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Abstract: The author reports of his visit to Palmyra, Manchester, and the Hill Cumorah, outlines many of the features of the Book of Mormon: the history and prophecy in the book, reference to Zion, America as a land of liberty, the relationship of Joseph and Judah, and Jesus Christ in America.

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THE BOOK OF MORMON

Historical and Prophetic Phases

BY ELDER ORSON F. WHITNEY, OF THE COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE

In the summer of 1914 it fell to my lot to visit some of the scenes made memorable by the early experiences of the Latter-day Saints. One object of surpassing interest was the Hill Cumorah, called "Mormon Hill" by the inhabitants of the region in which it is situated—namely, Western New York state, about midway between the towns of Palmyra and Manchester. Palmyra is where the Book of Mormon—its first edition—was printed; and Manchester, is the place nearest the rural home of Joseph Smith's parents, when he was but a boy.

A Visit to Palmyra

I bore a letter of introduction to a prominent citizen of Palmyra, Mr. P. T. Sexton, a wealthy lawyer and banker, who owned the Hill Cumorah and the old printing office in which the Book of Mormon went to press. Mr. Sexton received me courteously, and showed me, not only a copy of the first edition of the book, but also the corrected proofs of that edition, kept by him in a glass case and treasured as a relic of great worth. The proofs, he told me, were originally the property of one Major Gilbert, printer for E. B. Grandin, who had the publishing contract from Joseph Smith, and his associates. Gilbert had been a tenant of Sexton's, and in his old age, broken down, impecunious, and unable to pay his rent, had surrendered to his landlord these proofs, in liquidation of the debt. At the close of a very pleasant interview with Mr. Sexton, he called for his car, and directed the chauffeur to take me to the Hill Cumorah, "and wherever else Mr. Whitney would like to go." This commission was faithfully executed.

At the Smith Farm

Two and a half miles south of Palmyra, we halted at the Smith

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Farm (then as now the property of the Church) and entered "The Sacred Grove," the scene of the Prophet Joseph's first vision. I also stepped inside the house, a comparatively new structure built upon the site of a humbler dwelling in which the youthful Seer had his earliest interviews with the Angel Moroni. We then sped on to "Mormon Hill."

The Hill Cumorah

Before leaving my home among the mountains—whose towering tops seem to challenge the attention of the inhabitants of Mars—I had been told by friends who had seen the famous Hill, that it would disappoint me, being "not much of a hill, after all." But I felt no disappointment on beholding it. Cumorah is not a mountain, but it certainly is a hill, and the most considerable one in all that beautiful rolling country. It is of the variety known as "hog's back," the highest part, a bold bluff facing north, rising abruptly from a lane, and gradually receding southward until lost in the more level plain beyond. I would say that the Hill Cumorah about equals in height the Salt Lake Assembly Hall, exclusive of the towers. A climb up the grassy eastern slope on a hot day was sufficient, I found, to start a healthy perspiration.

On the West side, a little below the hill-top, and overlooking the road running toward Manchester, grew a rose bush, planted by some unknown hand, to mark the spot where was taken out, one hundred years ago, the stone box containing the record plates of the Book of Mormon.

To be there, upon that sacred summit, was to dream of the past and ponder upon the future, as I do now, while preparing this sketch.

Joseph Smith's First Vision

It was early in the spring of 1820 that Joseph Smith, then a lad between fourteen and fifteen years of age, had his glorious vision of the Father and the Son; the first known instance of the exercise by the "Choice Seer," of his matchless gift. And it was three years and some months later, when, during the night of September 21-22, he first beheld the angel messenger who revealed to him the existence of the golden plates.

The Angel Moroni

The angel gave his name as Moroni, and stated that while in mortal life he had ministered as a prophet to an ancient people called Nephites, a branch of the house of Israel—not the Lost Tribes, as is frequently asserted by the uninformed, but a remnant of the tribe of Joseph, mixed with a remnant of the tribe of Judah. The former had crossed over from Jerusalem about the year 600 B. C.; the others a few years afterward. These blended colonies had inhabited the Americas down to about the beginning of the fourth century of the Christian era.

when the civilized but degenerate Nephites were destroyed by a savage faction known as Lamanites, ancestors of the present-day American Indians.

