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The Book of Mormon: An Aid to Testimony

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Abstract: This article discusses how there is “no motivating power in this world” comparable to the testimony of truth concerning Jesus Christ and there is no greater testimony of Jesus Christ than that of the Book of Mormon.

The BOOK of MORMON

An Aid to Testimony

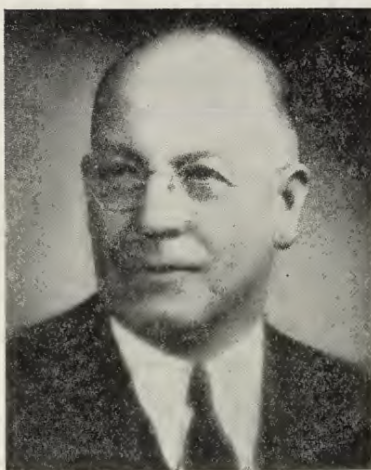
By LEGRAND RICHARDS

PRESIDING BISHOP

I DON'T know that I have ever attended a conference of the Church that I have been more inspired and lifted up, or more grateful for my membership in the Church and my association with the Saints of God. At the close of the last April conference I said to my wife, if I had two million dollars I wouldn't know what in the world I could buy with it that would mean as much to me or bring me as much joy and happiness as my membership in this Church and my opportunity to associate with the Saints and minister among them. And more than anything else this day, I desire that my ministry and efforts may be acceptable to God and a blessing to the people of this great Church.

President McKay spoke this morning about our responsibilities to the youth of the land, and I thought over my own life and I believe, my brothers and sisters, that what our young people need more than anything else in this world, is a testimony of the divinity of this work, and if in all our auxiliaries and our priesthood quorums we lay a little more stress on the spirit of the work rather than on the letter of it, I believe we would find the results in the lives of our boys and girls most acceptable.

I think of the time when I was a boy and the things that impressed me, and I remember reading the *Life of the Prophet Joseph Smith* by George Q. Cannon. It did something for me and caused my soul to burn within me, and I couldn't help wishing that I might have shared some of the responsibilities of those early days. Then I read his own statement where he was so concerned, and wondered because he was persecuted for telling the truth. He said he felt as he imagined Paul felt when he stood before Agrippa. He said, "I had seen a light; I had heard a voice; I knew that God knew that I knew it; and I dared not deny it, for I knew that by so doing I would come under condemnation before the Lord." (See "Extracts from the History of Joseph Smith.") Then I remember how that impressed me, and I thought that does not sound like the testimony of a deceiver or a false prophet, and I remembered the testimony of Paul, which I think is one of the most wonderful testimonies we have ever heard about, when he stood before King Agrippa and most noble Festus and bore his testimony how he, on the way to Damascus, had seen a light and heard a voice, and knew that God knew that he knew it. And how, when he had borne that testimony, Festus turned to him and said, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad," to which Paul replied, "I am not mad, most noble



LE GRAND RICHARDS

Address delivered at the Sunday morning session of the 117th semi-annual general conference October 6, 1946, in the Tabernacle

Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." To that Agrippa replied unto Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," and Paul replied, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." (Acts 26:24-29.)

I tell you, brethren and sisters, there is no motivating power in this world in the lives of boys and girls, or men and women, comparable to a testimony of the truth because God does something for men and women, and he does it for boys and girls when they have a testimony of the divinity of this great latter-day work.

I REMEMBER leading the Sunday School in one of our Sunday School conferences when Brother Karl G. Maeser and Brother George Goddard were present, in reciting the testimony of the three witnesses, and I would like to read that to you today. I believe I could recite it without the book, but I will keep it here for fear I cannot: Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come: That we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the

tower of which hath been spoken. And we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true. And it is marvelous in our eyes. Nevertheless, the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall dwell with him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen. (Book of Mormon, testimony.)

Now, if you want to read the conclusion of those testimonies, just read the histories of those three men when they lay on their deathbeds, and when a peace came over them when they lifted their voices before they went into the eternal world to bear witness that the testimony they had given was of God.

