



Type: Magazine Article

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## Reply to a Recent Critic

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Source: *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, Vol. 76, No. 28 (9 July 1914)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 440–445

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**Abstract:** This two-part series defends the Book of Mormon against the charge that it cannot be God-inspired since its literary merits are so poor. Brookbank believes that its poor literary style supports its claim even more since good style cannot be had from translating Egyptian hieroglyphics. The first part begins the series.

# THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR.

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THURSDAY, JULY 9, 1914.

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## EDITORIAL.

### REPLY TO A RECENT CRITIC.

A GENTLEMAN by the name of Charles A. Darnley, writing, not long ago, in the *Blackburn Times*, made use of the following language when criticising the Book of Mormon, which is received by the Latter-day Saints as the word of God. His remarks are not confined to this one point of attack, however. He says: "But the last and greatest trouble is that the Book of Mormon is self-condemned, \* \* \* quite conclusively to any competent student of literature by its inchoate and elementary literary style, which betrays a basic poverty of expression attempted to be relieved by traces of American Indian imagery and the emotionalism of modern campfire meetings, the whole thrown into a form which endeavors to resemble that of the Old Testament, but which shows absolutely no trace of the splendid inspiration—use the word in any sense you like—of its model. It is, in fact, the crowning misfortune in the origin of 'Mormonism' that its founder ventured to write a book. By this he delivered himself and his religion into the hands of his enemies wherever they possess the critical faculty. It should be added that the 'revelations' which Smith professed to receive from time to time from God Himself, are equally with the Book of Mormon on a pitifully low level of literary style. This disqualification of the fundamental evidences of 'Mormonism' in the eyes of a student would be bad enough in itself, but," etc.—the author at this juncture continuing his remarks with references to other matters. Mr. Darnley, who, it appears, is entitled to write B.A. after his name, does not descend to the vileness that characterizes the efforts of so many of our opponents who attempt to show that our religion is an imposture and a fraud throughout. He has considerable to say in commendation of the elders with whom he has become acquainted, and his disposition to be argumentative rather than abusive does him much credit, since he has but few associates, in these times, who are like-minded with himself, when the subject of "Mormonism" is under discussion in England.

But while evidently sincere in the position he occupies in condemnation of the Book of Mormon, on the stated grounds, his attention will be respectfully called to certain facts which should convince him that his argument can be applied with equal effect in disproof of the inspiration of men who shall be named before closing, and who, it is acknowledged by Christians in general,

were moved upon by the Holy Spirit to do God's work and announce His will and purposes. What we mean is that the gentleman is throwing stones while living in a house of glass.

In the first place, however, according to his view the Book of Mormon is self-condemned on account of its alleged "inchoate and elementary style," which is on a "pitifully low level." Now, while it is not claimed that the literary style of the work in hand is distinguished by classical elegance, and, doubtless, for good reasons, falls several points below that high standard, still we submit that it answers admirably the purposes of a revelation from God to man; for, according to the Rev. Dr. Angus in his Bible Handbook, par. 38, "The perfection of inspired composition is not so much classic purity as intelligibleness and adaptation to its proper end." This handbook is not a "Mormon" publication; but it is one that was extensively used formerly, and perhaps is yet, in the Methodist Theological Schools of America. According to the standard of inspired excellence thus laid down—and it seems to be a very fair one—the Book of Mormon ranks high as a divine revelation; for there is not a duty which man owes to God or to his fellowmen which is not set forth therein, as far as these matters are treated upon by it, in a manner that is remarkable for clearness and intelligibleness. Is not our friend aware that not one of the believers in that book has ever published a commentary to aid in the explanation of its doctrines, or to make them more intelligible to the common reader? On the other hand, there have been many of such works written on the Bible to explain its meaning. When the writer attended the Garrett Biblical Institute (Methodist), Evanston, Ills., a note that he took from the teachings of Professor, later Dr. Hemenway, was that at least sixty thousand different formal commentaries, besides more than one hundred thousand other expository works, but not of the same order or scope as those first mentioned, have been written on the Jewish scriptures to explain their meaning. Besides these there are new ones that are being gotten out from time to time, and, moreover, revised versions of the original text are coming from the press occasionally. These facts, and the divisions of opinion among sectarians respecting the teachings of the Bible, give us the impression that it is not very well understood by the world in general. So while its literary merits are of a very high order in general, it does not become any one who has to consult a whole library of books to ascertain what the Bible means, and take a stand somewhere on sectarian uncertainty and division, to deride another book which teaches, so far as it goes, the same principles so plainly that no external aid is required to give any intelligent person of adult age an understanding of them. Nor do we forget that a very large, intelligent and influential body of Christians have forbidden the reading of the Bible by its laity in general, on account of the difficulty there is in understanding it

properly, as its leaders allege. The style of the Book of Mormon is, admittedly, not classical, but it has the great merit of being easily understood. No one should construe these remarks into a denial of the inspiration of the Bible, for no people defend it, as the word of God, more vigorously than the "Mormons" do. The eighth article of our faith makes known the position of this Church on that matter. In its "adaptation to its proper end," which, among other things, is to teach men the principles of true religion, the Book of Mormon is not excelled by any other known work.

