

Book of Mormon Editorship

Grammatical Structure, Language, and Absence of Anachronisms

IN MY LABORS among the Saints, I have been under an impulsion to confine my efforts to topics of general interest to the church and related directly to our distinctive movement.

I therefore am well pleased with what is engaging our attention this week, for there is nothing so much Latter Day Saint as the Book of Mormon. I like to think of our labors here at this time as an extension of what was begun at Kirtland in October of last year, an educational movement akin to the School of the Prophets in which all of modern Israel may receive instruction.

Since the more important part of my effort is not lengthy, I wish to take a little time for some general remarks and lay a foundation from a personal experience.

As all of you have recognized, there is in the world today a feeling of secularism. It has been called "death of the heart." People quite generally have lost interest in life. Even church people are losing interest in the church. They no longer find in the church the spirit of high adventure. I suggest for Latter Day Saints an antidote for the situation that confronts us: It is the Book of Mormon.

The early Christians told a very simple story: Certainly to them it was one of consuming interest and thrilling adventure. They told the story of a man born of woman, who claimed to be the Son of God, who was persecuted for his claims, crucified, and resurrected. With that cause they went out in small numbers, and in the course of some three hundred years converted the major portion of the civilized world.

The elders of the Restoration in its beginning went out with the *same story* to tell to the world. They, too, had a story of wondrous adventure.

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They had everything the early Saints had: a man had been born of woman who averred he was the Son of God who was persecuted on the cross, executed, and then resurrected. In addition to that they related the marvelous way in which the gospel had been restored to the earth, and took, as a special witness on behalf of their Lord and Master, the Book of Mormon which we believe is perhaps a better, a more exact witness for Jesus Christ as to doctrine, than the New Testament, because it contains the gospel as revealed by Christ in its fullness—the everlasting gospel, which is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

That this book opens up new and interesting vistas is being amply demonstrated here at this time.

We have many able preachers and writers who are giving us valuable material in support of the Book of Mormon. We have among us men who have devoted much time and energy to archaeological evidences in support of the book, and the elders from the beginning have been able to substantiate it, at least to their satisfaction, from the prophecies found in the Bible.

However, my approach to the book on this occasion is from a different angle, and in doing so I will relate a personal experience.

WHEN I WAS MUCH YOUNGER—without admitting my age, however—I was a member of the Iowa Legislature. There I became acquainted with many men who became prominent in the affairs of that state. A number of them later

served as Governors of Iowa. One of them was William L. Harding. Some years after I removed to Missouri, I happened to be in Detroit when Governor Harding was there, and I had a very pleasant visit with him.

It was well known when I was attending the Legislature that I was a member of the Reorganized Church, and my church background was respected. As a matter of fact I was given a prominent committee chairmanship because of the excellent reputation of our church people, not because of any request made by me or by them, but because the Anti-Saloon League, the W.C.T.U., and the Prohibition Amendment League made specific request to the Speaker of the House. But while my connection with the church was known to all, very few of my colleagues ever talked with me about it.

This day at Detroit, however, after we had canvassed many things and recalled mutual experiences, Governor Harding very abruptly asked me a question. He wanted to know if I believed my grandfather had participated in a conspiracy with others to impose upon the public a spurious record in the Book of Mormon. The question, coming so unexpectedly, quite staggered me. I did not flatter myself that I was fully prepared to meet a situation like that; but through the years since then, as I have recalled the experience, I believe there was a degree of inspiration in the way I met it.

It flashed through my thinking: "Here is a very astute lawyer." I knew of his reputation as an attorney. I knew he had been specially successful in criminal cases. "Here is a man," I thought, "who understands human nature, or he would not be so successful with juries."

So I said to him, "Governor, do you believe that some eight or eleven or more men could go into a conspiracy, such as you suggest, and give their testimony with respect to the Book of Mormon, a false document, and put over anything of that kind without some one or more, or perhaps all of them, at sometime during their lives, acknowledging they had perjured themselves or borne false testimony?"

And then I followed about like this: "Governor Harding, history records it to be a fact, and I accept it as a fact, that my grandfather had very little in the way of scholastic advantages. In other words he was an unschooled youth. But I believe he was an intelligent, studious man, and I believe that those who are at all familiar with his life's history will have to admit that before his death he was fairly well educated according to the standards of his day—and even according to the standards of the present time. But," I added, "at no time during his life was he smart enough to write the Book of Mormon."

