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The Story of "Mormonism" II

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Abstract: In a lecture presented at several universities throughout the United States, Dr. James E. Talmage spoke on early Latter-day Saint history. In this second part, he focused on the critical reception that the Book of Mormon received, and dismantles one popular theory of its origin. He mentions early Latter-day Saint missions to the "Lamanites" and the persecutions that the early Saints endured.

THE STORY OF "MORMONISM."*

BY DR. JAMES E. TALMAGE, OF THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH.

(Continued from page 614.)

The Latter-day Saints believe the coming forth of the Book of Mormon to be foretold in the Bible, as its destiny is prophesied of within its own lids; it is to the people the true, "stick of Joseph" which Ezekiel declared should become one with the "stick of Judah" —or the Bible. The people challenge the most critical comparison between the record of the occident and the holy scriptures of the east, feeling confident that no discrepancy exists in letter or spirit. As to the original characters in which the record was engraved, copies were shown to learned linguists of the day, and pronounced by them as closely resembling the Reformed Egyptian writing.

The Book of Mōrmon was before the world; The Church circulated the work as freely as possible. The true account of its origin was rejected by the general public, who thus assumed the responsibility of explaining in some plausible way the source of the record. Among the many vague theories propounded, perhaps the most famous is the so-called Spaulding story. Solomon Spaulding, a clergyman of Amity, Pennsylvania, died in 1816. He wrote a romance to which no name other than "Manuscript Story" was given, and which, but for the unauthorized use of the writer's name and the misrepresentation of his motives, would never have been published. Twenty years after the author's death, one Hurlburt, an apostate "Mormon," announced a resemblance between the story and the Book of Mormon, and expressed a belief that the work

* A lecture delivered by invitation at the University of Michigan, at Cornell University, and elsewhere.

brought forward by Joseph Smith was nothing but the Spaulding story revised and amplified. The apparent credibility of the statement was increased by various signed declarations to the effect that the two were alike, instead of by extracts from both works. But the manuscript was lost for a time, and in the absence of proof to the contrary, stories of the parallelism between the two works multiplied. But by a fortunate circumstance, in 1884, President James H. Fairchild, of Oberlin College, and a literary friend of his—one Mr. Rice, in examining a heterogeneous collection of old papers which had been purchased by Mr. Rice, found the original story.

After a careful perusal and comparison with the Book of Mormon, President Fairchild declared in an article in the *New York Observer*, February 5, 1885:

The theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon in the traditional manuscript of Solomon Spaulding will probably have to be relinquished.
* * * Mr. Rice, myself, and others compared it [the Spaulding manuscript] with the Book of Mormon and could detect no resemblance between the two, in general or in detail. There seems to be no name nor incident common to the two. The solemn style of the Book of Mormon in imitation of the English scriptures does not appear in the manuscript. * * * Some other explanation of the origin of the Book of Mormon must be found if any explanation is required.

The manuscript was deposited in the library of Oberlin College where it now reposes. Still, the theory of the "Manuscript Found," as Spaulding's story has come to be known, is occasionally pressed into service in the cause of anti-"Mormon" zeal, by some whom we will charitably believe to be ignorant of the facts set forth by President Fairchild. A letter of more recent date, written by that honorable gentleman in reply to an enquiring correspondent, was published in the *Millennial Star*, Liverpool, November 3, 1898, and is as follows:

OBERLIN COLLEGE, OHIO,
October 17, 1895.

J. R. Hindley, Esq.,

DEAR SIR:—We have in our college library an original manuscript of Solomon Spaulding—unquestionably genuine.

I found it in 1884 in the hands of Hon. L. L. Rice, of Honolulu, Ha-

waiian Islands. He was formerly state printer at Columbus, Ohio, and before that, publisher of a paper in Painesville, whose preceding publisher had visited Mrs. Spaulding and obtained the manuscript from her. It had lain among his old papers forty years or more, and was brought out by my asking him to look up anti-slavery documents among his papers.

The manuscript has upon it the signatures of several men of Conneaut, Ohio, who had heard Spaulding read it and knew it to be his. No one can see it and question its genuineness. The manuscript has been printed twice at least—once by the “Mormons” of Salt Lake City, and once by the “Josephite Mormons” of Iowa. The Utah “Mormons” obtained the copy of Mr. Rice, at Honolulu,, and the “Josephites” got it of me after it came into my possession.

