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Let Its Words Be Judged

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Abstract: Though external evidence validates the Book of Mormon, it is the internal evidence that reveals its divinity. Like the Bible, the Book of Mormon rebukes sin, explains the existence of mankind, is filled with the “pure spirit of inspiration,” explains the law of opposition, and discusses the philosophy that brings one to believe in God.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS'
MILLENNIAL STAR.

[ESTABLISHED 1840].

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.”—JOEL ii: 28-30.

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LET ITS WORDS BE JUDGED.

BY ELDER CHARLES R. MABEY, PRESIDENT OF THE BERLIN CONFERENCE.

A PARABLE.

A CERTAIN book, purporting to be a message from the gods, and stamped with their divine seal, was once presented to an ancient nation for its acceptance as oracular. It came forth with the approval of legend, the beneficent smile of science, and the unimpeachable testimony of men. Its origin was seemingly unquestionable; its authenticity, proof against all argument; and its obscure authors were honorable and true. In fact every incident connected with its production confirmed its genuineness. Fortune looked favorably upon its first appearance, and many of the high ones accepted it without a word of disapproval, while of the multitudes, not a few were demonstrative in their acclamations.

There were those, however, who refused to receive this innovation (for so they styled it), and contended with all the power of intelligent men against its advocates. Said they: “If this book is from the gods, why do they not come down to us and publish it as such? Why do they appear to these illiterate people, instead of telling us who have studied the oracles and know them as if they were our own? Besides, we do not believe that the supreme rulers have anything to do with mortals nowadays. We have already received all the books we need. No, we shall do all we can to destroy the power of

this imposture." So the strife waxed stronger; and men grew angry and hate became a ruling passion.

Now in this nation there was a body of wise ones, who spent not their time in foolish quarreling, but studied the mysteries of the universe and moulded the opinions of humanity. They were not governed by the weaknesses of men and could easily unveil deceptions. The dispute was submitted to them for settlement, inasmuch as they knew the history of the end from the beginning and could foretell the shaping of events. They rendered their decision:

"All truth is eternal and indestructible. It is not affected by opinion either good or bad. Attempt to destroy it, and you merely give it opportunity to progress; overcome it in one form and it will show itself to you in another more beautiful and more triumphant. Evil is transitory and deceiving, it thrives on the ideas of men. To the foolish its shape is inviting and fair; to the wise, repellent and ugly. It assumes noble forms in order to accomplish ignoble ends, but it never bears scrutiny, for its outer appearance is only a gauze—an evanescent veil of hypocrisy. Truth invites close investigation, and unfolds storehouses of treasure as you explore its interior. Pearls are found in the depths of the sea; gold, in the recesses of the earth; crystal snow, on the summit of the mountain. If you are in search of pearls, dive below; if in quest of golden nuggets of truth, dig deep; if you wish the clarified thoughts of men, ascend the mountain. This book may have all the arguments of reason and common sense in its favor and be backed by indisputable evidence, but if its inward pages do not reveal its divinity, and its every word does not confirm the claim for its authenticity, then it is a dead letter and unworthy of our further notice. You men who have been fighting against it, how many of you have read its story? You, who have been shouting disdainfully at the simplicity and obscurity of its origin, go home and read and then decide for yourselves. If you then find it is a deception, well and good; it will die of itself, and you need not worry."

AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE.

The Book of Mormon maintains that it is inspired of God and sent to mankind for instruction in history, religion and salvation. It must be either true or false. If a fraud, it remains for the world to prove it so; if the truth, it is the greatest message communicated to man since the advent of our Savior. Up to this day not one point has been carried against it, it has passed through all the stages of a book that is designed to live in the hearts of the nations, and every day its influence is multiplied by its intrinsic merits. The old Spaulding story, to which its vilifiers clung with all the tenacity of drowning men, has passed into a well-earned repose. The idea of Joseph Smith being insane or self-deceived is dropped as worthless, because in the light of later events and the general contents of the record such a thing would be a greater wonder than its delivery by an angel.

When the book made its appearance it was met by a howl of derision throughout the whole world of science. Its title became a very synonym of mockery, and even now those unacquainted with its history speak of it only with contempt. In spite of this it has paved the way for scientific research on the western continent and illuminated its path for generations to come. It has lit up the dark night of American antiquity and given to the story of that

land a dignity in comparison with which even that of the old world pales. Its every chapter teems with useful information for the student of Mexican, Central American and Peruvian archæology. Science is slowly confirming its claims.

