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The Book of Mormon Originally Written in Hieroglyphics I

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Abstract: This article offers some evidence from worldwide sources to corroborate Mormon's statement in the Book of Mormon that the text was written in reformed Egyptian characters. The first part covers claims of Joseph Smith's fraudulence.

The Book of Mormon Originally Written in Hieroglyphics.

BY THOMAS W. BROOKBANK.

I.

We are informed by Mormon, one of the writers of the Nephite history, that it was originally written, or engraved, in reformed Egyptian characters, that is, in hieroglyphical symbols. Omitting all reference to the testimony of those who saw the engravings on the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated by Joseph Smith, it is the present purpose to offer some evidence from other sources to corroborate Mormon's statement.

Proceeding within these restricted limits, and assuming that Joseph Smith was an impostor, let us ask, in the first place, what plausible reason can be proposed why he should take the position that the ancient records, which he alleged were in his possession, were written in hieroglyphics instead of some alphabetical system of writing. What possible advantage could he hope to secure for his work from a claim of this character, that would not be counter-balanced many times over by the dangers of exposure, and the numerous additional difficulties that his unwise stand made inevitable—difficulties and dangers which he unnecessarily created and assumed without any prospect of compensatory benefits?

Since his work was to be founded on an alleged Jewish history of quite ancient date, does it not appear reasonable that an authentic record of that kind should be written in Hebrew rather than in Egyptian, which was a foreign and very difficult method of writing?

The position in which Joseph Smith, if an impostor, placed

himself by his reckless claim, may be illustrated by supposing a case where a school teacher of less than average scholastic attainments would propose to teach American history to his pupils from a text-book on that subject—written in Chinese, of which he knew nothing. Was he not aware that every one of his family connections, his friends, acquaintances and enemies knew perfectly that, so far as book learning was concerned, he could not correctly decipher a single hieroglyphic, whether of the reformed or of the unreformed order?

It is evident, from considerations of this character, that only extraordinary expedients could avail one particle to rescue an "unlearned" impostor from the entanglements in which he had thus entrapped himself. Whether Joseph Smith was an impostor or was not, another step forward, under actual conditions, was impossible with any prospect of success, unless efficient assistance from outside sources was forthcoming at once. Now, it is aid of this adequate kind that both his friends and his opponents are very sure he did obtain. There is perfect unanimity of opinion on this point everywhere; but while the "Mormons" refer Joseph Smith's success in removing the difficulties that beset his pathway, as a true servant of God, to the inspiration and favor of the Almighty, without finding it necessary to call in the assistance of a third party, the anti-"Mormons" bring Sidney Rigdon to the rescue. To this individual they assign the position of real principal, while Joseph Smith is made to occupy that of a mere figurehead only. But to what extent does this assumption, even if true, help our opponents out of the difficulties we have in view? Sidney Rigdon was, doubtless, no more qualified to read hieroglyphics of the Egyptian order than Joseph Smith was. It thus becomes apparent that just as they are sure that Joseph Smith must have had the assistance of Sidney Rigdon to carry on his work, so Sidney Rigdon must, in his turn, secure the assistance of some other party; but this time an Egyptologist who was able to read hieroglyphics of an unusually difficult kind. Just how and where to get a man with the required qualifications was a question of quite difficult solution, in view of the fact that the Rosetta stone, which holds the key to the interpretation of the Egyptian symbols, was not discovered until 1799; and Champollion, who deciphered the key,

was not born until 1790; and, therefore, it is safe to say that learned scholars who could read the Egyptian hieroglyphics, and who would assist in establishing the alleged "Mormon" fraud by their learning, were not very numerous in any part of America when the Book of Mormon was translated in 1827-8, and when *no one* anywhere could be found who was able to read the *reformed* Egyptian characters of the ancient American or Nephite order.

The abyss of difficulties into which Sidney Rigdon was thus plunged was just as deep as that into which the alleged impostor, Joseph Smith, fell headlong. What blunderers these so-called wily, fraudulent schemers were!

That an alleged religious impostor should make the mistake of claiming that the basis of his work, with respect to many of its principles and laws, etc., was written in a language which he could not read, would be wretched bungling; but if, not alarmed by this deadly error, he should go one step further, and practically claim that these matters were written in such strange forms that *nobody* on earth, at that time, could read them, the terms are yet to be coined that can adequately describe the stupidity of the proceedings. Looked at from the anti-"Mormon" standpoint, Joseph Smith must have been an irresponsible party, and for shame's sake this old world should stop its abuse of him, or of his memory.

