



Type: Magazine Article

Meliton Gonzalez Trejo: Translator of the Book of Mormon into Spanish

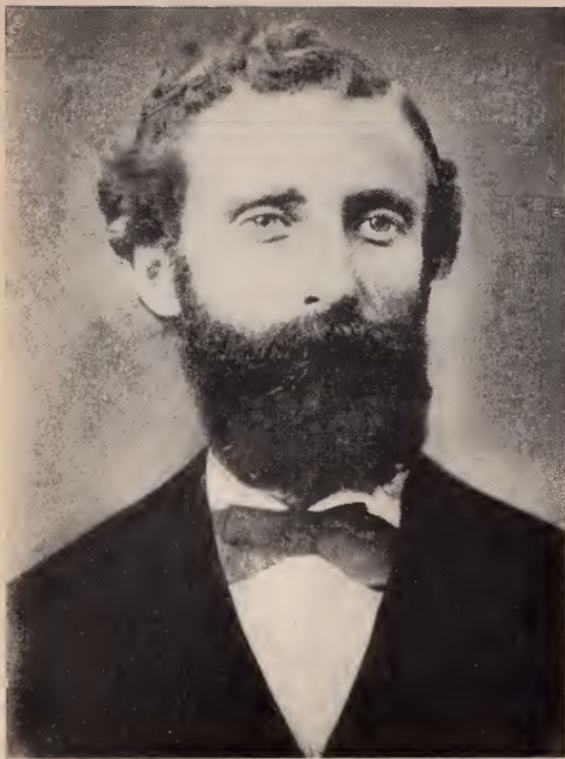
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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 59, No. 10 (October 1956)

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

Page(s): 714–715, 753

Abstract: This article is an historical account of the life, sacrifices, and accomplishments of Meliton Gonzalez Trejo, who, being guided by a dream, left his homeland Spain and moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, where he joined the LDS church. Trejo translated the Book of Mormon into Spanish.



Meliton Gonzalez Trejo

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TRANSLATOR OF THE BOOK OF MORMON
INTO SPANISH

by K. E. Duke

MELITON GONZALEZ TREJO was born March 10, 1843, in the town of Garganta-la-Olla, province of Cáceres, a part of the old region of Extremadura in western Spain. He was a descendant of the ancient family of Trejo whose progenitors came to Spain during Roman times as governors. Many of his forebears were known to history through their contributions to the military and religious life of Spain.

Sir Pedro Fernando de Trejo was a general of the armies of the kingdom of Galicia. Sir Fernando Trejo was one of the captains who aided King Ferdinand in conquering the Moors at Seville, which victory led to the establishment of the modern state of Spain. After the conquest, Sir Fernando Trejo established the ancient family in the Valley of Concha near the city of Burgos in Old Castille. Later, the family moved to western Spain whence came Antonio de Trejo who became Bishop of Cartagena in 1618 and Franciscan Commissar of the Indies of his order. One of his relatives was a cardinal in the Catholic Church, and many participated in the military and religious conquest of the New World.

With this illustrious family background combined with well-above-average wealth, Meliton Gonzalez Trejo was given many advantages. His parents wanted him to follow a career in the church, but Meliton pre-

ferred the army. He was given a liberal education, graduating from the military school as *alferez* and becoming an officer in the royal army while yet a young man, and receiving the degree—Docteur de L'Universite of Bordeaux, France. His superior education and training, together with the wealth and prominence of his father's family, gave him prestige among his associates. More important still, these opportunities helped to prepare him to accomplish later an unusual and important work in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In spite of his active military life, Meliton often thought seriously about religion. In his searches and readings he was unable to find anything or talk to anyone whose beliefs and teachings satisfied his religious desires and feelings. One day he heard a fellow officer make a remark about a group of "Saints" in the Rocky Mountains who were led there by a prophet of God. Pondering over this statement, Meliton was filled with an urgent desire to see these people. Inspired with this feeling, he petitioned the queen for permission to accompany a military expedition which was shortly to leave for the Philippine Islands (then belonging to Spain). He hoped that this would afford him an opportunity to visit America, particularly Salt Lake City.