I want to tell you, brothers and sisters, that when your boys and girls feel that, they have something that will hold them against all the powers of wickedness in this world. I would rather trust my boys and my girls in this world with a testimony of this work burning in their souls than all the information you can give them out of all the school-books that have ever been written.

I THINK the Book of Mormon is our greatest and most tangible evidence of the divinity of the mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith. When that book was first handed to my grandfather, Willard Richards, he opened it in the middle of the book and read a few pages; he then closed the book and said: "That book was either written by God or the devil, and I intend to find out

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should give them the benefit of our experience, our counsel and advice in these most serious problems.

May we avoid debt just as far as possible, and may we help our youth to avoid these pitfalls. Some of them are justified in obligating themselves if they can see their way out, but we should bear in mind that we cannot always maintain the wage level that obtains today, try as we will. I don't care what the theories of the economists are, it just simply can't be done. There is a law of retribution that operates in these matters, just as in everything else, and some day we shall have to pay. High wages will not always exist, hopeful as we are; neither will jobs be as plentiful as they now are. And so when that day comes, we do not want our boys in bondage as many of us were in the early thirties when the depression broke.

And so I say to you, it is well for us to accept the counsel and advice that is given us by the men whose right it is to give it, and I repeat again:

... whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same. (D. & C. 1:38.)

And God help us so to do, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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who wrote it." He read it through twice within the next ten days, and he said the devil couldn't have done it; it was from the Lord. It is from the Lord, brothers and sisters, and that is what our boys and our girls ought to know.

I want to express here a deep appreciation for my friend, President German E. Ellsworth. I have reason to call him friend beyond just the common friendship of brother to brother. I think possibly outside of the early founders of the Church, no other man has sponsored the distribution of the Book of Mormon as has Brother Ellsworth, and I noted here a little statement he made in the meeting of the mission presidents last Wednesday when we spent from nine o'clock in the morning until four-thirty in the afternoon listening to the inspiration of these men who are laboring with your boys and girls in the mission field. Brother Ellsworth spoke of the time when he was president of the Northern States Mission and of the thousands and thousands of copies of the Book of Mormon he published that were distributed to the world. He said as he walked off the Hill Cumorah one day, the voice of the Lord said unto him, "Push the distribution of the record taken from this hill; it will help bring the world to Christ." I think that when all other evidences fail, the Book of Mormon will do that very thing in this

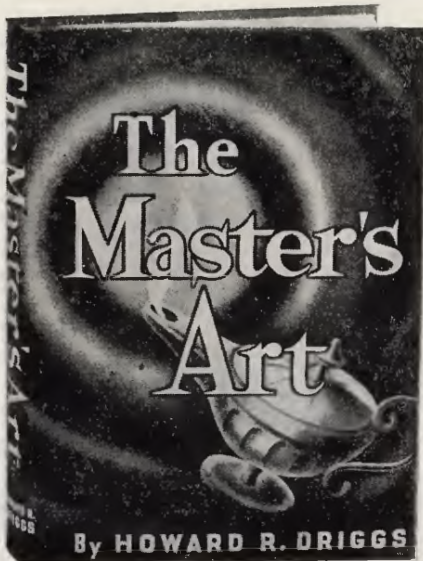
world, and as far as I am concerned, I think we haven't all the evidence yet. There will be plenty more to come.

I believe it was in 1934 that I read an article in the newspaper of a visit here to the United States of a William A. Kennedy from Lima, Peru. He was here in the interest of gathering funds for the erection of a research institution in Lima, Peru. The article indicated that with the money that was promised by the small Americas to match what could be gathered in the United States, that he already had the assurance of thirty million dollars, and that this amount would be increased to sixty or seventy million dollars within ten years. Former President Herbert Hoover was named as one of the board members of that institute, and it was to be erected for what purpose? To investigate the early civilization of America, particularly dealing with the Inca and the Maya civilizations.

I heard Brother Callis once say that when Joseph Smith received the plates he got down on his knees before the Lord, and said, "Oh, God, what will the world say?" And the voice of God came to him, "Fear not, I will cause the earth to testify of the truth of these things." And by the time this institute spends this sixty or seventy million dollars, we may have evidences, far beyond anything we have read of up to

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LE GRAND RICHARDS

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this time, of the divinity of the story told in the Book of Mormon.

