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An Angel from on High

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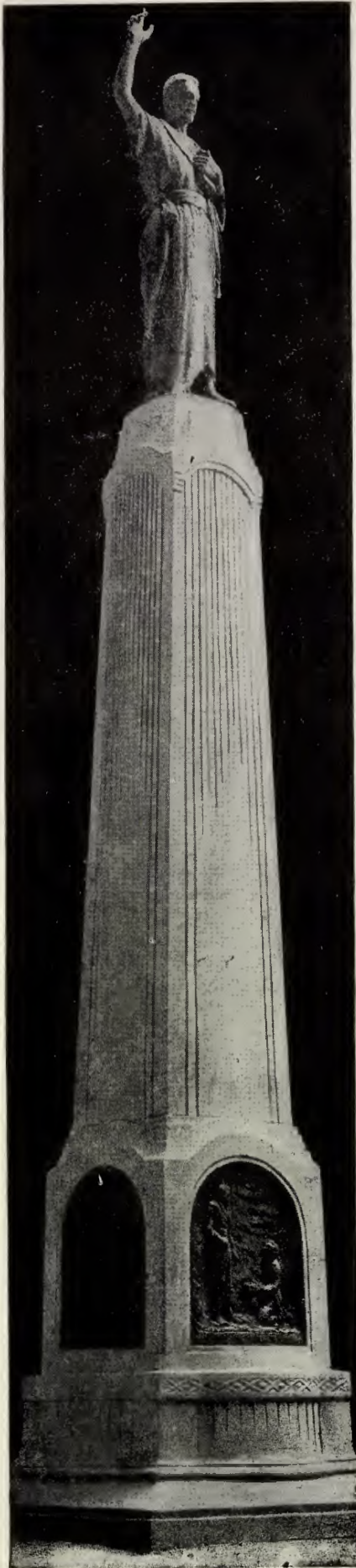
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Abstract: This article discusses the life and mission of the angel Moroni, his visits with Joseph Smith, and his role in the translation of the Book of Mormon.

An Angel from on



FIFTEEN CENTURIES AGO the lone survivor of a gigantic conflict was writing the concluding chapter of a once mighty nation. Sorrowfully he had watched his people forget their God and turn to wicked practices. He had witnessed the destruction of these same people at the hands of a degenerate blood-thirsty army of Lamanite warriors, and even as he wrote, he expected each moment to be his last.¹

This lone historian was Moroni, son of Mormon, a descendant of Nephi.² In the midst of calamity and warfare he was born into the world—at a time when fierce battles were raging between the Lamanites and his own people. We are told but little of Moroni's early life, and recorded history makes no mention of his mother. We do know, however, that his father, commander-in-chief of the Nephite armies, was a righteous man who had been chosen early in life to become historian for his people and in his fifteenth year was "visited of the Lord."³ Naturally, a father from such a background was not unmindful of his son's training. As Moroni grew up, he was instructed in the military arts, and when he was old enough, he took up military duties. During the final struggle between the Lamanites and the Nephites he led an army of 10,000 men.⁴ Of even greater importance was his religious training. On numerous occasions Moroni accompanied his father to the synagogue to hear him preach and was deeply impressed—so impressed, in fact, that he included one of Mormon's sermons in the precious little space available on the gold plates on which he was engraving the sacred history of his people.⁵

WHEN Moroni was called into the ministry, Mormon counseled with him concerning church principles. And even when distance separated father and son, Mormon sent his message by letter.⁶ In the midst of battle he wrote to Moroni

denouncing the wickedness of the people and encouraging his son to be faithful.⁷

Under the capable direction of his father, Moroni grew to be a God-fearing man. He believed in Christ and knew of his ministry here on the western continent.⁸ Diligently he studied the principles of the gospel. The teachings of the Master were part of the great record kept by him and his father. So great was his faith and so worthy his life that the Lord revealed the future to him and showed him many great and dreadful things that would come to pass in the last days.⁹

When the Lamanites and Nephites were locked in the great final struggle that was to destroy the Nephite nation, Mormon was mortally wounded, and the responsibility of completing the records fell upon the shoulders of Moroni. With haste he finished engraving an abridgment of the Jaredite history, and then, grateful that his life had been spared, he continued to write other truths he thought should be passed on—including principles of ordination, the administering of the sacrament, and baptism.¹⁰ Before sealing the record, Moroni wrote a farewell to the Lamanites, expressing in it concern and brotherly love for those who had slaughtered his kinsmen and were even then hunting him.

His work completed, Moroni buried the plates in the Hill Cumorah, and no more is heard of him until he appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith over 1,400 years later.

