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The Spirit and Influence of the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: The author testifies that the Book of Mormon is full of the Spirit of Truth. This Spirit carries the book's message to the hearts of its readers.

THE SPIRIT AND INFLUENCE OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

BY ELDER W. A. HYDE, PRESIDENT OF THE POCA TELLO STAKE OF
ZION

All men who have let the normal within them assert itself, know that there is something that passes judgment upon every act of their lives, and says that it is either good or bad. This is the stirring within the heart of man of an influence which has a universal field; it is the light within the man's mind of the Spirit of Truth.

Students of life and of history know, that coming down through the ages, there has been an arbiter that has put the stamp of approval or the brand of condemnation upon everything that has been created or done by man. A statue may be dug from ancient ruins which is a pattern for the greatest sculptor of the present day. From the mouldy walls of some ancient church, may be rescued a picture, which shall be the Mecca of a thousand modern artists. A word written by some sandal-footed poet at the dawn of recorded time, remains until now, the pinnacle of expression. These endure, because they have truth in them in large measure,—they are the earth's classics.

This Spirit of Truth is the judge of thought and opinion, and it issues its judgments upon little and great. One must believe that there has been no age that has not felt its influence, and no sphere where its power has not been known. It must have been co-existent with God—even a part of the Omnipotent. It is the Light of Truth and in the glorious spectrum we see most clearly these primary colors.

Primary Elements of Truth

Against the background of history and experience, we discern the element of Liberty. It has come from the original fountain, undiminished by the flow of the ages. It runs through the hearts of all men, and, confined within him, the slave may possess it in as large a degree as does the freeman. We know that it is the right of man, and man has lifted his eyes to it since the beginning.

Also, the dullest eye may see that Justice is an element of universal Truth. Do what he will by his sophistries, man cannot rid himself of the knowledge that law will eventually prevail. Beyond probability, possibility, speculation and theories we come at last to law. Law is the ultimate, and its highest form is that in the will of God.

As a companion to the powerful element of Justice founded in law, shines the light of Mercy. It is the setting aside of law as man knows it, by the higher law that is in the mind of the Infinite,—the graciousness by which power may relinquish its rights, and man may receive a gift otherwise beyond his reach. Dependent man looks toward this light, with a heart cheered by hope, in the assurance that if

he fail in his striving, by his faith a hand will stretch out to him and raise him up. These primary elements we know to be the basis of the Light of Truth, they are the fundamental ones from which all others radiate.

As a background to the beneficent illumination of light and life, there is the spirit of darkness and death. This proceeds from the source of lies, and wherever it may, it beclouds the radiance of Truth. Thus before the eyes of all men, to tax their powers of spiritual discernment, there are lights and shades, from the brilliance of the sun in heaven, to the blackness of the bottomless pit!

Down through the ages of history as man has known it under this light and shade, we see the perpetual flow of humanity, ever onward to the goal of the purified and perfected man. Our view being limited by our earthly horizon, we exclaim: "How utterly man has failed!" but if we could see beyond the horizon, we would know that there has been a ceaseless march toward God. There is no change in the picture. Sin and death—repentance and life—over and over again. It is the story of life as we see it in the pages of history, and perceive it in our own hearts and experiences.

The Prophet and his Book

In the midst of uncertainties, prophets have been the voices to men of the Infinite mind and will. They have revealed in our words, messages of the all-pervading truth. They have interpreted to men, the language of the stars, and whether written upon metal, granite, clay or papyrus they have made the enduring record of the Word.

But a book is a lifeless thing, as it lies there on the table, a pound of matter; but if it be opened and read, it becomes not only alive, but before the world it is innocent or guilty. One thought, in olden time, to kill a book by burning it, but there is something in a book that will live through a furnace. It is to us intangible, but it is nevertheless there—it is the Spirit of the Book.

There are all kinds of potency, from hemlock to "nectar for the gods" lying within the covers of your book. It matters not if it be bound in paper or leather gilt, it may have life or death in it. That potency for life or death is its spirit. Unlike the spirit of man, it has no power of initiative. It cannot say "I will do." It waits to be invited to speak. The spirit of the man must kindle into life the spirit of the book and make it give its message. Laws in a book are dead until man applies them. Yet they are there—the dead letter, but perchance having in them immeasurable life! The spirit of the book is that something, which, when awakened, reaches out and takes hold of the spirit of man, and makes him, for the time being, brother to the great, or companion of the unworthy. Just as men acquire power among men by reason of their clearness, their saneness and their justness, until what they say seems born of unquestioned authority, so some books acquire distinction. They are the ones that have never failed

you. You go to them to drink as to a spring, and generations before you may have been to that same unfailing spring, which may continue to pour forth its satisfying waters to the end of time.

