

JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH

IN MEMORIAM

1876-1972



JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH

Prophet, Scholar, Historian, Author, Counselor, and Friend

EARL E. OLSON*

As President Joseph Fielding Smith left the Church Administration Building on what was to be his last day at the office, he stopped to greet some of the personnel in the Historical Department. This was a typical action of this great man, showing the closeness he felt to those with whom he had associated over a period of seventy years. He became involved with the writing of Church history and the preservation of Church records when he started work in 1902 as a clerk in the Office of the Church Historian. He then became directly responsible for the history and the records when after an additional fifteen years he was called as the Church Historian in 1917, a position he filled for forty-nine years until he was sustained as the tenth president of the Church. During his tenure as Church Historian many advancements were made in the Historian's Office, involving record keeping, records management, microfilming, and processing and preservation of the Church records. One of his exceptional characteristics was that he could always be found at his desk or filling a Church assignment. Even when he was handicapped with his foot in a cast, he was busy at his desk from early morning until late afternoon. During these years he was productive in writing—fifteen publications coming from his pen, together with numerous pamphlets and articles, poems and hymns.

President Smith was an unassuming humble man, yet he could be stern when sternness was needed. He was often

*Earl Olson has worked closely with President Smith in the Church Historian's Office for thirty-eight years, first as a clerk (1934), then as Church Librarian (1948), then as assistant Church historian (1965). With the reorganization of the Historical Department of the Church, he was named Church Archivist. He is also a member of the Editorial Board of *BYU Studies*.

brief and direct in answering queries when he thought the inquirer should already know the answers. And yet, he had great empathy for those who had problems, and his door was always open, not only to those who worked under his direction, but to visitors who sought his counsel. He felt great love for little children and his face would light up whenever the little ones were ushered into his room. He was concerned for the members of the Church and for their proper understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many came to him for an interpretation of the scriptures and left well satisfied.

To those who knew him well, Joseph Fielding Smith was a warm personality. He was a devoted scholar, historian, author, and counselor. In his passing we have lost a great friend and leader.