142, 310, 485), and a New York reporter observing Brigham Young dousing a campfire (140, 181, 519).