The Governor responded very satisfactorily: "That is a pretty fair answer." Then he expressed a desire to read the book, I gave him one, by chance happening to have a new copy with me. I saw him frequently after that, up to the time of his death some fourteen years ago, but we never discussed the matter again, though perhaps I should have asked him about it. And I do not know whether he read the book.

THIS INCIDENT has led me to think about the work of Joseph Smith in connection with the Book of Mormon from an entirely different viewpoint. I began to speculate about some of the mistakes that Joseph Smith or Sidney Rigdon or any other man of his day would likely make if he were writing such a book as a work of fiction or out of his imagination, unless he were a man of great mental endowment coupled with a profound, firsthand knowledge of the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, as well as a knowledge of the history of many peoples.

You know, of course, that the first reaction to the claims about the Book of Mormon was that Joseph Smith had committed a rank and palpable forgery, that he was a deceiver and a fraud. And then, to people's astonishment, it began to dawn upon their thinking that this Book

gave evidence of something more than Joseph Smith could possibly have produced, and so they looked about to discover who had written it. They heard of Solomon Spaulding and loudly asserted he had written the book, until, fortunately and by the grace of God, that story was so entirely and completely exploded that nobody of any intelligence who has been at all advised in these times ever attempts to explain away the Book of Mormon by setting up the Spaulding story. And yet, strange to relate, there *are* sporadic efforts to do so even at this late date.

Ever since those earlier years, there have been various exposés and treatises of the work of Joseph Smith, and they have been so conflicting as to their theories that they have practically canceled out each other, like the witnesses who appeared before the Sanhedrin and testified against Christ: "But their witnesses agreed not together."

A book will soon be published, giving the various theories that have been advanced about Joseph Smith. It will be called, "The Changing Explanations Concerning Joseph Smith."

IN TREATING THE BOOK OF MORMON from this special angle, I believe we can agree on a few things:

1. If written by descendants of Manasseh, its language would reflect words and constructions typical of its alleged Hebrew origin. If discovered, they would have unquestioned evidentiary value.

2. If written as a mere work of fiction by a contemporary of Joseph Smith or by himself, there would *likely* appear colloquialisms and provincialisms, expressions common to their day, or slang expressions. These come within the range of probabilities, and of course would not have the weight of what I have listed under number 1.

3. An examination of the story would also suggest that an unlearned man, or even one ordinarily versed in history and in the Bible, in weaving narrative along with scriptural quotations, would make such egregious errors and commit such apparent anachronisms as to impeach the work beyond satisfactory explanation by its proponents.

Stated briefly, then, we aver there *are ample evidences* of words and idioms of Hebrew origin. There is a challenging absence of expressions that would otherwise stamp the book as a creation or fiction of the day; and there are a number of things in the record which give evidence of its divinity and authenticity, because only the most profound and astute Bible student could have avoided making errors that would at once condemn the book. I would also suggest that in the case of Joseph Smith there might have been gross errors of grammar.

I WANT TO BE FRANK with you. I am going to set out with respect to evidences of Hebrew origin and absence of so-called "modernism" something of the work of others, and I should mention that I have received material help from a small book prepared by Doctor John Widtsoe, though I have not confined my language to that found in his book, called *Seven Claims of the Book of Mormon*.

Common contractions, such as can't, couldn't, don't, shouldn't, and others found among English-speaking people are not found in the Book of Mormon and are never found in Hebrew writing.

There are no titles in the Book of Mormon, such as Mr., Mrs., Miss, Professor, Dr., M.A., B.A., Hon., Ph.D., lady, gentleman, sir, madam, or reverend, and no titles of nobility. There are only two exceptions as to titles: the word "king" and the word "captain" are used.

If the writer of the Book of Mormon had put in any surnames, it would have been a fatal mistake, because surnames did not come into general use until the eleventh century. That would not harmonize with the alleged history of the Book of Mormon.

There are no q's, x's, or w's in any uncorrupted proper names. And you do not find them in the old Bible, nor in the Hebrew language—another evidence indicating the Hebrew origin, because the Nephites were of Hebrew descent.

There are no modern names of cloths, such as calico, muslin, linsey, broadcloth, and many more.