In the Philippines he became so

engrossed in his work that the real purpose of his trip was temporarily forgotten until he was stricken with a severe illness. Serious reflection during his long period of hospitalization reminded him of his object in coming to the Philippines. He became determined to go to the Rocky Mountains. That night he asked the Lord in fervent prayer to help him in his quest for truth and to make His will known concerning him.

That night Meliton had a dream which satisfied him completely and which he always considered exceedingly sacred. It is believed that he never revealed this dream to anyone except Brigham Young.

As soon as he was able to put his army affairs in order, he sewed two thousand dollars in bills inside his vest and booked passage for America. Landing in San Francisco on July 4, 1874, he set out immediately for Salt Lake City.

Although Meliton was well-educated and could read English, he had not had occasion to speak it. How was he to receive the truth which he sought in an English-speaking community?

Donning his Spanish officers' uniform and walking around the streets of Salt Lake City, he attracted considerable attention. Finally a Brother Blanchard, a native Frenchman who was then a teacher of romance languages at Brigham Young Academy, in Provo, spoke to him in Spanish. Meliton at once made his desires known to Brother Blanchard who accompanied him to his hotel where they could talk without interruption. At last Meliton had found the pearl for which he had been searching. Brother Blanchard taught Meliton the restored gospel and introduced him to Brigham Young and other Church leaders.

Relating the story of his life as well as his sacred dream to Brigham

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Young, Meliton said his most fervent desire was to translate the Book of Mormon into the Spanish language and to carry the gospel to his people. His desire was to be realized. Using the money which he had saved, Meliton retired for a time, during which time he translated the Book of Mormon into Spanish, beginning in 1874 and completing it in 1875. He also translated the *Voice of Warning* by Parley P. Pratt into Spanish. At the end of this period of work, Meliton presented the translation to the Church as a gift in partial recompense for the joy and happiness which the gospel had brought to him. He only had fifty cents left in his pocket, but he was more than satisfied.

Not long after this, May 29, 1884, Meliton was married to Emily Jones in the Logan Temple. But he was not to remain in Utah long. Along with several other men, Elder Trejo was called to open up missionary work in Mexico—the other part of his dream coming true. Returning to Logan in 1887, after an extremely inspiring and productive mission, he settled down to a more normal life on the farm.

But his talents in language and literature were not to be wasted. He was engaged as a teacher at the Latter-day Saints' College in the old Social Hall on State Street and at the University of Deseret (now University of Utah) in Salt Lake City. One of his students during this period (1892-93) was Mabel Cooper Cain. She wrote: "President Woodruff thought so much of Elder Trejo's ability and the necessity of our boys and girls availing themselves of this wonderful opportunity, that he sent out fifty Box 'B' letters to that number of students, male and female. Box 'B' letters in those days were calls for missions, and we felt that it was just that. Professor Trejo was all that the correspondent wrote of him—a mild, kindly gentleman and fully capable of the work he did in our classes. We all loved him and gave him the honor due such a gifted man."

When the Latter-day Saints began to colonize in Mexico, Elder Trejo was again set apart as a missionary to that land. Taking his wife and four children with him, he settled in Chuichupa, Chihuahua, where he was to remain for approximately eleven years. He loved the country, his

farm, his cattle, especially his missionary trips to the neighboring states of Sonora and Durango. He loved to go up into the mountains where he could commune with the Lord in his own "sacred grove" as did the Prophet Joseph Smith. He loved his family and was the father of four more children born in Mexico.

Meliton tried to share the gospel with everyone including his family back in Spain. But they, with the exception of one brother, would have nothing more to do with him. From this brother he obtained many of the genealogical records of his family from which he obtained the necessary information to have temple work done for his deceased relatives. However, many of these records and almost every worldly possession were lost to the family when the revolution began to foment in Mexico.

Many of the Mormon settlers along with other foreigners were to see their houses burned, their horses, cattle, and agricultural tools stolen, and their own lives put in considerable jeopardy by Pancho Villa and others. However, Elder Trejo was able to take his family out of Mexico by team and wagon as far as St. David, Arizona, where he had a small farm. But times were difficult, and there were many mouths to feed. Leaving the family with the eldest son, Elder Trejo tried to find work in Douglas and Bisbee, Arizona. But work was hard to secure, so he walked the seventy-five miles back to St. David.