ON the night of September 21, 1823, in an upper room in the log home of the Smith family in Manchester, New York, Joseph Smith knelt in prayer. Three years had elapsed since the Father and the Son had appeared to him in the Sacred Grove, and Joseph was greatly concerned because he had heard no more of the promised gospel restoration. As he prayed this night, the room suddenly brightened and there, standing before him, was

¹Moroni 1:3

²Mormon 8:13

³*Ibid.*, 1:15

⁴*Ibid.*, 6:12

⁵Moroni 7:1

⁶*Ibid.*, 8

⁷*Ibid.*, 9

⁸Mormon 8:6

⁹*Ibid.*, 8:34-41

¹⁰Moroni, chapters 1 to 6



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a personage "glorious beyond description." This was the resurrected Moroni sent as a messenger from the presence of God to declare to Joseph that the Lord had a great work for him to do. It was Moroni's responsibility to tell Joseph of the gold plates that he had personally deposited in the Hill Cumorah over fourteen centuries before—the plates that contained the history of the inhabitants of ancient America and the fulness of the everlasting gospel as delivered by the Savior to the inhabitants of the western hemisphere.

Moroni quoted much scripture having to do with the coming forth of the restored gospel¹¹ and explained that Joseph was to obtain and translate the ancient record for the sole purpose of glorifying God and re-establishing his kingdom here upon the earth. A second and third time that night Moroni appeared to Joseph, relating to him the same truths outlined in the first vision, and warning of the judgments that were to come upon the nations of the earth. When Moroni departed after the third visit, Joseph found that it was daybreak; the messenger's visits had occupied the entire night.

Later in the morning Moroni again made an appearance. Joseph was returning from the field unable to work because the experience of the night had left him depleted in strength. Physically exhausted, he fell to the ground; and when he regained consciousness, Moroni was standing beside him. Joseph was severely reprimanded for his failure to tell his father the experiences of the previous night. He had been fearful lest his father should doubt

the truthfulness of what had taken place, but with Moroni's assurance that Joseph Smith, Senior, would believe every word of his testimony, Joseph took his father into his confidence.

In the afternoon of the same day when Joseph found his way to the Hill Cumorah and uncovered the plates, Moroni was close at hand. Joseph reached out to remove the plates from the stone box in which they were buried, but he experienced a paralyzing shock. This was

repeated a second time and a third time with increasing severity that left him weak. In desperation he cried out: "Why can I not obtain this book?" Moroni's words came forcefully to the young Prophet's ears: "Because you have not kept the commandments."¹²

JOSEPH had been told that his only thought in getting the plates should be to glorify God, but on the way to the hill he had been tempted to think of what he might do with the plates. It was Moroni's task to impress upon Joseph's young mind the importance of this great trust and to prepare him for obtaining and translating the sacred record. He counseled Joseph and warned him repeatedly of the necessity for vigilance and caution, showed him the Prince of Darkness and his cohorts who would do everything in their power to defeat God's purpose, and commanded him to report to the hill each year for the next four years to be instructed concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the establishment of God's kingdom upon the earth. The plates would be entrusted to him when he was not only willing but also able to assume the responsibility.

Moroni's work was to train the boy who had been chosen by the Father and the Son to be the prophet in this last dispensation. One can only imagine what took place at each of these meetings between young Joseph and Moroni. Joseph's mind was undoubtedly filled with questions concerning what the Lord planned to do, what his own place in the scheme of things was to be, and in what manner the kingdom would be conducted in the last days. As Joseph grew in years and intelligence, Moroni revealed to him the great plan of life in its fulness. What a wonderful experience for a boy in his late teens and early twenties to



"Now you have got the Record in your own hands, and you are but a man, therefore you will have to be watchful and faithful to your trust, or you will be overpowered by wicked men; for they will lay every plan and scheme that is possible to get it away from you, and if you do not take heed continually, they will succeed. While it was in my hands, I could keep it, and no man had power to take it away! but now I give it up to you. Beware, and look well to your ways, and you shall have power to retain it, until the time for it to be translated." (Lucy Smith, *History of the Prophet Joseph*, chapter XXII, p. 110.)

¹¹Moroni quoted the 3rd and 4th chapters of Malachi, the 11th chapter of Isaiah, part of the 3rd chapter of Acts, and the 2nd chapter of Joel.

¹²B. H. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church*, vol. 1, Chapter VII, p. 78.

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GRANDMA—THE GOOD SAMARITAN

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and slid it slowly into place above her wedding ring, and clasped the watch on her arm. These were Dick's gifts. She would take them with her. They belonged to her. The two bags harboring her personal effects were packed waiting.

Ruth gazed abstractly at the two rings on her finger, and tried to cover her confusion by asking if there was a telephone near.

