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## Concerning the Book of Mormon

Editor(s): T. W. Brookbank

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**Abstract:** This article argues that the idea that Joseph Smith actually wrote the Book of Mormon is ridiculous and such an accomplishment would be similar to someone writing a 1000-year historical work in a few weeks.

# THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR.

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 1914.

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## EDITORIAL.

### CONCERNING THE BOOK OF MORMON.

THE Book of Mormon is, without doubt, the most wonderful book, in many respects, which has ever come forth among men in historical times. It is wonderful, if inspired, because it is, therefore, an authoritative history of nations long since passed away; and more than startling in its significance as the work of God, who has, consequently, after maintaining silence for centuries, once again, as in olden times, begun to busy Himself in the affairs of man's temporal life. But, however wonderful it may be as coming from the hand of the Almighty, it is yet more so when considered as the product of man's imagination—when viewed as a romance, a fiction, without reality of any kind upon which to found its story; since, while then untrue in every part, it is nevertheless so bulwarked round with truth that none can prove it false. Were it the invention of men, it would stand as a marvel; for who can find the key, either in the wisdom of this world or in the revelations of God, to unlock its character as an imposture. It baffles all efforts to overthrow it or destroy its influence; and makes reason, science and scripture its devoted allies. It is loved by the pure, and hated by the vile. Alleged to be the work of Satanic inspiration, it, nevertheless, leads men to righteousness, and many of the great ones of the earth are even now coming to Zion, whose law it is, to learn of her ways and to walk, a little, at least, in her paths. Assumed to be the product of ignorance, it has, for all that, well nigh revolutionized the theology of Protestant Christendom. Despicable, in the eyes of its enemies, it yet strides onward with a success which awakens the fear of a sectarian world.

Viewed either as an inspired production or as the fiction of designing men, the Book of Mormon, as before stated, is a marvel. But when we consider some only of the difficulties which Joseph Smith would have been obliged to meet and overcome, if the allegations of his enemies are true, we shall find that neither he nor any other man, nor set of men could have brought it forth, unassailable as it is, under the circumstances which attended him in his work, and we are, therefore, driven to the conclusion that it is the word of God.

Let us inquire briefly into the nature of some of the difficulties

of which we have spoken. Remembering that the Book of Mormon is largely a history, it is observed that history is a systematic, written record or account of events, particularly those that affect a nation, or institution, etc. Its pages must give knowledge of events as they have occurred; for otherwise the record is the sheer imagination of the mind, without historical reality, and only by the rarest chance can it, even in a single instance, conform to the facts in the case. To write a large history wholly from original records is a task that few, if any, historical authors ever think of undertaking. The labor involved is too great to offer any encouragement that it shall be accomplished with success. The documents upon which they would be compelled to rely for the numerous items of their accounts or narrations, are filed away in the archives of the state or nation to which they belong, or they may be preserved in public or private libraries, or in books, papers, charts, maps, etc., that belong to many different individuals, who perhaps are living apart from one another in regions widely separated; or the required records may be inscribed on monuments, or the only documents relating to them may be buried in the corner stones of churches or public buildings. Much of the information that is contained in our later, modern histories is taken from other books previously published on the same or kindred subjects, and which thus afford the desired accounts, records, or items in convenient form and ready for use. These serve their purpose for the new history; though some facts that other authors have omitted, or not given in sufficient detail, etc., are generally obtained from an examination of original documents, or other first sources of information, and made a part of the text of the new work. The procedure thus briefly outlined is the one usually followed by historians, as their acknowledgments to earlier writers make evident.

It is manifest from these reflections that if there were no books published which give an account of the events pertaining to any certain nation—this kingdom serving as an example—any one who should now attempt to write its history, would have to consult original documents, papers, maps, charts, inscriptions, etc., before he could even begin to make up his record. He would have to get from them, or from living witnesses, every item or fact of which he gave information that should be truthful. Let us now try to imagine the vast amount of labor that would be required to write, under these conditions, a fairly complete outline history of this people for the last ten years only. It must embrace not only political, but military and ecclesiastical history as well. It must give information relating to the organization of the English army, and of the wars it has fought, if any, during the time specified. It must give us a complete insight into the religious principles of the people of this kingdom, together with an account of the contentions of the sects; it must disclose to us the habits and the

customs, the sciences and the arts—give, in short, a general view of English history to such an extent that the reader shall get a fairly good understanding of what this people have done for the decade in question. Those who have anything like a proper conception of the amount of labor involved in an undertaking of that character, will readily admit that it would be very great indeed, and much, very much, care would have to be exercised if the history should so conform to facts that it could not be disproved by the British people who should live during the succeeding eighty years after its publication, though all the time they should be getting freer access to original documents. Remember that it must be so reliable, so faithful to facts that, though a few millions of intelligent citizens, who do not like the history, shall exert themselves to the utmost during all those long years to discover errors, discrepancies or inconsistencies of one kind or another in it, they shall fail to find any material ground for calling its authenticity in question. The author shall be allowed one assistant to act as clerk, who, with his chief, shall constitute the regular force, which may be increased occasionally to double the number for longer or shorter periods of service; but these additions are inconsiderable since he—the author—must get his manuscript ready for the press within a few months after he has commenced the actual work of collecting data for his accounts and narratives, and so were the services of the larger force continuous from the beginning to the end of the work, they would represent but a small percentage of what the case demands. With this small force, and in this limited time, the history must be prepared so that its authenticity, as before stated, can not be assailed successfully, nor after publication shall it be revised in any way or manner.