God's concern for his children has been such that he has miraculously preserved enough of his written word to guide them to obedience and life. The Holy Bible has been thus kept, and to the believer in a future life, there is a halo surrounding it that lifts it above other books. One reads it as he would commune with the spirit of the ages. Typography and the book binder's art are lost in the presence of its grandeur of truth which now speaks to us. Spokesmen for humanity have poured their essence into these pages, and they have become the voice of universal experience. If, then, speaking for humanity in general, there be any book that may be used as a standard by which we may judge the spirit of all other books, that book is the Bible, for it is the highest expression of truth that the civilized world as a whole has accepted. In its pages we find the rays that are the basis of the Light of Truth, Liberty, Justice and Mercy. These are seen to be outlined with unmistakable clearness. They are the heart of the book. You could not take from the Bible one of these elements, and leave it worthy to be called scripture. It would be shorn of so much life. But you can strip it of much else, and still leave it, for the purpose of its mission, unimpaired.

If this be true, this, then is the written standard by which any book that presumes to speak for God must be judged. By this standard we may know something of the Spirit of the Book of Mormon.

This is the voice of the Spirit of the Book:

The Standard Applied

That liberty rests in the decrees of God,² and that man may choose and have what he wills.³ That liberty is inherent in this Western Hemisphere by reason of God's decree.⁴ That liberty is not compatible with earthly monarchies,⁵ that democracy is advocated, and that, operating under this law of choice, was held perhaps the first election of sacred history.⁶ There is given an example of constitutional law,⁷ and the principle is established, that all men have the right to worship God as their consciences dictate.⁸ The results of the failure of democracy is shown;⁹ and most important, it is announced that the spirit of freedom is akin to the Spirit of God.¹⁰

It is declared that Justice is the operation of a righteous and unfailing law, and that though free, man will be subject to the operations of that law "at the great and last day."¹¹ That the sinful and unrepentant man must have his just condemnation;¹² and that the application of the law is general,¹³ and without favoritism, but that to the uninformed there is no law but the law of mercy.¹⁴ That according to a man's deserts, shall his reward or condemnation be.¹⁵ That the redemption of God does not apply to the sins of the unrepentant,¹⁶ but that it is the prerogative of God that Mercy may satisfy the demands of Justice.¹⁷

It is taught that God's concern for man is far reaching and envelopes every land and clime,¹⁸ that the grace and mercy of God are founded in power, and that they are the result of the condescension of God,¹⁹ and come from the Father, because of the Son;²⁰ and that being thus it must be founded upon faith in God, its source,²¹ and upon the repentance of man,²² and upon obedience to all of his requirements.²³ That the grace of God saves man "from their sins and not in their sins,"²⁴ and that it is sufficient for all who are humble.²⁵ That the ultimate expression of grace was shown in the atonement and resurrection.²⁶ That we would be eternally lost without grace,²⁷ but that it is continued and free.²⁸ Throughout the book there is the unmistakable lesson that there is a price to forgiveness, but that it is within the reach of all. Mercy shines continually through the rigors of Law and Commandment. Said the prophet of this Infinite tenderness: "For I know that the Lord giveth no commandment to the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them, that they may accomplish the thing which he commanded them."²⁹

Thus are the primary elements of the Spirit of Truth unmistakably shown.