There are no modern names of wearing apparel, such as skirts, pantaloons, waistcoats, collars, cuffs, gloves, boots, shirts, and many others, which very easily could have crept in there, if the book had been written out of the imagination of some man of that time.

No schools nor institutions of learning are mentioned; no libraries, museums, or collections; no phrases or single words, such as "namely, as follows, the following, to wit, the foregoing, the above, to sum up, for instance, for example." None of these, also, are found in Hebrew writings—another "straw in the wind" which indicates Hebrew origin.

No names of churches or religious movements are given. The Mohammedans are not mentioned, the Jesuits, Franciscans, and so on.

There is no principle of science in the Book of Mormon under any modern name.

In money it would have been fatal if the decimal system had been suggested, such as five and five tenths, or eight and two tenths, because the decimal system was invented in the Christian Era, since the days of Christ in another sphere.

There is no reference to relative values in English or American money.

No weekdays are mentioned. That is something to think about; and no names of months as we have them; because the names of our days of the week are Anglo-Saxon in origin and do not come from Hebrew at all. Our months are of Roman or Latin origin.

There are no specific religious days, such as Easter or Lent.

There is no mention made of modern drinks, such as tea, coffee, and chocolate.

The narrow neck of land is mentioned repeatedly in the Book of Mormon. Anyone in the nineteenth century, speaking about that little neck of land down there, instantly would have thought of Panama; but it is always referred to as the narrow neck of land, showing there was fidelity in the translation of the book.

If there had been any references to latitude or longitude, it would have been a fatal mistake. There are none such in the Book of Mormon. Latitude and longitude were principles developed in the fourth century, about A.D. 382, in other places.

The Indians—the aborigines of this country—were known to Joseph Smith and his confreres and his contemporaries. They were known as Indians, but never are they referred to as Indians in the Book of Mormon. They are always referred to as Lamanites.

The time of the crucifixion set out in the Book of Mormon, taking into consideration that the crucifixion took place on the other side of the world, exactly corresponds.

There is no mention of the trial by jury.

The words "quite," "just," or "guess" are not used.

Some of these things seem insignificant, and they would be *if* taken by themselves and alone; but all together they have strong evidentiary value in demonstrating—or at least proving satisfactorily—that the Book of Mormon gives evidence of a Hebrew origin and that it was not the work of men of the last-century, English-speaking persons of and from the common men of the times of Joseph Smith.

I NOW CALL TO YOUR ATTENTION something that indicates the genuineness of the work and is of great importance to me.

Let us go back to the story of Lehi and his colony, which allegedly left Jerusalem about 600 B.C. You will remember that some of the family went back, and among other things they brought out was the "book of the law." This was of course what we call the "Old Testament." You will remember that when

Jesus began his ministry at Nazareth, he entered the synagogue, asked for "the book of the law," and read certain passages from Isaiah. Now the book of the law, or the old Bible, while it at that time may have contained the record of *other prophets* than those recorded in the Bible of today as we now have it, shows that following the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah approximately six hundred years before Christ there were a number of prophets who lived and spoke and whose words were recorded in the record.

There are several hundred passages or quotations from the prophets which are quoted in the Book of Mormon, and that they are sometimes quoted differently than as found in the Bible speaks much for the correctness of the work of translation, when you give the matter consideration. Since the colony of Lehi allegedly left at a certain time, if any of the later prophets were quoted, it would have been fatal indeed to our claims concerning the book. Fortunately for the integrity of the book, there are no such passages to be found in it.

Let us consider the Book of Ether: This is an account of a colony that, according to the record, left about two thousand years before the birth of Christ—if Ussher's chronology is accepted as correct. A careful reading of the abridgment known as the Book of Ether, which does not require any length for reading, discloses that it does not mention any of the many things that a man writing from imagination, or even as historical fiction, would likely have brought into the story. Here are some of such things: the Law of Moses is not mentioned, neither the Ten Commandments. If they had been brought into the record, it would have been fatal. If Mount Sinai, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Palestine, the Dead Sea, Jordan, or the priesthoods had been mentioned, any of them would have been fatal, because they did not exist, so far as the people of Ether, Jared, and his brother were concerned.