However, finding themselves thus surrounded by difficulties, which they could not overcome by human agencies, these alleged impostors cut the Gordian knots with which they had bound themselves, by referring the interpretation of the hieroglyphical records to the assistance of the Almighty; but just as they, if impostors, botched the beginning of their work, so they closed it with another blunder of large proportions. Joseph Smith, according to the allegations of his enemies, was a depraved wretch of the darkest hue, while Sidney Rigdon, on the contrary, was known as a preacher in good standing among his own people, and possessed unusual ability as a speaker. It is manifest, therefore, that if these men were impostors, Sidney Rigdon, instead of Joseph Smith, was the one of these two who should have claimed the inspirational aid and favor of the Almighty; but, as the program was carried out, it appears completely reversed from this common-sense arrangement.

Being unable to reconcile these deadly blunders with the skill and perfection which are so plainly manifest in the structure of "Mormonism" as a whole, Joseph Smith's statement that the Nephite records were written in hieroglyphics is accepted as true. If we reject it as untrue, some of his proceedings cannot be reconciled with those of a man possessed of a properly balanced mind; and Sidney Rigdon was his intellectual equal, neither more nor less.

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Attention shall now be directed to some peculiarities in the text of the Book of Mormon, which serve to show that it was not originally written in English, nor in a language with which the Nephite writers—the first Nephi in particular—were perfectly familiar. It is here recalled to mind that at the time Lehi left Jerusalem, his son Nephi, as he himself informs us, was "exceeding young," and, consequently, educated only "somewhat" in the learning of his father, which consisted in both Jewish and Egyptian knowledge. President George Q. Cannon, in his *Life of Nephi* expresses the opinion that at the time this young servant of God left his native land he was not more than fifteen years of age, though large in stature. Boys of his years are not usually very proficient in education, and Nephi's lack of familiarity with a foreign system of hieroglyphical writing, for which no future use was likely foreseen, may be assumed with great confidence. The brass plates upon which were engraved in Egyptian characters the ancient scriptures of the Jews, and with which the Book of Mormon history is concerned, were not kept in the family of which Nephi was a member, but by a Jew named Laban; and there is nothing to show that Nephi ever saw them until they were delivered into his hands by a special providence of the Almighty. About eight years were spent, principally in the wilderness of Arabia, from the time when Lehi left Jerusalem until he and his little colony landed on the shores of the western continent. During this whole period Nephi was the main dependence of the company in providing it with food, and in building a ship in which to cross the seas. In short, he had to perform a large part and a hard part of all the labors incident to the wilderness life and journeyings.

It is apparent from these facts, that from the day the brass

plates came into Lehi's possession until he and his people arrived at their destination in "the land of promise," Nephi had but little leisure time, and few opportunities that were favorable for studying hieroglyphics or to practice the writing of them, and to make himself proficient in the art of engraving on metal.

Further, it is not at all probable that when the brass plates were obtained from Laban a key to the engravings on them was also secured. Lehi's knowledge of things Egyptian appears to be the principal reason why the scriptures on the plates did not become a sealed book to the Nephite colony. A key to the symbols had to be prepared right at the beginning of the Nephite history, and this circumstance was most opportune for the origination and introduction of a *reformed* Egyptian system of writing among the Nephites. No other time in their whole history could be so favorable for laying its foundation as that particular period in their affairs. Mormon, when stating that the records of his people were written in *reformed* Egyptian, excepts no portion of them, and it is therefore almost certain that the new method was devised and adopted, in its beginnings, at the time just indicated.

These last remarks have been made to show that the changed system of writing could have been applied without causing any particular confusion, and without making some portions of the Nephite history very difficult to read by the later generations of the people directly concerned. These points are worthy of our attention, since they manifest that the Book of Mormon history, without making any formal attempt to do so, has consistently made provisions for all the requirements in the case, and without leaving an "awkward situation" in any respect to be explained away.

SNOWFLAKE, ARIZ.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

THE INDIAN gave the white man tobacco, and the white man gave the Indian "fire water." When we consider existing conditions, with nearly every corner store in our great cities occupied by well-patronized red curses in the form of cigarette and tobacco dispensaries, it is a question, which got the worst end of the deal.