This manuscript is not the original of the Book of Mormon.

Yours very truly,

JAMES H. FAIRCHILD.

The story has now been published in full, and comparisons between the same and the Book of Mormon may be made by anyone who has a mind to investigate the subject.

But we have anticipated the current of events. With the publication of the Book of Mormon, opposition grew more intense toward the people who professed a belief in the testimony of Joseph Smith. On the 6th of April, 1830, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was formally organized and thus took on a legal existence. The scene of this organization was Fayette, New York, and but six persons were directly concerned as participants. At that time there may have been and probably were many times that number who had professed adherence to the newly restored faith; but as the requirements of the law governing the formation of religious societies were satisfied by the application of six, only the specified number legally took part. Such was the beginning of The Church, soon to be so universally maligned. Its origin was small—a germ, an insignificant seed; little calculated to arouse hostility. What is there to fear in the voluntary association of six men, avowedly founded for peaceful pursuits and benevolent purposes? Yet the storm of persecution raged from the earliest day. At first but a family affair, opposition to the work has involved successively the town, the county, the state, the country, and today the “Mormon” question has been accorded extended con-

sideration at the hands of the national government, and indeed most civilized nations have been forced to take cognizance of the same.

Let us observe the contrast between the beginning and the present proportions of The Church. Instead of but six regularly affiliated members, and at most two score of adherents, The Church numbers today more than a quarter of a million souls already assembled in the valleys of the Rocky mountains, and a multitude more in the foreign branches of The Church. In place of a simple hamlet, in the smallest corner of which the Saints could have congregated, there are now over five hundred organized wards each with its full complement of officers and quorums of the priesthood. The practice of gathering its proselytes into one place prevents the building up and strengthening of foreign branches; and inasmuch as extensive and strong organizations are seldom met with abroad, very erroneous ideas exist concerning the strength of The Church. But the mustard seed, among the smallest of all seeds, has attained the proportions of a tree, and the birds of the air are nesting in its branches; the acorn is now an oak offering protection and the sweets of satisfaction to every earnest pilgrim journeying its way for truth.

I spoke of the "quorums of the priesthood" to be found in every organized ward. Allow me to digress long enough to say that the word "quorum" has a special significance in Latter-day Saint history and theology. Instead of signifying simply a majority of an organized body, such as is regularly constituted to transact business of the organization, the term signifies the organization itself. Thus the people speak of a quorum of high priests, of elders, of deacons, and of the quorum of the First Presidency of The Church, signifying in the last instance the three presidents, and not simply two or a majority of that body. From the organization of The Church the spirit of emigration rested upon the people. Their eyes were from the first turned in anticipation toward the evening sun; not merely that the work of proselyting should be carried on in the west, but that the headquarters of The Church should be there established. The Book of Mormon had taught the people the true origin of, and had shown them indeed part of the destiny of; the Indians, and to this dark-skinned rem-

nant of a once mighty people, the missionaries of "Mormonism" early turned their eyes, and with their eyes went their hopes and their hearts.

Within three months from the beginning, The Church had missionaries among the Lamanites. It is notable that the Indian tribes have always regarded the religion of the Latter-day Saints with favor, seeing in the Book of Mormon striking agreement with their own traditions.

The first fully established seat of The Church was in the pretty little town of Kirtland, Ohio, almost within sight of Lake Erie; and here soon rose the first temple of modern times. Among their many other peculiarities, the Latter-day Saints are characterized as a temple-building people; as they say history proves the Israel of ancient times to have been. And in the days of their infancy as a Church, while in the thrall of poverty, and amidst the persecution and direful threats of lawless hordes, they laid the cornerstone, and in less than three years thereafter they celebrated the dedication of the Kirtland temple, a structure at once beautiful and imposing. But even before this time, populous settlements of the Saints had been made in Jackson County, Missouri; and in the town of Independence a site for the great temple had been selected and purchased, but though the ground has been dedicated and the corner-stone laid, the people have not as yet been permitted to build thereon.