There are some further facts to which the attention of our author should have been directed, and whose significance he should have studied, before he made the charge that the Book of Mormon is self-condemned because of its lack of literary refinement. Doubtless he, as the writer himself does, thinks that when the Lord speaks He is able to do so with an elegance that the culture of this enlightened and super-critical age would feel it could commend as perfectly congruous with His position, majesty and intelligence. It would be disrespectful to think that He could not express His thoughts in faultless Greek or English; but what He can do and what He does do, are not always identical. There are occasions when He does not do His best as a linguist. That would be a serious charge to make, if He Himself had not first made the statement. It appears that He sometimes conforms His speech to the moral and religious status of those to whom He addresses His remarks. His purpose to do this is recorded in Isaiah 28: 11, where it is said that with "stammering lips" He will speak to His people. The context makes manifest that it was obstinacy—their rebellious disposition—their refusal to listen to and obey the Almighty—which led Him to declare His intention as Isaiah states it. But the CAUSE is not material to the present argument particularly; for the essential point is that we have warning from Him that in some of His revelations to mankind there may be but little fluency of speech, some bad grammar, imperfect diction, or the lack of a faultless literary style, which some critics might consider inconsistent with a genuine revelation from Himself. This is just what is meant by "stammering lips," as we understand the phrase. The condemnation of a professed revelation from God, therefore, because its literary qualities are not of a high standard, involves the plain risk of rejecting the word of God on insufficient grounds. It would be much safer to attempt to overthrow the Book of Mormon, as a divine record, by showing, if it can be done, that that work is in conflict with Bible principles or truths, or that its historical portions are not trustworthy. If it is a fictitious record, it surely can not be a difficult task to make that fact apparent. Indeed, it should be very easy to do so, as all of our opponents know as well as ourselves. But this easy work, assuming that the Book of Mormon is not authentic, is finding no takers. The various

theories which men propose to disprove that work as inspired, or their attempts to discredit it effectually because it is not written in a style that schoolmen now teach or can approve according to modern standards, are merely a waste of energy, since they fail to take cognizance of the real strength, on rational grounds, of the "Mormon" defense, which is found in the reliability of its historical records. Until it is made evident that its claimed authenticity is a fiction, the hold which it has secured upon the faith, affection and lives of multitudes of God-fearing men and women can not be loosened.

These latter remarks are digressive, and to return to the leading line of thought, it is observed that the objectors who condemn the Book of Mormon on the ground of an unsatisfactory literary style, are obliged to reject, for similar reasons, some of the most famous of God's inspired messengers to mankind. For the first of these, we mention Moses. When the Lord proposed to send him to Pharaoh to demand the liberation of the children of Israel, he tried to avoid assuming the responsibility of that mission because of his limited qualifications as a speaker, saying, "O Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Ex. 4:10). Moses insisted so earnestly on being excused from the performance of this new duty on the ground already noted, that the Lord finally commissioned Aaron, his brother, who was a fluent speaker, to assist him in the capacity of a spokesman. Now, it appears to us that the inability to speak well, to be a man of "slow tongue," has about as much effect in disqualifying one to be a representative of the Almighty, or to give utterance to inspired thoughts, as the lack of an elegant style in writing does. Just how, then, our friends can consistently maintain that Moses was inspired to do God's work, or commissioned to represent Him in any way, since he was not eloquent with his tongue, while they repudiate Joseph Smith as being a specially commissioned servant of the Lord on the ground that he was not eloquent with the pen, we do not perceive at this writing. One would naturally think that it was a very simple thing for Moses to tell Pharaoh that God commanded the liberation of the Israelites; but even that this unquestionably inspired man of God did not feel qualified to do, and so had to take his brother along to do the talking for him. Why, a case of that kind occurring in these days would provoke the ridicule and derision of modern critics as nothing else could. The idea of a man being inspired of God and called to do a mighty work for Him, while being so deficient in speech that he was not able to talk fluently about his business, would be more than "sufficiently trying to the digestion of these days." Indeed, one can scarcely think an effort to "digest" it would be made at all. That is the identical position that Moses assumed the king would take in regard to his message, as is manifested when he said to the Lord,

“How then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips” (Ex. 6: 12, 30). It would, however, have been very unwise for even a pagan king to lay down conditions according to which the true God should speak to him, and it is the part of wisdom for Christians not to do so now. It does not become beggars, such as we all are before God, to expect or demand that His benefits shall always be handed to us on silver salvers, or that the waters of life shall be offered to us in goblets of gold with ornamental gravings.

