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The Book of Mormon—An Ancient Work

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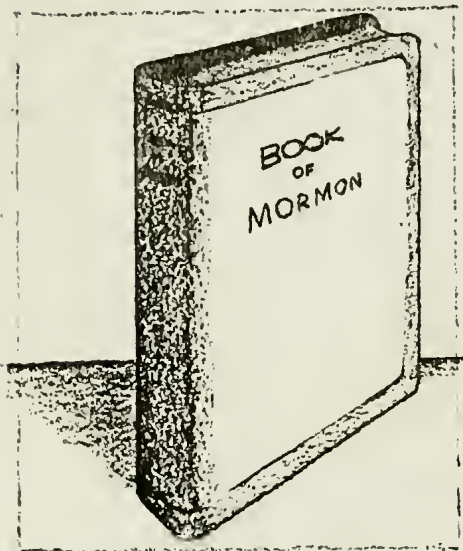
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Abstract: This series deals with a wide variety of aspects of the Book of Mormon including Joseph Smith, Obadiah Dogberry, ancient fortifications, metal plates, Spaulding theory, clarifications of biblical doctrine, the abridging work of Mormon, record of the Jaredites, differences between the Bible and the Book of Mormon, witnesses of the Book of Mormon, history, literary qualities, Hebrew traits in the book, its relation to the Bible, and evidence of its antiquity. The seventh part covers internal and literary evidences of the Book of Mormon's ancientness and authenticity.

The Book Of Mormon—An Ancient Work

By ELDER CECIL E. MCGAVIN

Author of "Cumorah's Gold Bible" and "Mormonism and Masonry"



IT is remarkable how the Book of Mormon meets the most exacting requirements that the critical mind can devise. Every paragraph bears evidence of its genuineness and divine origin. One of the first criticisms of the Book was that "its author decides all great controversies discussed in New York in the last ten years." Yet all must admit that the decisions announced are in opposition to the generally accepted decisions of the Church councils and synods. Though it discusses problems that are vital today, the spirit of antiquity is apparent on every page.

The tone and spirit of the Book are those of an ancient people. From every page the voice of slumbering nations cries with the sound of antiquity. The echo of that voice from out the distant past bears not the slightest resemblance to modern times. It is more akin to Jerusalem than New York; its style more like Isaiah than Joseph Smith. No place in all the Book is its divine inspiration more apparent than in the utter omission of modern terms. It is consistent with itself in every respect.

There is but one passage in the Book that mentions a trade, "The smith that bloweth the coals" (III Nephi 22: 16), and that is in a quotation from Isaiah. The translator's father and older brothers were coopers, carpenters and stone masons, but these terms are not found in the Book of Mormon. Such trades were very necessary among the Nephite and Jaredite pioneers, but these modern words were not used by the ancients, nor were they substituted by the translator.

The various trades and occupations are described in a typically Hebrew manner, as they "did work timber" (I Nephi 18: 1); "expert in the work of cement" (Helaman 3: 7); "did many things after his cunning arts" (I Nephi 16: 28); "did work in all manner of cloth" (Ether 10: 24); "tools with which they did work their beasts" (Ether 10: 26).

These ancient people built ships, barges, houses, temples, walls, cities, ditches, palaces; yet modern tools, trades and devices are not mentioned.

In no part of the Book is its ancient setting revealed more than in its reference to money and its equivalent in grain. "The judge received for his wages a senine of gold for a day," we read in Alma 11: 3. In Old Testament days, as well as in Book of Mormon times, gold and silver were bartered by weight for desired commodities. The Nephite values were as follows:

A silver lean was worth $\frac{1}{4}$ measure of barley; A silver shiblum was worth $\frac{1}{4}$ measure of barley; while the silver shiblon was valued at $\frac{1}{3}$ measure of barley; the gold senine and the silver senum were each worth a measure of barley; while the gold sean and the silver ammor were worth two measures of barley.

The Nephites did not use the system of weights and measures developed by the Jews. The decree of King Mosiah that "a senum of silver was equal to a senine of gold; and either for a measure of barley and also for a measure of every kind of grain," set the standard values for the Nephites.

There are several names in the Book, such as cup, dish, candle, floor, seats, home, timber, but there are no such names as roof, lumber, utensil, furniture, watch, clock, breakfast, dinner, banquet, sugar, knife, fork, tea, stove, etc.

There are no references to modern science or literature. The Book contains no surnames, no mention of modern intoxicating drinks, no modern diseases or medical terms, no modern drugs.

Another striking feature of this Book is the absence of modern connective words such as: namely, the following, the foregoing, to wit, subsequently, furthermore, moreover, however, consequently, for instance, and many others so common today. It does not contain such transition words as where-

upon, whereas, to wit, namely, and others that appear in the Bible. Such words are of more recent derivation, having been supplied by the translators, but not being in such ancient records as the brass plates of Laban.

