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Concerning the Book of Mormon Plates

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Abstract: This two-part series argues that it would be useless to show the Book of Mormon plates to the public, for a display of the gold plates would not build faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord has already sent a multitude of witnesses to testify of the Book of Mormon. The first part begins the series.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR

THURSDAY, JULY 3, 1913.

EDITORIAL.

CONCERNING THE BOOK OF MORMON PLATES.

OCCASIONALLY we find a member of this Church who entertains a belief that a public exhibition of the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated by Joseph Smith, would be highly advantageous to the "Mormon" cause; and the non-"Mormon" world is of this opinion generally. As a member of this Church for about thirty-five years, during which time I have experienced many blessings in it according to the promises of the Lord, I feel to thank God for "Mormonism" just as it stands; but as the point in view is considered quite important by many, some remarks concerning it will be submitted for the consideration of our readers.

If we ask why the plates should be put on exhibition, the reply is that a view of them would convince the world that Joseph Smith did get them AS CLAIMED; and the opposition to the principles which he taught would cease, and many thousands would unite with the "Mormon" Church who now fail to do so because they are not satisfied that the plates ever had an existence. While there may be many who honestly hold this view respecting the results which would accrue to our cause from an exhibition of the plates, it is not by any means clear to our mind that the enmity of the devil against God and His work (and of a world also which is taken captive by him at his will) would be overcome, and a general surrender of the forces in rebellion against the Almighty be effected by such a simple circumstance as the exposure to their view of certain sacred objects which are connected with His work. The plates, we should remember, were not engraved by the hand of the Almighty Himself, but by men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to do it. Now, we find the world of Christendom believes that the Pentateuch, the gospels and the epistles of the apostles, together with the other portions of the Bible were written by men who spoke and wrote as they were moved upon by the Spirit of God, yet the people in general are far from adopting in their lives the principles of morality and righteousness which these sacred writings contain. We do not find multitudes uniting with the various churches which profess to practice the religion of Jesus Christ, though the people generally in times past have accepted the Bible as inspired—acknowledged it as the word of God, and hence, we must conclude from the course which they pursue, that something more than this belief and acknowledgment is necessary

to induce them to practice gospel principles, and unite with the churches. Upon what ground we can found a supposition that the masses would act differently in case they were convinced of the truth of "Mormonism," from a view of the plates, or from some other cause, we fail to discern.

Going a step further we find that Jesus Christ Himself not only taught the divine word of God with power and spoke as never man before or since has spoken, but He also performed many mighty works. These were of the most remarkable character, and should have been sufficiently convincing, even beyond the shadow of a doubt, to manifest His calling as a messenger sent from God—His personal Divinity, we should say. These works were of a character, too, which far transcends, as attesting their Divine origin, anything which the mind of man could be made to sense from a view of certain plates upon which a sacred record was engraven. Though Jesus performed so many mighty wonders, the world did not fall down at His feet and worship Him. It should have done so; but what it ought to do, and what it does are vastly different things. It did not cease its opposition to Him, because of the miracles which He wrought. It did not rush to the fold of the Church which He founded because He turned water into wine, or raised Lazarus from the dead. Far from it. It reviled Him, persecuted and crucified Him—yes, crucified this worker of these mighty manifestations of the actual presence of Divinity. Think of that, will you? Think of how the alleged followers of Moses were so calloused by sin that they were not stricken with fear at the bare suggestion of laying violent hands upon the Son of God, nor paralyzed with horror as the thought began to take the form of a purpose in their hearts to do it! But they did not know that Jesus was the Son of God, you say. Well, what of this objection? Have we not just called attention to the fact that they had far more evidence upon which to base an acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, than men would have in our times to accept "Mormonism" as the work of God from a view of certain plates connected with it? If the world anciently would not accept Christ for what He truly was on both the direct and indirect evidence supplied to it, the man who says the world to-day would accept "Mormonism" on a single point of indirect evidence, which shall be shown later is not material at all, neither understands human nature, nor that of the forces which are arrayed against this work.

But, says the objector, people nowadays are more highly educated and refined—more competent to weigh evidence and arrive at just conclusions than they were in the days of Christ. If this be a fact, then why in the name of common sense are not more of the present enlarged capabilities of these twentieth century minds of ours exercised in such a manner as to show that the gospel of Jesus Christ, as taught in the Bible, should be accepted and practised as divine more generally than it is at present, and as a per-

sonal matter especially? If people anciently were too ignorant to perceive or understand divine truth, no such plea can hold good in these times of boasted enlightenment and wisdom. Why, then, are not the churches of Christendom filled with people who should be convinced of the Divinity of Christ and of His word? The evidences which show all this are not lacking. Why is it that the sanctuaries of Christendom are being abandoned, instead of being filled, as they should be, if it be true that the enlightenment of this age especially fits men to be judges of divine things and of the evidences which tend to show that the Bible principles come from God? If the high state of civilization to which man has attained, and the associated development of his mental powers qualifies him in a corresponding degree to recognize more fully divine truth when he sees it, and blesses him with a willingness to receive and practice it, how does it transpire that the Bible, which is the word of God, is in this enlightened age being torn to shreds, and only so much of it accepted as divine, and put into practice, as different societies of men choose to select from it according to their personal preferences, or which they can practice with but little self-sacrifice or humility of spirit on their part?

