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Attempts to Prove the Book of Mormon Man-made

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Abstract: This article discusses how since the Book of Mormon was first published it “has withstood a century of attempts to prove it man-made.” The author gives examples of different attempts and shows how each has failed.

Attempts to Prove

"THE BOOK OF MORMON has withstood a century of attempts to prove it man-made. Despite fierce and unending assaults it continues to challenge the attention and scrutiny of the world.

"One result of this vigorous opposition has been the formation of a large Book of Mormon literature. Friend and foe have sought and sifted sources and evidences to support their views. Few books have been as thoroughly examined," writes Dr. John A. Widtsoe.

"The Book of Mormon must be either true or false," wrote Orson Pratt, in 1840, an early convert to the Church. "If true, it is one of the most important messages sent from God to man. If false, it is one of the most cunning, wicked, bold, deep-laid impositions ever palmed

THE BOOK OF MORMON Man-made

By Francis W. Kirkham, Ph. D.

upon the world, calculated to deceive and ruin millions who will receive it as the word of God."

On March 26, 1830 the Book of Mormon was announced for sale by the *Wayne Sentinel* at the village of Palmyra, New York. Joseph Smith had secured the copyright on June 11, 1829, and in keeping with the requirements of the law, had signed his name as author and proprietor. The manuscript was delivered by him to the printer, E. B.

Grandin, Palmyra, New York, in August 1829. Each night after the usual work of the day, the printing continued over eight months until the book was offered for sale.

The preface taken from the plates, in part, describes the Book of Mormon, as an account written by the hand of Mormon, upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi—"Written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation—Written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed—To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof. . . . And also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations. . . ."

Joseph Smith declared this preface was not written by any man in his generation. It was taken from the plates.

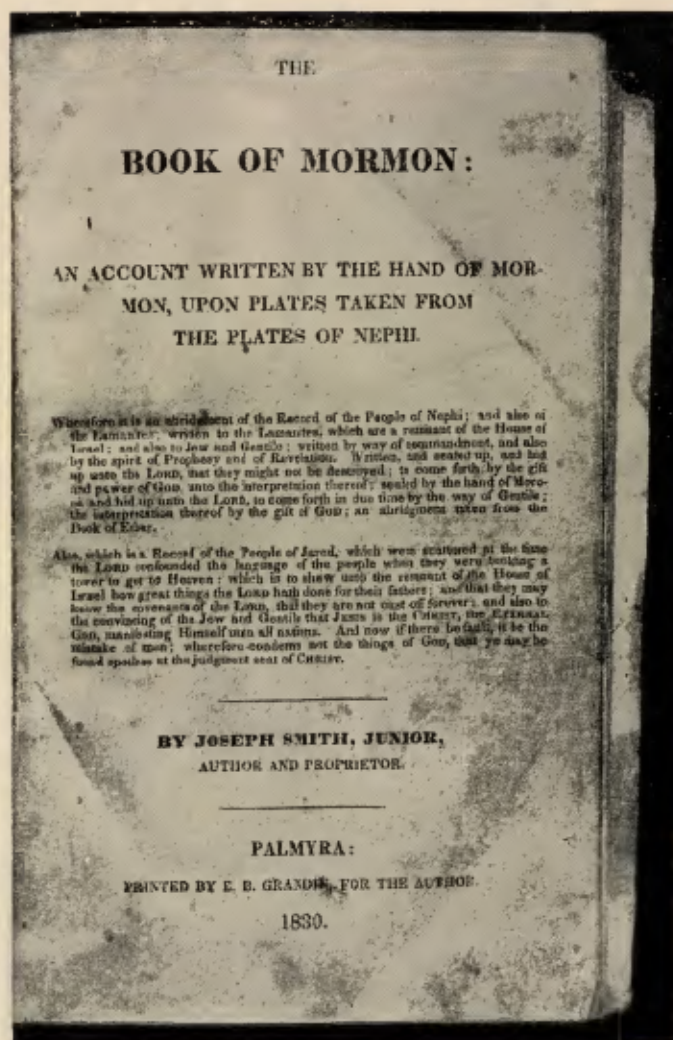
The *Rochester Daily Advertiser* of Rochester, New York, about twenty miles from Palmyra, published under date of April 2, 1830, only one week after its publication, the following:

Blasphemy—Book of Mormon, alias the Golden Bible.

The Book of Mormon has been placed in our hands. A viler imposition was never practiced. It is evidence of fraud, blasphemy, credulity, shocking both to Christians and moralists. . . .

It is an interesting and challenging study to discover and describe the many attempts to prove the Book of Mormon man-made.

From the newspapers published at Palmyra, from books written by residents, from affidavits of citizens, it can be proved that the persons, places, events, and situations described by Joseph Smith concerning the "coming forth" of the book were common knowledge among the



people of Palmyra. The historical events are conceded, the divine power in its writing, preservation, and translation is denied.

