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Book Reviews

A Biography of Ezra Thompson Clark. By ANNIE CLARK TANNER. Utah, the Mormons, and the West Series, no. 5 (Salt Lake City: Tanner Trust Fund, University of Utah Library, 1975. Xi+ 82 pp. $8.50.)

This short biography of her father by Annie Clark Tanner is essentially a loving eulogy by a devoted daughter. It consists of a brief background chapter followed by an account of his life in Nauvoo and Winter Quarters and his journey to Utah as a member of Heber C.Kimball's 1848 company. Chapter 3 summarizes the main events of the rest of his life, including colonizing missions in Iron County and Bear Lake, and proselytizing missions in England, Canada, eastern United States, and Oregon. It also describes his marriages to three wives and his subsequent imprisonment and $300 fine for those polygamous relationships. The remaining chapters give more intimate details of his home life, business affairs, and philosophy of life, including religion. The final few pages include a "resolution of respect" by fellow high council members and Ezra Clark's written testimony and instructions to his family.

Mrs. Tanner's account portrays her father as being a devout Mormon, but "largely free from spiritual superstition"; an energetic and highly successful farmer and businessman; and an affectionate husband and loving father. This is evidently a valid assessment of his general character, ability, and personality; but her descriptive statements are so overwhelmingly favorable that one wonders what he was really like. The nearest approach to a weakness in Ezra Clark's character is described in his being exact in business "for which he was sometimes criticized." But then the author immediately counters with the statement "however it was often said of him that his word was as good as his bond." Mrs. Tanner asserts that his "sense of values" was so keen that "he seldom, if ever, made a mistake in his plans or suffered disadvantages in a business deal" but was "generous to a fault" in a social way.

Speaking of his family relationships, she reports that "every child found a delight in pleasing him. Everyone tried to anticipate his every wish." Apparently he was able to achieve unusual success as a polygamous husband and father, but his daughter's portrait of him is lacking in objectivity.

Mrs. Tanner's own superb autobiography, published recently under the title of A Mormon Mother, is written with such candor and insight that it is disappointing to find so little of these qualities in her biography of her father. Perhaps the fact that it was written in 1931 — thirty years after her father's death and almost ten years before she wrote her autobiography — may help to explain this difference in quality. And, of course, she knew her own life and feelings far better than those of her father.

Despite this lack of objectivity, readers will find much that is interesting in this little volume. The chapter on home life with its descriptions of bobsled

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rides, "peach cutting" socials, molasses candy pulls, and twenty-fourth of July parades conjures images of a by-gone era in which life seemed much simpler and more wholesome. But the deaths of two of his sons while on missions and his own imprison-

ment for unlwaful cohabitation serve as a reminder that each age has its problems as well as its pleasures.

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