TEN years ago Brother Nicholas G. Smith, one of my dearest friends, stood in this pulpit in the general conference. He was then presiding over the California Mission, and I was president of the Southern States Mission. He told this story. You can find it in the conference report; I didn't need to look there because I remembered it. He told about being invited by the dean of religion from the University of Southern California at Los Angeles to come to his church to listen to him preach, and he asked to borrow a copy of the Book of Mormon. One of the missionaries handed him his copy. Now all you missionaries know how we underline certain passages in red, and the minister stood up before his congregation, Presbyterian, as I remember, with Brother Smith and some of our missionaries present. He held that Book of Mormon up to his congregation. He said, "I have here a volume of scripture which has been in our midst for over one hundred years, and we haven't known anything about it." And then he opened it, and turned page after page, reading the passages that were underscored in red, and then, holding it before his congregation, again, he said, "Why can't we fellowship a people who believe in such beautiful things as I have read to you out of this volume of scripture?"

Two years before that, we received, from a man who visited on this block, a letter from down in Texas, in which he said that he had been a minister in a Methodist church for thirty-seven years. He said, "I have spent over twelve thousand dollars building a library of the choicest books I could find. I have now in my library one book which is worth more than all the others because it is a volume of holy scripture," and he named it as the Book of Mormon.

BROTHERS and sisters, we just don't know the value of the Book of Mormon. I was out on the Boston Commons one night, holding a street meeting. Following the meeting, a young missionary walked up to me and said, "Brother Richards, I don't know the gospel is true." I said, "You don't?" And he said, "No." "Well," I said, "you take the Book of Mormon and live with it and think with it and pray about it, and it will not be very long before you will know the gospel is true." We were back there again, a few weeks later—I didn't happen to be laboring in that town, but we came in for a conference or a priesthood meeting. That night I was in charge of the meeting. That same missionary walked up to me and said, "Brother Richards, may I speak tonight?" He had been in the field only a short time, and I said, "You surely can." He walked out be-

GENERAL CONFERENCE

fore the group that had gathered and held up the Book of Mormon, and pulled out of his pocket some postcards of buried cities in Central and South America that had been uncovered, and said, "If that Book of Mormon isn't true, you tell me how Joseph Smith knew those cities were buried out in Central and South America." It didn't take him long to find the truth.

Then we had another missionary come to us in the South, who said, "I had a hard job to make up my mind to come on my mission. My professors told me it would be a waste of time." He was a college student. He said, "You know, I am a very practical sort of a fellow. I like to be able to walk out in the garden and pick the pears off the pear tree, and then I know it is a pear tree." "Well," I said, "my boy, I wouldn't worry too much about that if I were you. Pears grow on our tree, too. Now you take the Book of Mormon, and you apply all the analysis you can to it from every source; how it could have been written; who could have written it; who could have put in it the information that is there save God the Eternal Father, or someone to whom he gave that information."

Well, I sent this boy out into Alabama. A few weeks later I went over to attend a conference, and I said to the district president that I would like to hear from that young man down there. He called on him. He bore a magnificent testimony. I walked up to him after the meeting. I said, "You must have found some pears on the pear tree." And he said, "Oh, President Richards, forget it."

My wife was in company with me one day when we met a boy we had helped rear and who had learned about twelve languages and had a Ph.D. She turned to him and said, "What do you think is the greatest evidence of the divinity of the Book of Mormon?" "Why," he said, "every page in it! No human being could have written that book of himself. No knowledge in this world could have given it, save it was from God."

Now, brothers and sisters, I must not take more time, but I want to tell you that when our boys and girls get to feel the truth of that book, there will be less worry about where their feet are leading them by day and by night. God bless the youth of Zion. God bless every man and every woman who bears responsibility in the home and in the organizations and in the priesthood quorums, and may our testimonies and our lives so affect theirs that they will become powers for good in this world, and may this book yet fulfil this great decree, as written in the preface, that it shall be a witness of the Lord, Jesus Christ, unto all nations, I pray, and leave you my testimony, in the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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