Obediah Dogberry, editor of the *Palmyra Reflector*, asserts and aims to prove its human origin in six weekly published articles beginning January 6, 1831.

Alexander Campbell, the noted evangelist and founder of the "Church of Christ," also described the human origin of the book within a year of its publication. His statement, agreeing with Obediah Dogberry, was published first in *The Millennial Harbinger*, February 7, 1831, was reprinted in the *Painesville Telegraph* March 8 and March 15, 1831, Painesville, Ohio, and later printed by Joshua Hines of Boston in 1832 under the title *Delusions*. This came to be the first universally accepted explanation of the origin of the Book of Mormon other than the one by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Alexander Campbell writes, "Every age of the world has produced impostors and delusions." He then follows with a long description of false prophets and false Christs. In one place he writes, "We have been thus particular in giving a few of the incidents of the life of this impostor, as a specimen of the others; and because of some remarkable analogies between him and the New York impostor, Joe Smith."

Under the heading "Internal Evidence," he writes:

It (the Book of Mormon) admits the Old and New Testaments to contain the revelations, institutions, and commandments of God. . . . No man with his eyes open can admit both books to have come from God. Admitting the Bible now received to have come from God, it is impossible that the Book of Mormon came from the same author, for the following reasons:

1. Smith, its real author, as ignorant and as impudent a knave as ever wrote a book, betrays the cloven foot in basing his whole book upon a false fact, or a pretended fact, which makes God a liar.

This ignorant and impudent liar, etc., . . .

Through nine reasons Campbell positively and definitely makes Joseph Smith the sole author and writer of the book.

He makes the final summary with this remark:

I will sum up the whole of the internal evidences which I deem worthy of remark in the following details:

The Book of Mormon professes to be

written at intervals and by different persons during the long period of 1,020 years. And yet for uniformity of style there never was a book more evidently written by one set of fingers, nor more certainly conceived in one cranium since the first book appeared in human language, than this same book. If I could swear to any man's voice, face or person, assuming different names, I could swear that this book was written by one man. And as Joseph Smith is a very ignorant man and is called the author on the title page, I cannot doubt for a single moment that he is the sole author and proprietor of it. . . .

It is as certainly Smith's fabrication as Satan is the father of lies, or darkness the offspring of light. So much for the internal evidences of the Book of Mormon.

About one month following the preceding explanation of the Book of Mormon by Alexander Campbell, the *Evangelical Inquirer*, a Campbellite publication at Dayton, Ohio, David I. Burnett, proprietor, published a complete number, March 7, 1831, to "Something new—The Golden Bible." This paper reprinted from the *Painesville Telegraph*. The above quoted article by Alexander Campbell refers to the writings of Thomas Campbell, also a letter from the postmaster at Palmyra, and reaches the same conclusion that Joseph Smith, an ignorant and impudent knave, was the sole author of the Book of Mormon. (Original pages at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.)

Within four years, another explanation for the Book of Mormon became imperative. The believers in its divine origin had gathered at Kirtland, Ohio, and in Missouri. They were Christian men and women of intelligence, character, and ability. Some were Protestant ministers. It was evident the book was not written by "ignorant Joe Smith."

The explanation by the people of Palmyra at the time and place of its publication could not be true. Someone, "behind the scene," with religious training and ability had conceived a plan to deceive the ignorant and superstitious. Sidney Rigdon, more than ten years the senior of Joseph Smith, a Baptist preacher who joined the Church

within a few weeks' time of his hearing the strange story, must be the man who planned the fraud and wrote the Book of Mormon.

By searching, a manuscript was found which was claimed to give the historical background for the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith was selected to present the book as a divine record translated by the gift and power of God. He no longer deserved pity nor could he expect sympathy. He was in reality a vile deceiver, a public nuisance that should be eliminated.

The authors of the book called *Mormonism Unveiled*, which set forth this new explanation, had in their possession a manuscript written by Solomon Spaulding, which they declared provided the historical parts of the Book of Mormon. For obvious reasons, they refused to print or reveal its contents.

During the next fifty years, scores of books were written calling Joseph Smith a vile deceiver. He was building a church upon claimed revelations from God.

Fortunately, in 1884, the Solomon Spaulding manuscript secured by the authors of *Mormonism Unveiled* in 1833 was found and published. It was evident that it had had no part in furnishing the contents of the Book of Mormon. Also, its author, who denied the divinity of the Christian scriptures, did not have the ability or character to contribute to the prophecies, religious teachings, and historical contents of the Book of Mormon.

A different explanation was again made imperative to prove the Book of Mormon man-made. Enemies stated that it was a longer lost manuscript written by Solomon Spaulding at a later date that was used by Sidney Rigdon when he wrote the Book of Mormon, not the one found and already published.