Now, reader, what prospects are there that a reliable history of this kingdom can be written for the last ten years under these conditions? When we think of the wide extent of the field that it must cover, of the search among original documents for all its data, of the small force that shall be employed to do the work, of the limited time in which it must be completed, of its required accuracy, and of THE PROHIBITION TO REVISE IT, we know that under these stated conditions a work of the kind in view is improbable of accomplishment. It never would be undertaken seriously by any one in his senses. That is just the view, we think, that every intelligent person will take of the case. But, now, we want the reader to notice how with a few added conditions the probability not only falls to zero, but, if we may be allowed so to speak, it goes gliding along far beyond the reach of probability, and becomes tied in a Gordian knot of impossibility which no sword can cut. Histories can not be written without entailing expenses, and sometimes they are quite heavy, and one of the conditions to be added relates to them. Expenses for the author and his force who are to write the English history, as pro-

posed, shall be allowed at the rate of ten shillings a day. No mileage on traveling account is to be considered. No one is expected to do enough traveling to make a bill of it. If they can not manage to consult public documents in distant public libraries, without going there, or without getting them into their possession for examination, it is unfortunate for the historian and his assistants. It is not part of our business to make any provision for these ordinarily necessary conveniences at all. Another difficulty that has to be met and overcome in this case, is that not one of the men engaged on this work shall know a word of the English language. We shall call them Siberians for short. They must, of course, write the history in English, so that the people of this kingdom can read and understand it. Construction of sentences to be fairly good, and remarkable for plainness. It will doubtless take them longer to learn the language alone than they are to be allowed for acquiring a thorough knowledge of it and write the history at the same time, but the conditions can not be materially modified in any respect.

The reader, perhaps, is suspicious by this time that some of these remarks have been penned in a spirit of levity that does not comport at all with a serious subject; but we assure them that what we have said has been uttered in a proper spirit of gravity, and they are requested to bear with our folly, if it must be so called, and even to endure it somewhat further. Of course, all perceive that a HISTORY can not be written under the conditions that have been proposed. The work is impossible of accomplishment. To make that fact apparent is the point in view. But if a history of the English people can not be written as stated conditions require, for the short period of the ten years just closing, what shall we think of the man who should attempt to cover the past one hundred years by such a work, or going to still harder conditions, try to write it for the last thousand years? But the difficulties are not yet all disclosed. Suppose that he should undertake to write the history of a nation covering a thousand years and relating to nearly all phases of its life, whose people historically passed out of existence fourteen hundred years ago, and who had left nothing obtainable anywhere as documents, books, maps, charts, inscriptions, etc., except a few of the latter (wholly indecipherable), on some monument fast going to ruins. To attempt the writing of ancient history with nothing but blank paper and pencil in hand is sheer folly—madness. There would be no recourse but to sit down and THINK it out. But no one can compose AUTHENTIC history in that way. ANCIENT HISTORY is a far different thing from the creations of modern fancy. Who is able to make the chimeras of the imagination conform throughout to the realities of events where a multitude of them are taken into the account? No one; nor is it in the power of our race, united together in one supreme effort, to do it.

We do not purpose to recapitulate the conditions which have already been stated in relation to the writing of a supposed history of this country or of an ancient nation. A sufficient number of them can be readily recalled to show the impossibility of doing the work when obstructed by such hindrances, or by any one of a number of them, if single and alone it had to be met.

Well, reader, they illustrate the conditions under which Joseph Smith labored, and the obstacles he had to overcome, and which he did successfully, if his work—the Book of Mormon—is a fiction of his mind or of any other man's, or set of men. Let us review briefly the work that he did.

1. He has given us a history covering about one thousand years.
2. It is an alleged ancient record, and the principal nation of which it treats, ceased to exist about 400 A.D.
3. It gives information relating to the civil, military, and ecclesiastical concerns of the nation, as well as to the social customs, learning, etc., of the people.
4. He occupied but a few months in its preparation.
5. His office force consisted of one regular clerk. One or two others occasionally assisted in various ways.
6. His income was barely sufficient to supply them with necessary food and clothing; though funds to pay the printer and binder were in time, advanced by a friend.
7. He had no original documents, previously published histories, or anything of the kind from which to get his information.
8. There were some INDECIPHERABLE inscriptions on a number of monuments thousands of miles from where he wrote. These were erected by the people of whom his history treats; but he never saw the inscriptions, and could not have read them if they were before him.
9. He never revised a word of his published records.
10. The world has tried to prove that history false; but can not do it. The Book of Mormon has been open to disproof since 1830 A.D.
11. New evidence is coming forth continually to establish its authenticity. Archæological research in America is doing this work.

Now, reader, shall we believe that Joseph Smith thus accomplished the impossible, or shall we accept the only alternative left us, viz., that his work was done by the inspiration of God, and so easily account for the marvel of it all.

T. W. B.

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“RELIGION is a jealous thing; it must either have first place in a man's heart, or no place. It cannot be subordinate to any other aim, impulse, or passion. It accepts no compromises. It must either be the master of a man, his great guiding principle, or it is worse than worthless.”