Coming down to later times, to days when the manifestations of God's power, and the gifts of His Spirit were seen and enjoyed in a marvelous manner—when men's tongues were sometimes so unloosed that they spake in tongues unstudied, or prophesied in terms that no modern critic can decry because it is not of a lofty and sublime style; we find that the mighty men of God were not ALL, even then, greatly blessed with the power of utterance; and among those deficient in this regard was that wonderful APOSTLE of Jesus Christ, Paul, or Saul of Tarsus. This chosen vessel of the Lord, who was spoken to directly by Him, and whose commission, as an ambassador for Christ, no believer in the Bible can question, had a similar charge made against him that our friend makes against Joseph Smith; for said Paul's enemies, “His speech is contemptible” (II. Cor. 10: 10), and to a rudeness of language he confesses, as we learn from II. Cor. 11: 6. That was the charge that was made against one of the greatest messengers of God in apostolic days, practically sustained, too, by his acknowledgment. Was Paul inspired? Who doubts it? Did he WRITE only as he was moved upon by the Holy Spirit, or did he also SPEAK under the same influence? Was Paul's WRITINGS alone the word of God, while what he PREACHED by the living voice was not? No, what he SPOKE when preaching the gospel was from God as well as what he wrote; and it follows that the charge of “contemptible speech” is lodged against the work of the Holy Spirit, just as it is against Paul; for Jesus says that what is done to the least of His disciples is done to Him, and so, of course, to the Father and the Holy Spirit. Paul's tongue could have been made eloquent; but it was not so loosened, and we appear to have in his case an example of what the Lord meant when He said that under certain conditions He would speak to the people with “stammering lips.” How dreadful is the accusation that the speech of inspiration is “contemptible”! May God have mercy on the men who make it. Paul not only admits his speech was “rude”; but he says he was sent to preach the gospel: “not with wisdom of words” (speech) (I. Cor. 1: 17), and he declared it not “with excellency of speech,” nor with “enticing words” (I. Cor. 2: 1-4). And finally, to conclude these quotations, he says, “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God: that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but

which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (I. Cor. 2: 12, 13). According to this scripture Paul's WORDS, though lacking in eloquence, were the words of the Holy Ghost.

In these remarks we have "compared spiritual things with spiritual," and while it cannot be said that what has been submitted to the reader for his consideration proves that Joseph Smith was inspired because, if, as alleged, he was "slow of speech, and slow of tongue," or spoke even with "stammering lips" or was "rude in speech" to such an extent that to some people his language and style were "contemptible" and "hard to digest," still it has been shown that elegance of style and diction are not necessarily associated with inspiration and a divine mission. To claim, then, that the Book of Mormon or the "revelations" given to the world by Joseph Smith, are self-condemned because of the lack of a high standard of literary excellence, or even because they are on a "low level," which latter assertion we do not admit, merely shows that those who advance it fail to understand the ways of the Lord to a degree that is scarcely excusable in the light of what He has done in the past. Several passages of scripture will have to be expunged from the Bible before Mr. Darnley's argument in the present case will amount to more than a waste of effort. Skirmishes on the far outposts of "Mormonism" never disturb those who dwell securely in the citadel of its truth.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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## JUDICIAL INTEGRITY.

THE reader will find elsewhere in this issue of the *Star* an account of some mobocratic outrages which have occurred recently at Saltley, together with a report of the evidence which was laid before the magistrates in whose court Mr. Edwin Jones, the alleged leader of the Anti-"Mormon" League at Birmingham, was tried and convicted for instigating the riotous proceedings. The court report is taken from the *Birmingham Daily Mail*, to which paper we respectfully tender our compliments for the unpartizan spirit which it has manifested in the case.

But while we are gratified to find a great newspaper giving an impartial account of the trial, we take pleasure in expressing a still greater appreciation of the straightforward manner in which the magistrates performed their duties. The world-wide reputation which English courts enjoy for integrity and fairness, has been fully maintained—the majesty of English law respected as it should be by those who administer it.

While we think the judgment rendered is scarcely commensurate with the gravity of the offence committed; for it appears that the lives of unoffending citizens have been imperiled, we recognize the