Within two years from the time of its dedication, the temple in Kirtland was abandoned by the people, who were compelled to flee for their lives before the rage of mobocrats; but a second temple, larger and more beautiful than the first, soon reared its spires from the city of Nauvoo, Illinois. This structure was destroyed by fire, but the temple-building spirit was not to be quenched, and in the vales of Utah today are four magnificent temple edifices. The last completed, which was the first begun, is situated in Salt Lake City, and is one of the wonders and beauties of that city by the great salt sea.

To the fervent Latter-day Saint, a temple is not simply a church building, a house for religious assembly. Indeed, the "Mormon" temples are rarely used as places of general gatherings. They are in one sense educational institutions, regular courses of lec-

tures and instruction being maintained in some of them; but they are specifically for baptisms and ordinations, for sanctifying prayer, and for the most sacred ceremonies and rites of The Church, particularly in the vicarious work for the dead which is a characteristic of "Mormon" faith. And who that has gazed upon these palaces of praise can say that the people who can do so much in poverty and tribulation are insincere? Bigoted they may seem to those who believe not as they do; fanatics they may be to multitudes who like one of old thank God they are not as these, but insincere they cannot be even to their bitterest foe, if he be a creature of reason.

The clouds of persecution thickened in Ohio as the intolerant zeal of mobs found frequent expression; numerous charges trivial and serious, were made against the leaders of The Church, and they were repeatedly before the courts only to be liberated on the usual finding of no cause for action. And the march to the west was maintained. Soon thousands of converts had rented or purchased homes in Missouri,—Independence, Jackson County, being their centre; but from the first, they were unpopular among the Missourians. Their system of equal rights with their marked disapproval of every species of aristocratic separation and self aggrandizement was declared to be a species of communism, dangerous to the state. An inoffensive journalistic organ, *The Star*, published for the purpose of properly presenting the religious tenets of the people, was made the particular object of the mob's hate; the house of its publisher was brought to the ground, the press and type confiscated, and the editor and family maltreated. An absurd story was circulated and took firm hold of the masses, that the Book of Mormon promised the western lands to the people of The Church, and that they intended to take possession of these regions by force. Throughout the book of revelations, regarded by the people as law specially directed to them, they are told to save their riches that they may purchase the inheritance promised them of God. Everywhere are they told to maintain peace; the sword is never offered as their symbol of conquest. Their gathering is to be like that of the Jews at Jerusalem—a pacific one, and in their taking possession of what they regard as

a land of promise, no one previously located there shall be denied his rights.

A spirit of fierce persecution raged in Jackson and surrounding counties of Missouri. An appeal was made to the executive of the state, but little encouragement was returned. The lieutenant governor, Lilburn W. Boggs, afterward governor, was a pronounced "Mormon"-hater, and throughout the period of the troubles, he manifested sympathy with the persecutors.

One of the circuit judges who was asked to issue a peace warrant refused to do so, but advised the "Mormons" to arm themselves and meet the force of the outlaws with organized resistance. This advice was not pleasing to the Saints whose religion enjoined tolerance and peace: but they so far heeded it as to arm a small force; and when the outlaws came upon them, the people were not entirely unprepared. A "Mormon" rebellion was now heralded; the people had been goaded to desperation. The militia was ordered out, and the "Mormons" were disarmed. The mob took revenge. The "Mormons" engaged able lawyers to institute and maintain legal procedure against their foes, and this step, the right to which we would think could be denied no American citizen, called forth such an explosion of popular wrath as to affect almost the entire state.

It was winter; but the inclemency of the year only suited the better the purpose of the oppressor. Homes were destroyed, men torn from their families were brutally beaten, tarred and feathered; women with babes in their arms were forced to flee half-clad into the solitude of the prairie to escape the rapine and murder then prevalent. Their sufferings have never yet been chronicled by human scribe. Making their way across the river, most of the refugees found shelter among the more hospitable people of Clay County, and afterward established themselves in Caldwell County, therein founding the city of Far West. County and state judges, the governor, and even the president of the United States, were appealed to in turn for redress. The national executive, Andrew Jackson, while expressing sympathy for the persecuted people deplored his lack of power to interfere with the administration or nonadministration of state laws; the national officials could do nothing; the state officials would do naught.

(To be continued.)