The Familiar Spirit

There comes to us from the voice of the book, echoes as from some word that we have heard long since and have well understood; they are the whisperings to us of familiar truths. We recognize them, for they are attested by the reasoning of the mind, and the sanction of the spirit within us. They tell us that the end of life is that we shall be born again,³⁰ redeemed and become the sons and daughters of God. That there is no happiness in sin, and that obedience is the way to joy.³¹ It teaches that an element of faith is a recognition of God's superior knowledge,³² and how that faith is nurtured and grows in the heart of man;³³ and how it may become so powerful that nothing can be held from it.³⁴ That spiritual gifts to man, ceases only because of his wickedness,³⁵ and that God, to be unchangeable, must be a God of miracles.³⁶ It gives full light on the comprehensiveness of the plans of the Almighty,³⁷ and shows that all men have been alike to him from the beginning of creation, and that his atonement applied as well before as subsequent to his coming in the flesh.³⁸ That baptism, necessary now, was always necessary.³⁹ That the mission of all prophets has been to testify of the Christ.⁴⁰ It teaches that purity of heart alone gives access to God.⁴¹ And with unanswerable authority is given again, by the Lord himself, the essence of his Gospel.⁴²

The Challenge of the Book

With a boldness that has in it a spirit of militancy, the book challenges the world. It invites comparison by laying down a law by which itself is to be judged,—that "there is nothing which is good save it comes from the Lord,"⁴³ and that which is evil cometh from the devil.⁴⁴

"I show you the way to judge, for everything which invites to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ, wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge that it is of God.⁴⁵ There is no book, the Bible not excepted, that tells so plainly and fervently the mission of Christ.⁴⁶ The book challenges the world in its support of the Bible. Said the prophet: "This is written for the intent that ye may believe that, and if ye believe that, ye will believe this also."⁴⁷ It challenges the world for a better statement of the moral law, and the blessings that come from its observance.⁴⁸ It challenges all men by the witness of the Spirit, if they will read it with open and earnest minds.⁴⁹ It comes to the world with a crystal clearness that challenges the understanding of men.

The Spirit's Authority

It speaks with a spirit which is authoritative. By a law of the operation of the Holy Ghost which it announces,⁵⁰ its light and truth are carried into the hearts of men and women, and many thousands of the honest in heart, have been first thrilled and then converted by its powerful message. The voice of these ancient heralds of the truth, come to us as out of the dust,⁵¹ speaking as with a "familiar spirit," and thousands have heard and will still continue to hear its sacred whisperings. They recognize the Word, for it is the Light of Truth, the Spirit of Him who is the Author of our salvation.

Pocatello, Idaho

(1) Jer. 36:23; (2) Hela. 14:30; 2 Nep. 2: 16-26; (3) 2 Nep. 10: 23; (4) 2 Nep. 1:6-8; Alma 46:17; (5) 2 Nep. 5:18; Mos. 23:13; Mos. 29; (6) Mos. 29:39; (7) Alma 30:7; (8) Alma 1:17; (9) Alma 10:19; (10) Alma 61:15; (11) 2 Nep. 2:26; (12) 2 Nep. 9:46-7; (13) 2 Nep. 30:2; Jacob 3:8; (14) 2 Nep. 9:25; Mos. 3:11; (15) Alma 12:10; 32:20; Mos. 2:41; (16) Alma 12:18; (17) Alma 34:16; (18) Alma 26:37; 37:18-19; (19) Jacob 4:7; (20) Alma 33:11; (21) 1 Nep. 1:20; Mos. 26:24; (22) 2 Nep. 2:4; Hela 12:22; (23) 1 Nep. 1:14; (24) Hela 5:10; (25) Ether 12:27; (26) 2 Nep. 9; (27) 2 Nep. 25:23; (28) 2 Nep. 28:23; (29) 1 Nep. 3:7; (30) Mos. 27:25; (31) Alma 41:10; 2 Nep. 2:25; (32) Mos. 4:6-12; (33) Alma 26:22; (34) 3 Nep. 7:18; Ether 12:19; (35) Mormon 1:14; (36) Mormon 9:19; (37) 2 Nep. 27:7-10; (38) Mos. 3:13; (39) 2 Nep. 31:9; Mos. 2:22; 3 Nep. 11:38-9; (40) Jacob 7:11; (41) Jacob 3:1; (42) 3 Nep. 27:13-16; (43) Moroni 7:13; Ether 4:12; (44) Omni 1:25; (45) Moroni 7:14; (46) 2 Nep. 33:10; Ether 8: 26; Alma 29; 2 Nep. 11:4; (47) Mormon 7:9; (48) 3 Nep. 30:2; (49) 3 Nep. 26:8; Mormon 8:12; Ether 4:11; (50) 2 Nep. 33:1; (51) Isa. 29:4.