The Nephite Record

The Angel further stated that a record of the Nephites had been hidden in a hill not far from Joseph's home—a hill anciently called Cumorah; and upon that spot, four years later (September 22, 1827), Moroni delivered the record into his hands. It was a book of metallic plates "having the appearance of gold," covered with strange characters, "small and beautifully engraved"—characters known to the Nephites as "the reformed Egyptian" (Mormon 9: 32). By means of "interpreters," discovered with the plates, and consisting of "two stones in silver bows," the youth translated the unsealed portion of the record, and with the assistance of a few friends published to the world the Book of Mormon. It was so named for its compiler, the Nephite prophet Mormon, whose son and survivor, Moroni, had buried the plates where Joseph Smith found them.

History and Prophecy

The Book of Mormon is a sacred history of pre-historic America, and a prophecy of the wondrous future of this chosen land. It tells not only of the Nephites and Lamanites, but also of a more ancient people, the Jaredites, who came from the Tower of Babel at the time of the confusion of tongues. Becoming extinct, the Jaredites were succeeded by the Israelitish colony, led from Jerusalem by a prophet named Lehi, whose sons Nephi and Laman became, respectively, the heads of the two nations called after them. The Jewish remnant that mixed with the descendants of Lehi was headed by Mulek, one of the sons of Zedekiah, king of Judah, whom the Babylonian conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar, overthrew.

The Land of Zion

The Jaredites, as well as the Nephites, had a knowledge of the Christ and of the principles of his Gospel, revealed to them prior to his advent. To both these nations it was made known that America is the Land of Zion, the place for the New Jerusalem, a holy city to be built "unto the remnant of the seed of Joseph" (3 Nephi 21:23, 24; Ether 13:3-8). Likewise it was shown to them that the Old Jerusalem would be rebuilt "unto the house of Israel" in the last days, before the Savior's second coming.

A Nursing Mother

Among the many interesting features of the Book of Mormon, is a prophecy relating to the discovery of America by Columbus; the migration of the Pilgrim Fathers and others to these western shores; the war for American Independence, and the founding of the republic of the United States, a nation destined long before its birth to play

the part of nursing mother to the restored Church of Christ (1 Nephi 13:10-19; 22: 7, 8).

And here let me interject, that whatever may be said of the persecutions suffered by the Latter-day Saints in various states of the Union—persecutions inflicted, not because of the Constitution or the genius of the American government, but in spite of them—persecutions by lawless force, mob violence, ever to be execrated and condemned by every true patriot—whatever may be said of such deplorable happenings, still must our noble Nation be credited with what it has done in the direction of fulfilling its God-given mission. It is extremely doubtful that in any other land, or in any other nation upon this land, would the Lord's people have been treated with the same degree of consideration. In no other country on earth, without special divine interposition in its behalf, would this marvelous work and wonder have been permitted to come forth.

A Land of Liberty

America, according to Nephite prophecy, based upon divine revelation, is to be a land of liberty to the Gentiles—modern peoples, not of Israel, now possessing it—provided they serve the God of the Land, who is Jesus Christ. So long as they shall follow righteousness and maintain the pure principles upon which this Government was founded, just so long will they prosper and enjoy the favor of Heaven. America, if true to her mission, is promised divine protection, and will be invulnerable to every foe. God "will fortify this land against all other nations," and they who "fight against Zion shall perish" (2 Nephi 10:11-13).

If, however, the Gentiles, lifted up in pride, shall harden their hearts and reject the fulness of the Gospel, Liberty's perfect law, another destiny, and a sad one, awaits them. No king but Christ shall reign upon Zion's Land. No people occupying it can practice evil with impunity. The nation fostered here must be a righteous nation, or like the Jaredites and the Nephites, who perished because of their wickedness, it will be swept from off the face of the land when the cup of its iniquity is full. So the God of Heaven hath decreed (Ether 2:8-12).

