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Joseph Smith, by *Richard Lyman Bushman* (*Knopf*; \$35). Joseph Smith claimed that he was visited by an angel who gave him golden plates from which he transcribed the Book of Mormon, and he had organized a church before he was twenty-five. His personal charisma and his administrative genius helped spread Mormonism throughout the Western United States, turning the sect into a legislative federation complete with social and political institutions. There were always those who thought Smith a charlatan and a fanatic, and, in 1844, at the age of thirty-eight, he was fatally shot by an angry mob. Bushman is both an emeritus professor of history at Columbia and a practicing Mormon, and his exhaustive biography carefully treads a path between reverence and objectivity, as when he investigates the phenomenon of “plural marriage”; Smith, in order to establish “a Righteous race . . . upon the Earth,” had more than thirty wives.

Warped Passages, by *Lisa Randall* (*Ecco*; \$27.95). Randall, a professor of physics at Harvard, offers a tour of current questions in particle physics, string theory, and cosmology, paying particular attention to the thesis that more physical dimensions exist than are usually acknowledged. Writing for a general audience, Randall is patient and kind: she encourages readers to skip around in the text, corrals mathematical equations in an appendix at the back, and starts off each chapter with an allegorical story, in a manner recalling the work of George Gamow. Although the subject itself is intractably difficult to follow, the exuberance of Randall’s narration is appealing. She’s honest about the limits of the known, and almost revels in the uncertainties that underlie her work—including the possibility that some day it may all be proved wrong.

No Applause—Just Throw Money, by *Trav S.D.* (*Faber & Faber*; \$25). Late in the nineteenth century, America’s variety



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