If Joseph Smith is chargeable with writing the book, it is inconceivable that he knew enough about the Bible and biblical history to have avoided the almost inevitable mistakes that he would have made. This applies to Sidney Rigdon or any other man of the same period. These things relate to the internal evidences of the book.

I NOW WISH TO CONSIDER one of the most remarkable statements of the Book of Mormon, in considering which we must resort to things not of record in it. I quote from the fourth chapter of Mormon, beginning with the ninety-ninth verse. Moroni says: "If our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in the Hebrew, but the He-

brew hath been altered by us, also, and if we could have written in the Hebrew, behold ye would have had no imperfection in our record." Now, please note what follows:

"But the Lord knoweth the things which we have written, and also that none other people knoweth"—that is, no other people at the time Moroni was writing, for it is in the present tense, "that none other people knoweth our language. . . . therefore he hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof." We, of course, know what these means were.

Here was a man writing a record, pursued by deadly enemies, and theoretically killed soon afterward, and he was saying, on his own authority or by inspiration (though if a true statement, it must have been by inspiration, which is in harmony with our entire theory about the book), that there was no people in the world that knew the writing of his record. What could he possibly have known, on his own account, about the people in the Old World? There were no means of communication, such as we now have, between the Old World and the New.

Now Moroni said: "We have written this record according to our knowledge in the characters, which are called among us the *reformed Egyptian*, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech."

WE take Moroni at his word as to the time he was writing, for in the seventh verse of the safe fourth chapter of the Book of Mormon, we find this: "Behold, four hundred years have passed since the coming of our Lord and Savior."

The word "coming" must be construed, I submit, as referring to the Savior's advent in the Western Hemisphere. Well, according to the usual belief of the Christian world, the Savior lived approximately thirty-three years. If so, then, we find Moroni saying, according to his record, that about A.D. 433, the present or Christian dispensation, there was no people in the world that knew Egyptian writing. I submit, unless Moroni was given this knowledge, it was a daring—an audacious statement for him to make.

We have learned that the Hebrew children were four hundred years in Egypt. We are told that Moses was much learned in the Egyptian lore. And we can well believe that the people down to the time of the alleged departure from Jerusalem could have retained their knowledge of the Egyptian.

I go to history recognized as authentic and find in the *Historians' History of the World*, Volume 1, pages 250, 251, this statement about Egypt:

About the beginning of our era (that is, the Christian Era), Egypt having become a Roman province, all of its personal life was stamped out. The hieroglyphic language was no longer written or read, long before that the language of the people had been greatly modified from its ancient purity, and in the days of Egypt's greatness it was only the scholarly few, chiefly the priests, who could read and write the language. Now this speech became still further modified. Finally, through the slow mutations of time modern coptic has developed as its lineal descendant.

In the early days, however, probably before the time of the oldest existing records, the original picture writing, or hieroglyphics proper, had been modified into a sort of running script or symbol writing, which the Greeks called hieratic, and this again had undergone (just as the writing said) another modification some four or five centuries before, the development of a script called encorial or demotic, which, in the days of the Ptolemies, represented the language of the Egyptian people. But after the complete disruption of the Egyptians under the Romans, the hieratic and demotic forms of writing, as well as the hieroglyphics, ceased to be employed, and presently, as has been said, all three forms became quite unintelligible to any person living. From that time on until the early days of the nineteenth century, the records of Egypt, preserved so numerous on their monuments, on the papyrus rolls, and on mummy cases, were a closed book. No man lived during this period, in Egypt nor out of Egypt, who did more than effect the crudest guess at the meaning of this strange writing. For something like two thousand years the Egyptian language was a dead language in the fullest sense of the term, and the records locked imperishably in the hieroglyphics seemed likely to hold their mysterious secret from the prying minds of generations of men. But then, in the early days of the nineteenth century, the key was unexpectedly found and to the delight of the scholarly world the Egyptian Pandora box was opened.

Now, if these historians are correct and they are said to be, two thousand years back of the beginning of the last century Egyptian was a dead language. Therefore in A.D. 433, there was no people in the world who could know the Egyptian language or could read Egyptian writing. That statement is *absolutely demonstrated and proved by these facts*.