Joseph's Blessing

Another name for America, authorized by the Book of Mormon, is the Land of Joseph, referred to by the Patriarch Jacob in blessing his twelve sons (Gen. 49:22-26), and by the Prophet Moses in his farewell benediction upon the twelve tribes of Israel (Deut. 33:13-15). Jacob's allusion to Joseph as "a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall," was fulfilled in the migration of Lehi and his companions from Asia to America over the Pacific Ocean. It is hardly necessary to add, that one of the main features of these western continents are those mighty mountain ranges, the Andes and the Rock-

ies, well termed by the Hebrew Patriarch "the everlasting hills," nature's depositories for "the precious things of the earth"—gold, silver, and other minerals—and for "the precious things of heaven"—the sacred records already discovered, and others that are yet to come forth.

Joseph and Judah

The Book of Mormon has a divine mission in connection with the Hebrew Scriptures, "unto the confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions" (2 Nephi 3:12). It is "The Stick of Joseph," mentioned by the Prophet Ezekiel, that was to be one with "The Stick of Judah" (The Bible) "in the hand of Ephraim." They were also to be one in the hand of Jehovah, symbolizing the reunion of the two great branches of the Israelitish race, after many centuries of separation. "And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel," saith the Lord, "and David my servant shall be king over them" (Ezek. 37:16-24). The king here spoken of is not David, son of Jesse, but "another by the name of David" who is to be "raised up out of his lineage" (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 253).

David's empire, which parted in twain, forming the Kingdom of Judah and the Kingdom of Israel, may have been a foreshadowing of God's greater empire of the last days, which will consist of two grand divisions—two in one. Here, upon the "land choice above all other lands" (Ether 2:10), the children of Joseph, descended through Ephraim, are even now assembling to prepare for Messiah's advent. The Jews will greet Him at Jerusalem. Christ's Kingdom will have two capitals, one in the Old World, one in the New; one in America, the other in Palestine. "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa 2:3).

Jesus Christ in America

The main fact for which the Book of Mormon stands is the visitation of the Savior, after his resurrection at Jerusalem, to the righteous remnant of the Nephites, who had survived the awful cataclysm of destruction coincident with his crucifixion. Some might think the great wars of the Jaredites, Nephites and Lamanites, with the mighty political changes and geographic convulsions, preceding or succeeding the rise and downfall of cities and empires founded by those ancient peoples, whose wonderful civilizations are now the study of the archaeologist and the antiquarian—some might think these the more consequential features of the Book of Mormon. I did, when I was a boy, and looked at all things through boyish eyes. When reading that sacred record—and I read it very early, by the advice and persuasion of my sainted mother—I would skip over the prophecies and preachings, which meant little to me then, and feast upon battles, victories and defeats, acts of courage and heroism, with which the book abounds; and which had for me, a romantic fascination.

As I grew older and "put away childish things," I became a devout student of the Gospel, and learned to appreciate the sublime doctrines set forth in the Nephite record; for I had developed a testimony of the truth, and as a young missionary was out preaching it to people in the world. Not until my mind was matured however, did I grasp with anything like a full and clear comprehension, the significance of the risen Savior's appearance upon the Land of Zion—this land, where the New Jerusalem will yet rise, and the way be prepared for the glorious coming of the King of kings.

TRANSLATION AND PUBLICATION OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

BY ELDER JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH, OF THE COUNCIL OF THE
TWELVE, AND CHURCH HISTORIAN

The idea seems to prevail quite generally among members of the Church that the Prophet Joseph Smith spent the greater part of his time between September, 1823, when he received the plates, and the fall of 1829, translating the Book of Mormon.

As to the Length of Time

Because of lack of dates it is impossible to tell exactly how long it took him to complete the translation, but we know from the historical information at hand that there were many days spent in other work, when no attempt was made to translate after that labor had been undertaken. There were times when the Lord commanded him to cease translating. For instance, the Lord said on one occasion (Doc. and Cov. 5:30): "I say unto thee Joseph, when thou hast translated a few more pages thou shalt stop for a season, even until I command thee again." The reason given for this is that his enemies were lying in wait to destroy him and the work. Again the Lord said: "Do not run faster or labor more than you have strength and means provided to enable you to translate; but be diligent unto the end." (Doc. and Cov. 10:4).

