

The Sainly Scoundrel: The Life and Times of Dr. John Cook Bennett, by Andrew F. Smith. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997. xiii, 271 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$26.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JOHN S. HALLER JR., SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY AT CARBONDALE

This book by Andrew Smith is a fine addition to the Mormon studies publications of the University of Illinois Press. The book traces the career of self-taught Rev. Dr. John Cook Bennett (1804–1867) from Massachusetts, an eclectic genius in many ways, but most certainly a scoundrel as well. At various times in his life, Bennett was a surgeon and professor of midwifery and diseases of women and children; a diploma-mill peddler; a chancellor and president of several colleges and medical departments; a major, brigadier general, and major general in five different militia units; a mayor, justice of the peace, and postmaster; a minister (Methodist and Christian Disciple), Mason, and Mormon; an abortionist, lobbyist, and agriculturalist. He lived out his interesting life in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, New Hampshire, and Iowa, and published books and articles that span religion, education, medicine, horticulture, and animal husbandry.

Although apprenticeship-trained by a regular physician at the age of eighteen, Bennett practiced a mixed system of medicine based on the reform efforts of Samuel Thomson, Wooster Beach, Thomas Morrow, Horton Howard, and others who challenged the hegemony of orthodox medicine with a more botanically based *materia medica* and prohibitions against bleeding, blistering, and mineral poisons. In particular, he took a liking to Alva Curtis, an independent Thomsonian with similarly eclectic interests, and taught occasionally at his Botanico-Medical School in Cincinnati.

But Bennett was first and foremost an entrepreneur who found early success selling diplomas in law, divinity, arts and sciences, and especially medicine. He then attracted national attention with health claims about tomatoes and tomato pills. From there, he moved on to phrenology, patent medicines, and the Mormon church. His ingratiating correspondence with Mormon leaders Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon brought him into the inner circle of church politics and the dirty little business that it once was. Smith painstakingly recounts the conspiracies, embezzlements, revelations, designs, seductions, adulteries, assassinations, public confessions, expulsions, and exposés that riddled the public and private face of Mormonism at mid-century. Eventually, Bennett became a whistle-blower (after his expulsion for seduction, adultery, embezzlement, perjury, and treason), and tra-

veled the country lecturing on Mormon misdeeds, including the experiment with polygamy. Yet, even after publication of his *History of the Saints* (1842) and two years of campaigning against them, he tried to gain control of the movement following Joseph Smith's assassination in 1844.

In later years, Bennett associated with the Hinklites (a splinter group of the Mormons) and then with Voree Strang (the self-proclaimed successor to Joseph Smith) before finally forming a poultry and stock company and moving to Iowa in 1853. He finished out his years living a comfortable life in Polk City, Iowa, where neighbors considered him one of the town's better citizens.

Smith has done a fine job of recounting Bennett's story. The book is well researched and decently written. At times, the detail becomes burdensome, but, for the most part, the story being told is worth the telling.

Reverend Joseph Tarkington, Methodist Circuit Rider: From Frontier Evangelism to Refined Religion, by David L. Kimbrough. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997. xxi, 218 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY FRANK E. JOHNSON, MIDAMERICA NAZARENE UNIVERSITY

David Kimbrough has written a clever biography, casting the central figure as a minor player in a grand drama. Kimbrough argues that Joseph Tarkington was a significant figure in the development of Methodism in Indiana. This combination of biography and denominational history will be of particular interest to regional and religious historians. While scholars will appreciate Kimbrough's work, it is suitable for undergraduate students and lay historians as well.

Kimbrough's thesis is that Tarkington (1800-1891) personified nineteenth-century Methodism. Tarkington resided in Indiana for all but the first fifteen years of his life. Licensed to preach in 1824, he remained an active minister, filling numerous assignments throughout the state, until the late 1880s. He served as a circuit rider well beyond the typical four-year "probation" period. With the blessing of his presiding elder, Tarkington married Maria Slawson in 1831; together, though more Maria's responsibility than Joseph's, they raised seven children. Genealogists will delight in Kimbrough's exploration of Tarkington family history. In many respects a mirror image of the denomination, the Tarkingtons struggled to rise above inauspicious origins and achieve social respectability. Tarkington, and Methodists

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