From such considerations as these it does not appear that the public exhibition of the plates would accomplish any good. The proposition is tantamount to a demand for "signs" to be wrought in order to convince men of the truth, and those who propose such conditions Jesus classes as belonging to a wicked and adulterous generation (Matt. 16: 4; 12: 39). The number of such people who would accept "Mormonism" under any condition is comparatively small. The idea which the world in general entertains that signs and miracles are intended to convince men of divine truth or to establish the genuine character of a divine commission is erroneous. If we read the inspired account of the means which were used on the day of Pentecost when three thousand souls were added to the Church of Christ, we will not find that "signs" were the agencies employed to bring about these conversions. The operations of the Spirit of God upon His servants aroused public interest and caused the multitude to flock together; but no conversion resulted from these "signs." What did serve as the human means to effect them was the testimony which the apostles bore respecting Christ, in conjunction with the word of God which they quoted from the ancient scriptures, thus proving that Jesus was the expected Messiah. These were the visible means employed—the Holy Spirit accomplishing its share of the work by them, not by "signs."

That men would not be constrained to cease their warfare against this Church even were the plates shown to them is evident from the course pursued by representative men who are willing to admit that Joseph Smith did have the plates as he claimed, or what is to the same effect, that "Mormonism" is true.

The first case in point which shall now be cited is one that came into the writer's experience before he became a member of this Church. It was while traveling across the plains in a train bound for Ogden, Utah, that I became acquainted with an editor who was going into the heart of "Mormondom" to start a Gentile newspaper. As we approached nearer to the boundaries of Utah, the passengers, without apparent exception, directed their conversation to matters pertaining to the "Mormon" people, and in the course of the remarks which passed between my new acquaintance and myself, I asked him if he had the least idea that Joseph Smith ever had in his possession the plates of which we heard so much, and from which the "Mormons" claimed the Book of Mormon was translated. He frankly stated that there was no reasonable ground for doubting his claims. Personally, I was not prepared to admit so much, but looking at the matter from his position I asked him what we were going to do about it. His reply was that there was "nothing for us to do but to fight it"—"it" meaning "Mormonism."

Another case is one which was related to me by a missionary who some years ago labored in New Zealand. His narration concerned himself as one of the parties. He said that in conversation on one occasion with a certain minister the latter finally declined to hold any further discussion with him on gospel principles. When asked for his reasons he replied, substantially, that he was well aware that when it came to a matter of successfully defending sectarianism on his side, or of "Mormonism" on the other, on Bible grounds, he (the elder of this Church) could make out a case so strong that there was no use for sectarians to try to meet his arguments. Not only did he say that he himself was aware of this fact, but that the ministers with whom he was acquainted were all of the same opinion. The "Mormon" elder then asked him the same question which I had asked the editor in the case already related: "What are you going to do about it." Not being able to quote his reply verbatim, it is not put in quotation marks, but its substance follows: What are we going to do about it? There is nothing for us to do but to fight it. As to myself I depend for my living, and for that of my family, on my ministry. I have never been trained to do any other kind of work. I can not now learn a new business. If I quit my ministry myself and family will be beggared. I can not think of enduring such a life. I must continue the fight against you. May God have mercy upon such men. They are rather to be commiserated than condemned. How many there are of those who oppose us that do so for similar reasons to the ones which prevailed in this case, we do not know. That there are some is a fact. That the world for eighty years has been fighting this work—"Mormonism"—we know. That it has been repudiated by the masses of the people we know. That every vile epithet and word of opprobrium which they can think of has been hurled against it, we also know; and who is so simple minded

as to believe that if the plates of the Book of Mormon were now shown to the people they would stultify themselves by admitting that what they have so fiercely assailed as false is, after all, true? They certainly would never humble themselves sufficiently to make such an admission, much less think of accepting it as the word of God, and of regulating their lives according to its teachings.

It may be urged that if the plates had been put on exhibition in the early days of the Church, the people might never have drifted into such a state of hostility towards "Mormonism," as they at present sustain. But the reader is reminded that in the first part of these remarks we viewed our subject from this very standpoint; and it is manifest that at no time since "Mormonism" came into existence have the people generally been in a condition of mind or heart when a view of the plates in question would have been of any consequence to move them to accept the Book of Mormon as the word of God, and provided they had done so—had accepted it as a divine record—what ground is there for a belief that they in general would treat it with more sacred regard than they now manifest for the Bible, which has been so widely acknowledged as the inspired word of God. If they wrest the one to their destruction so would they do with the other; and it is, perhaps, a mercy that so many of them do not know that the Book of Mormon is of divine origin.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A BIG "IF" FOR THE INVESTIGATOR.

SOME time ago it was my painful duty to join a party in search of a lost hunter; a man that had disappeared after one of those heavy, short and at the same time fearful snowstorms that are so common in the "Rockies" of the Western United States.

We have them in Utah—in fact, this was in Utah; in one of those rugged cañons that seem to have been cut out hastily by an invisible hand, through the mountains, the sides being so shaggy that they remind one of the work of some powerful gunner who has literally shot out the side of a mountain.

This one was known as "Rock Cañon," and it certainly deserves its name. Nothing but rock, and then more rock: huge cliffs towering up for hundreds of feet on all sides of you.

The man whom we were searching for had lived for years at its mouth, and it was said, by young and old alike, that he knew every step and bypath of the gorge and valley as no other man in the world knew them or had known them, due to the fact that he had lived there practically all of his life.

He was seen before one of those snowstorms by some loggers who were coming down the small and narrow cañon road after