Time for Study and Practice

Joseph Smith received the plates and the Urim and Thummim September 22, 1827. Because of persecution, poverty, and the necessity of "laboring with his hands" for a living, nothing was done towards translating the record that year. However, he was busy studying the characters and making himself familiar with them and the use of the Urim and Thummim. He had a great deal more to do than merely to sit down and with the use of the instrument prepared for that purpose translate the characters on the plates. Nothing worth while comes to us merely for the asking. All knowledge and skill are ob-

tained by consistent and determined study and practice, and so the Prophet found it to be the case in the translating of the Book of Mormon. It will be remembered that the Lord said to Oliver Cowdery when he desired to translate: "But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind." Oliver thought it would be easy, but found it difficult and therefore was content to accept the advice from the Lord and continue as scribe to Joseph Smith.

The Lost Pages

It was between December, 1827, and February, 1828, that the Prophet copied the characters from the plates; and, in the month of February, Martin Harris carried them to New York to Professor Charles Anthon (*History of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 19.) April 12, 1828, Martin Harris commenced to write, and the Prophet to translate the abridgment giving the history of Lehi and down to the days of King Benjamin. These pages Martin Harris lost, and because of his disobedience he was not permitted to act again as scribe and the Prophet Joseph lost his gift for a season.

Oliver Cowdery Appears

Oliver Cowdery came to the Prophet at Harmony, Pennsylvania, April 5, 1829, and two days later commenced to write at Joseph Smith's dictation. It must be remembered that they had to commence once more at the beginning and cover the same ground that had been covered in the lost manuscript, but in more detail, for they were now translating the small plates of Nephi. The translating with Oliver Cowdery as scribe, continued without interruption (*History of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 35) until May 15, 1829, when these two men having a desire to know something more about baptism went into the woods to pray and received the Aaronic Priesthood from John the Baptist. Following this important event, it became necessary for Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery to change their place of residence because of opposition, and they therefore moved from Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Fayette, Seneca county, New York, to the home of the Whitmers.

The Witnesses are Shown the Plates

It was early in June, 1829, that Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris, with Joseph Smith retired to the woods and sought the Lord in prayer and were visited by the angel who revealed to them the plates. It was also on this occasion that they heard the voice of the Lord declaring unto them that the record *had been translated* by the gift and power of God.

Copyright Secured

About this time Joseph Smith also writes: "Meantime, our translation *drawing to a close*, we went to Palmyra, Wayne county, New York, secured the copyright, and agreed with Mr. Egbert B. Grandin

to print five thousand copies for the sum of three thousand dollars.”

I think we may conclude that the copyright was not secured until the translation was completed, and these words of the Prophet Joseph indicate that this is the case. The copyright bears the date of June 11, 1829.

Book Ready for Distribution

After completing the translation it took some time to make arrangements with Mr. Grandin and to raise the sum required to print the book, the funds being furnished by Martin Harris through the sale of his personal property. In the meantime Oliver Cowdery, at the request of Joseph Smith, made a complete copy of the manuscript, and it was this manuscript copy that was taken to the printer, sheet at a time, until the Book of Mormon was printed. Mr. Grandin commenced the printing in August, 1829, and the Book of Mormon was ready for distribution about the first of March, 1830.

We may conclude from the evidence that the actual time of translating the record, as we have it in the Book of Mormon, was between April 7, 1829, and the first week of June of that same year, or not to exceed two full months.

TESTIMONIES OF THE WITNESSES TO THE BOOK OF MORMON

BY ELDER JOSEPH FIELDING SMITH, OF THE COUNCIL OF THE
TWELVE, AND CHURCH HISTORIAN

The question has been asked many times of our Elders:

Where are the Plates?

“Does the Church have in its possession the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated by Joseph Smith?” When the answer is given that the plates were received again by the Angel Moroni, who through the centuries since they were “hid up unto the Lord” has been their special guardian, the reply is generally made: “What a wonderful aid it would be to your people in convincing the world of the truth of your story if you could show the plates to prove that Joseph Smith really had them.”

Perhaps it is natural for a man who hears for the first time the story of Joseph Smith and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon to propound such a question, and to think that the plates, if they had been placed in some museum where the public could examine them, would have added much to prove the authenticity of the Prophet’s story. With deeper reflection we discover that this would not have been the case, for, it is not the way the Lord proves his truth, now or at any other time. However, in surprise, and in some cases with an