After a few months he decided to go back into Mexico to see if he could not salvage some of his possessions. Particularly was he anxious to recover a large box which contained all his records and the manuscript of his translation of the Book of Mormon. He took one of his sons with him back to Chuichupa and spent some time looking for his valued box among the charred ruins of the village. But soon the final order came for all Americans to leave at once or be killed.

When the final word came, Elder Trejo was not in the village to receive it. He had gone back to his grove in the mountains to fast and pray for a few days. His son protested violently against leaving without his father, but the boy could not be left there all alone with the rebels coming at any moment. Bishop Sevey organized the little group of men into

a company, and they rode out of town under the cover of darkness.

When Elder Trejo returned, he found rebels in charge of the town. They shot at him several times before he succeeded in shouting to them in Spanish that he was not to be considered a foreigner. He was allowed to live under the stipulation that he would teach school for several months without compensation. This he did, while continuing the search for his valuable box of papers. After several months, however, he considered his search fruitless, so with the aid of many of the Mexican converts who were always loyal to their great teacher, he was able to cross the border once again and return to his family in Arizona, who did not know whether he was alive or dead until he walked in eight months after all Americans were supposedly out of Chuichupa.

Elder Meliton Gonzalez Trejo lived some five years longer on his farms in St. David and Benson, Arizona, before he finally succumbed to nephritis (Bright's disease) on April 29, 1917, at the age of seventy-four while visiting at the home of one of his daughters, Mrs. Heber C. Kimball of Willcox, Arizona. A few days later he was buried in the little cemetery across the highway from his farmhouse in St. David, Arizona.

He was survived by his widow and six of the ten children who were born to them. His beautiful wife Emily died January 28, 1953, and was buried at his side in St. David, Arizona. Still living are Sarah Trejo Kimball Telford of Los Angeles, Calif.; Milton Joseph Trejo of Mesa, Arizona; Jared Trejo of St. David, Arizona, and present president of the Southern Arizona Stake; Isabel Trejo Fisher of Los Angeles, Calif.; Emmanuel Leroy Trejo of Mesa, Arizona; and Inez Avah Trejo Dunn of Salt Lake City, as well as twenty-nine grandchildren, together with their numerous posterity.

Meliton Gonzalez Trejo was indeed a remarkable man. A person of slight stature with a light complexion, blond hair, and blue eyes, he was deeply religious, a sincere searcher for truth, uncompromising with evil, and exceedingly brave. Neither his moral nor his physical courage ever failed or faltered. His acceptance of the gospel and especially his missionary labors in Mexico involved severe physical and financial hardships, but

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he always bore them cheerfully. Although his family in Spain completely disowned him, he forgave them, loved them, did the temple work for those who were deceased. He never regretted the sacrifices he made in becoming a Latter-day Saint, and he was staunch and true until his devoted spirit took its flight from mortality. He suffered much during the last six months of his life but endured the physical pain with fortitude. His last words were an expression of willingness to go if the Lord wanted him to, yet he regretted leaving his family.

Though performed quietly and unostentatiously, almost in obscurity, the work of Elder Trejo has been of great importance to the Church and to thousands of individuals. He helped to make it possible for millions of Spanish-speaking people to study the gospel in their own native tongue. His fervent testimony, borne to thousands, helped to bring many souls to the Lord, and strengthened the faith of untold others. The genealogical research which he did opened the door for many of his ancestors to receive the gospel through vicarious temple ordinances. He was truly one of the great pioneers of the Church, and many will call him blessed.

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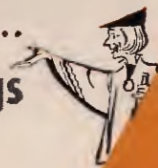
By Elaine V. Emans

WHY AM I glad today, you ask—
But must I name one reason for it?
I would be wrong to say it's this
Weather alone, though I adore it,
While I should only brush the edge
Of reasons, answering, "Because
Of a letter I received," "A bird
Song sweeter than I thought it was"—
"A way I found to help a friend"—
"A paragraph I read." I could
Be lengthily specific, dear—
But, very briefly, *life is good.*

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