How was the Pandora box opened? A soldier in the French army under Napoleon in Egypt at a town called Rosetta, found a peculiarly marked stone. He took it with him, and today it is lodged in the British Museum in London. It was broken somewhat, but most of it was in good condition. After it found lodgment there, early in the last century pictures of this stone were sent out to the men of the scientific world. They were asked to see what they could do toward deciphering it. Well, they knew that one part of the record was the hieroglyphic and another was demotic.

They saw that the third part was Greek. It occurred to a Frenchman named Champollion, after he had been thinking about it and noticed a recurrence of characters in each one of these writings that it was the same document, only in three different writings—hieroglyphic, demotic, and Greek! That gave him the key, and starting with that small key, he and others finally developed Egyptology to an exact science, so that by 1865 they had not only hieroglyphic dictionaries and hieroglyphic grammars but also demotic dictionaries and demotic grammars.

BUT JOSEPH SMITH knew nothing of these events. In February, 1828, he handed a piece of writing about the size of 5½x11 inches to Martin Harris. You have heard the story. Harris took that paper to New York City and talked to Professor Anthon and some others there who said it was Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyrian, and Arabic writing.

I do not *know* where Joseph Smith got those characters. I do not *know* where Joseph Smith got those records. But here is something that has been demonstrated. He said that he had copied them from the plates. Let us put that aside for the moment.

We have that Anthon transcript, the very identical paper that was taken to New York City by Martin Harris in our vaults in Independence. When we purchased the manuscript of the Book of Mormon from the heirs of David Whitmer, about 1904, they turned over to us this document which had been with the manuscript all these years and which David Whitmer told a committee, consisting of my father, my Uncle Alexander, and some others, way back in the 1880's, was the same document that Martin Harris took to New York City. We know what those characters were like. They were first published to the world in 1844 in *The Prophet* (New York City) so there is no dispute about what those characters looked like.

Some Egyptologists who are interested not only in that subject, but also in the Book of Mormon, who are connected with the Utah Mormon Church, have gone into the demotic dictionaries and discovered out of the two hundred thirty-six characters altogether on that paper, about a hundred thirty-five different ones, and of these there are ninety-seven exact identities found in the demotic dictionary.

Now, wherever Joseph Smith got those characters, it is thus demonstrated that *they are Egyptian*.

Suppose they had found all the different characters in the demotic dictionary. That would have proved too much, and to prove too much is just as fatal as proving too little, because Moroni, you remember, said the characters had been

changed by them according to their speech.

I submit to you that this is an outstanding and significant fact which tends to prove this is a genuine record.

I DO NOT BLAME anybody for having reservations about the Book of Mormon, especially those who are investigating, because of the marvelous and miraculous way in which it allegedly has come about. My own father early in his ministry had some hesitation about it. There are those here who knew him, who probably have a pretty good idea as to his character. I think that of all the men I have known—and I had pretty close contact with him for a number of years as his secretary—in my time in whose integrity I had absolute confidence, he would take undoubtedly the top place with all of them. He said that he had reservations about the Book of Mormon for some years after he took the presidency of the church; but one day, when he was occupying the pulpit, he mentioned the Book of Mormon. As he did, an audible voice spoke to him, as if coming from a person at his right, saying, "The Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity." He related that he stood still and listened. A second time the statement was repeated, and still he stood there, and the third time the voice said, "The Book of Mormon is of divine authenticity." He said he never had any difficulty in talking about the Book of Mormon after that.

Paul says that to some it is given to know, to them *knowledge* is given, just as many of you have received a testimony about the truthfulness of this book; and to others it is given to believe on *their* testimony, and it is even more blessed for the latter to exercise faith and believe than it is for those to whom the testimony was directly given. It is disastrous for one to have a testimony and then repudiate it. I declare that if I did not have any testimony about this Book of Mormon myself, I could believe on the testimony of my father. I believe there are others here who could almost say the same thing.

Now I believe that of all the people in the world, we have the least excuse for finding lodgment in our hearts and minds for this spirit of secularism. I think we have a story of adventure such as no other church in the world has, and I don't see any reason why we should lose interest and faint and fall by the wayside.

Adopting the words of Henry Van Dyke:

So let the way wind up the hill or down,
Or rough or smooth, the journey will be joy,
Still seeking what I sought when but a boy—
New friendships, *high adventure*, and a *crown*.
My heart will keep the courage of the quest,
I know the road's last turn will be the best.