<p>PART VII OF "A MARVELLOUS WORK AND A WONDER"</p>

For this reason there are certain trite expressions that are overworked in the Book of Mormon. These have been called by the critics "Smithisms," but they are genuine Hebrew traits preserved in this Book.

The translators and revisers of the Bible have attempted to break the monotony of its ancient style by supplying a variety of words not in the original. No such effort was made with the Book of Mormon, however, a fact explaining why many critics find fault with its literary style.

If the Old Testament were restored to its ancient and genuine Hebrew construction, without the introduction of many modern words to make it more similar to present day literary standards, these arguments would cease to exist. It has been said that the word "and" was Joseph Smith's "main stock in trade." Other words which the critics have called "Smithisms" are "behold," "wherefore," "and it come to pass," "now," "but," and other expressions that are perfect examples of Hebrew abridgement.

In his daily conversation, in his sermons and writings, Joseph Smith did not overwork these words. Instead of being what certain critics have called "Smithisms," they afford indisputable evidence that he translated from an ancient text whose writers were well acquainted with early Hebrew literary style.

In the King James version of the Bible there are 810,697 words, while the Book of Mormon contains about 350,000 words. The transition word "and" occurs 19,000 times in the Bible, though there are but 31,175 verses. Thus 60 per cent of the verses in the Bible are connected by this word, whereas, only 53 per cent of the 6,712 long verses in the Book of Mormon are thus connected, being a total of 3,557 times. The frequent use of this word is certainly a Hebrew characteristic, not a provincialism of Palmyra or a "Smithism."

A careful comparison of the translation from the small plates of Nephi, containing 65 chapters and 1,678 verses, with an equal amount of material from the Old Testament, reveals that the Book of Mormon is not extravagant in the use of these transition words. This material is compared with the two books of Samuel and the first eight chapters of I Kings, which comprises 63 chapters and 1,676 verses. In these two documents the following transition words are repeated thus:

The word "and" appears 901 times in the Book of Mormon, while it is found 1,087 times in corresponding space in the Bible. The word "therefore" occurs 23 times in the Book of Mormon and 31 times in the Bible. "Now" appears 27 times in the Book of Mormon and 57 times in the Bible. "But" is found 69 times in the Book of Mormon and 60 times in the Bible.

The conclusion of the critics simply will not bear investigation. All their arguments fall to the ground, broken and powerless.

Most of the words and expressions that have been scoffed at by opponents of the Book, are the most perfect examples of Hebrew idioms. It is surprising that critics did not detect this before they denounced the Book as a fraud. In almost every case their strongest arguments were directed against the rough, halting expressions in a modern book claiming God as its author. Many have said that such a translation should have contained the most perfect English and majestic literary style of any book in the world.

On the other hand, there are those who would want to see some Hebrew traits in such a translation, and the Book is replete with such necessary evidence. The texts that are ridiculed the most are the ones in which a more faithful and literal translation has been made. It is evident that the translators of the Bible have attempted to avoid such literal translations. Yet there remain many such translations in the Bible, though they do not make good construction in English. These appear regularly in the Book of Mormon, thus showing an underlying Hebrew text, though presenting a very awkward construction in English.

Many adjectives are expressed in Hebrew by circumlocution, such as "sons of valour" for "valiant." Though a popular Hebrew trait, such expressions in the Book of Mormon as "He was a man of many words" (Mosiah 27: 8) has been scoffed at by the critics who seemed entirely ignorant of the Hebrew literary styles.

Other expressions common to both books are "words of my mouth," "followers of me," "did witness of it," "sons of mine," "eys of me," and many others which do not make perfect English construction.

Every page of the Book of Mormon bears evidence that it is an ancient book; that its style follows closely that of the Jewish writers many centuries before the time of Christ; that its most objectionable features are its literal translations from ancient Hebrew, and that the literary styles of its two widely separated peoples are more dissimilar than the literary styles of the Old Testament and the New.

No man or sect of men, unaided by divine inspiration, could have written such a volume as this supreme book, which is not unworthy of the title, "The Gold Bible."



THE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF UTAH

JOSEPH F. SMITH MEMORIAL BUILDING

80 NORTH MAIN STREET

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

IMPORTANT NOTICE.

April 1, 1942.

Dear President:

There is an acute shortage of names of females for temple work at each of the temples now in operation. Hence it is now an opportune time for Saints in the Missions to get temple work done which they are unable to do personally.

We therefore suggest that throughout your Mission you request the Saints to submit names of those eligible for temple work.

We suggest that all such records be collected within Districts and forwarded to the Mission Office. It is further requested that each Mission President approve the sheet submitted by any patron before it is forwarded for temple work.

We trust that whatever records are sent will be thoroughly compiled in accordance with existing rules with all the information called for on the sheets sent in as completely as possible.

Sincerely yours,

Genealogical Society of Utah,

JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH,

President.