Grandma Curtis' face was expressionless. She seemed to hesitate as she said, "I see. Yes. Yes, I see." She turned to an old family album on the table by her chair.

"I was looking at these just before you came in," she pointed to a photograph of a woman wearing bulging sleeves. "Would you ever guess that to be me? I was the belle of our little village, then. They said I was pretty." She sighed, then laughed. "I took home a prize from the county fair for being the prettiest girl once. I could sing very well, too. They said I would have quite a career. I

thought a long time before I gave up the idea for Jim—he was my husband."

Ruth Rollins looked up. There was a twinkle in Grandma's blue eyes. She said, "We were a couple of modern kids for those days. We didn't get along at first. People said we both had minds of our own. I guess we were both pretty stubborn. But we were married more than fifty years. The longer we lived together, the more we seemed to care for each other. We had a lot of good times together." Grandma paused, and then went on:

"Maybe I shouldn't say it, but when Jim passed away, most of my life went, too."

From the back of the album she brought forth scenes of places abroad, summer vacations at the beach with children, and happy events of later years. A single tear dropped on the open page. Ruth hoped it wasn't noticed. For a long time the two sat by the open album, busy with their own thoughts. The

clock on the mantel struck three.

"I must be going," Ruth announced. A bright young smile she hadn't seen before caught Grandma's attention.

"This room—I'm going to call it the 'Enchanted Room,'" she went on. "I slipped in here just to get out of the rain, and what a wonderful visit I've had." She stood up. "Now I must run back—I want to unpack before Dick gets home."

Grandma Curtis smiled. "Come again," she pleaded. "I miss young folks. I'm really a young person still, you know." Her laugh was merry. Her eyes twinkled. Ruth laughed with her. At the door she touched her fingers to her lips and blew Grandma a kiss. Grandma watched her go, hurrying toward home. Then she turned and spoke to the little dog again.

"Well, Pal—I do believe I'm good for something. I do believe I helped that poor young thing. She was terribly upset about something. I wanted to comfort her. I wonder what the trouble was. Deaf folk miss such a lot, Pal."

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be instructed by a resurrected personage direct from the presence of God!

What feelings must have surged through Joseph as he approached the hill on the morning of September 22, 1827, and found the holy messenger waiting there to meet him! This was the ninth time Moroni had met with Joseph, and this was the day the plates were to be given over to him. Four long years had elapsed since the angel first appeared—four years of tutoring and direction by a heavenly being!

As Moroni delivered the plates to Joseph, he uttered these words of counsel and warning:

Now you have got the Record in your own hands, and you are but a man, therefore you will have to be watchful and faithful to your trust, or you will be overpowered by wicked men; for they will lay every plan and scheme that is possible to get it away from you, and if you do not take heed continually, they will succeed. While it was in my hands, I could keep it, and no man had power to take it away! but now I give it up to you. Beware, and look well to your ways, and you shall have

power to retain it, until the time for it to be translated.¹²

No more is heard of Moroni until Martin Harris was given the 116 pages of manuscript Joseph had translated from Mormon's abridgment of the large plates of Nephi. Martin had received reluctant permission to take the transcribed manuscript, but at the same time the pages were turned over to him, Moroni returned and took from Joseph the Urim and Thummim and the sacred record.¹⁴ When Martin Harris lost the 116 pages, Joseph fervently sought the Lord in prayer, and Moroni was permitted to return the Urim and Thummim to Joseph, and through these sacred instruments Joseph received a revelation in the form of a severe reprimand for his negligence.¹⁵ He was frankly told that the Lord's plans would not be frustrated.

A few days after this revelation Moroni again appeared and returned the Urim and Thummim and the gold plates to Joseph. So it was

¹²Lacy Smith, *History of the Prophet Joseph*, chapter XXII, p. 110

¹⁴Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 111

¹⁵D. & C. 5

that the young prophet was taught the severe lesson that he must heed the word of the Lord and accomplish the work he had been called to do.

As translation was again resumed, the persecutions became more intense in Harmony Township, and it was thought advisable to move to the home of Peter Whitmer in Fayette Township to continue the work. At this time the plates were wrapped up, and Moroni took them into his custody until Joseph and Oliver had arrived at their destination. There, in a garden a little way from the Whitmer home, Moroni once more returned the plates to the Prophet.¹⁶

Just before the translation was completed, Moroni appeared to the three witnesses in a grove near the Whitmer home and there showed the gold plates to David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery, and Martin Harris.

When the translation was finished, Moroni returned and took the plates into his keeping. The history he had helped record and preserve had been delivered to a new generation in the fulness of times.

¹⁶Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 124