With the turn of the century, and with a constantly growing better attitude toward the Latter-day Saints, many writers have made various attempts to prove the Book of Mormon man-made. Joseph Smith has been called an epileptic, a paranoid, a myth-maker of prodigious talents; a person with a dissociated personality. One writer declares: "The Book of Mormon reveals the background

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SMOKE SCENE

By S. H. Dewhurst

ONLY the autumn now
Hugs the brittle bough,
As gold leaves, brown leaves burning
Mark the year's swift turning.

ATTEMPTS TO PROVE THE BOOK OF MORMON MAN-MADE

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of western New York of the first decade of the nineteenth century, as distorted by an adolescent mind, and as recorded by that mind in an autistic state."

More and more an effort is being made to trace the contents of the Book of Mormon to the social and religious environment in which Joseph Smith lived. Confusion is apparent among the writers. It becomes more and more difficult to declare Joseph Smith an ignorant, deluded person, or assert he was

a base deceiver. An unbiased writer in 1951 asserts: "No Vermont schoolboy wrote this, [the Book of Mormon], and no Presbyterian preacher tinkered with these pages." He permits the believers in the divine origin of the book to make their own explanation, and leaves their claims to the truth-seeker.

The Book of Mormon, because of its divine origin, is the greatest challenge of evidence of divine

¹The Mormon, p. 21, reprinted by Deseret Book Company from Faith and My Friends, Marcus Bach, Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. 1951.

power since the death and resurrection of Christ. In a troubled and frightened world that recognizes the need of faith in God and a return in human life to the teachings of the Master, the Book of Mormon more and more challenges the sincere investigation of all people everywhere.

This investigation will include the evidence of divine power in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, also the many changing attempts since its publication to prove it man-made.

THE SHIP "BROOKLYN"

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'hatched below' during a terrific storm. Women and children were at night lashed to their berths, for in no other way could they keep in. Furniture rolled back and forth endangering limb and life. The waves swept the deck and even reached the staterooms. A passenger relates that their only light was from two lamps hung outside in the hall and these were dim and wavering from the movements of the vessel. Children's voices crying in the darkness, mothers' voices soothing or scolding, men's voices rising above the others, all mingled with the distressing groans and cries of the sick for help, and, above all, the roaring of the wind and howling of the tempest made a scene and feeling indescribable.

"The effect and feeling at such times were so wretched that with some of us the certainty of death would not have roused us to an effort to save life in our own behalf. And yet even there amid such scenes a few were cheerful and sought to comfort others, and those never for a moment lost belief that they would reach their journey's end. Upon one occasion, during a dreadful storm, the good old captain came down with grave countenance. The passengers gathered around him to catch his words amid the confusion of the scene. He said: 'My friends, there is a time in every man's life when it is fitting that he should prepare to die. That time has come to us, and unless God interposes, we shall all go to the bottom; I have done all in my power,

but this is the worst gale I have known since I was master of a ship.' One woman, full of confidence and zeal, answered him: 'Captain Richardson, we left for California and we shall get there.' Another looked with a calm smile on her face and said: 'Captain, I have no more fear than though we were on the solid land.' The captain gazed upon them in mute surprise and left them. As he went upstairs he exclaimed, 'These people have a faith that I have not,' and added to a gentleman, 'They are either fools and fear nothing, or they know more than I do.'

Australia—A Virgin Field

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dead, with over two million interments at Rockwood, New South Wales, has been the center of activity. Organized groups have been allotted certain sections, and they spend many Sunday afternoons and many holidays in this manner.

It is a huge undertaking. All who have the opportunity should cooperate and thus speed the work which is being eagerly awaited by the society in Utah. I can personally vouch for the soul satisfaction derived from this activity. There is no greater project upon the earth and none more fascinating and engrossing. Those who have not assisted in cemetery work have missed the most inspiring and satisfying work of all.

"That storm passed away, and we encountered another off Cape Horn, in which one of the sailors was washed overboard. It was also during a storm that Mrs. Laura Goodwin was descending a stairway when she was thrown heavily forward, which caused premature confinement and death to ensue.

"They had a quick passage to Cape Horn. Their little children were on deck every day, attending school, jumping rope, and engaged in other amusements. At no time was the thermometer in the cabin below 50° Fah. On the deck, at one time, it fell for about three hours as low as 36° which Captain Richardson attributed to passing near an iceberg. Ran up to the cape with a fair wind, then took a west wind and ran up to 60° south latitude in four days, then took a south wind until they made longitude west of the cape, then had a fair wind down the Pacific; experiencing a heavy gale from the south, and were unable to continue with safety, so they scudded before the wind until it hauled to the east which brought them to the island of Juan Fernandez, where they found two families living.

"The first settlement on this island was burnt by the Peruvians several years ago, the fort destroyed, the canoes sunk in the harbor and the convicts carried away. The last settlement was abandoned a few years ago, at the time of the earthquake at Valparaiso when the island sank and rose about fifty feet; excellent water found, easy of

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THE IMPROVEMENT ERA