Besides this, the book bears the unquestioned testimony of men who were as honorable and sincere as human beings could be. Even in the presence of the angel of death they bore witness to all the world that they saw and examined the plates of gold. What more does the world desire? Must an angel of God come down from on high and show them the same? Would they believe it then? No, they say: "I may have been deceived. It was only an hallucination; or perhaps I was in the throes of a delirium."

WHY THE NEPHITE RECORD WILL ENDURE.

It is necessary to have some other proof of the validity of this ancient scripture, and that proof is contained in the book itself. If holy beings were to reveal it again and again to incredulous man, he would not accept it. The writings of the inhabitants of ancient America must speak for themselves. Their pages must proclaim in letters of flaming gold that its pretensions are absolutely true. We tire of hearing defense of men merely from outside sources. We like to see them do something for themselves. We care not what a man has done, or who speaks well of him. We wish to see his excuse for living in his daily deeds. Reputation is the medium through which we can learn what other people think of an individual, but it gives us no truer an insight into his real self than a telegraph message can give of a man's true feeling in a battle. The same can be said of any book. Critics can say good things about it, but their words are like the description of a banquet. The Book of Mormon to be understood, must be read and that, carefully.

If a literary production proves more interesting upon second reading it can be said to be above the average; if after numerous perusals it not only retains its vitality but also opens up new treasures of thought to our understandings, it can be safely placed with the classics. Among such books we class Emerson, Bacon, Shakespeare, Schiller, Homer, and that father of literature—the Bible. We claim just as much for the inspired record of Mormon, and request the whole world to examine its contents. We assert that its chapters breathe just as high a spirit of optimistic philosophy, contain just as many deeper shades of reasoning and beautiful flights of oratory, as candid declarations against sin and as masterful a grasp of subject as any other book in the world. Its thought is also as clear and its manner of presenting ideas as convincing and logical as the most perspicuous passages from Plato.

It can be said of the Bible that it never indulges in monotony, as does the Koran or other non-Christian scriptures, and we maintain the same for the Book of Mormon. The Bible is an edifying, vitalizing gift of God, and so are these companion Scriptures of the western world. The Book of Mormon as well as the Bible contains scathing rebukes of sin, pure soul-lifting thoughts, the clearest and most concise explanation of the purpose of man's existence. Nay, more: the Testaments were written by orientalists; their prophecies are couched in the flowery, figurative language of the imaginative Jews, and they have been translated and changed by unskillful men who were not only not in touch with the ideas expressed, but who also knew little of the true spirit and meaning of the work. For that reason the translations have been an in-

sufficient guide for sects and creeds through the darkness of nineteen hundred years. This is not so with the Book of Mormon. It comes forth bathed in the pure spirit of inspiration and penned by accepted servants of the Almighty. It is rendered into plain English through the medium of that spirit which conveys all truth.

LEHI'S PHILOSOPHY.

We refer the reader to one chapter of the Book of Mormon, which not only bears comparison with the brilliant works of Saint Paul, but surpasses the genius of the Apostle to the Gentiles. Saint Paul in his impetuosity, in his overwhelming purpose to attain an end, often jumps from one subject to another without bridging over, and leaves us in the dark as to his real meaning. This author, however, weighs every sentence, sees the conclusion from the beginning, and sets each argument logically in its place. Every declaration is invincible, and one is never left in doubt as to the intended meaning of the author. We allude to the second chapter of II. Nephi.

Lehi, the old Jewish Prophet, educated in the schools of Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Zephaniah, gives some last words of admonition and instruction to his son Jacob, who was born in the wilderness. His purpose is to show the plan of the creation of the human family, the reason for the fall of Adam and the necessity of the coming of a Messiah. He shows the object of the law and explains why Adam's transgression took place in order to fulfil the measure of man's being; he does not lay the sin at the door of our first parents, who made it possible for us to begin an earthly career. In other words, "Adam fell that man might be; and men are that they might have joy." This tells the whole story of the human race and interprets in one terse sentence the grand drama enacted by Adam and closed by Jesus Christ.

OPPOSITION A TUTOR.

The whole chapter abounds in wonderful statements of philosophic truths. Mark how the old sage introduces the two great forces which combat for existence here on earth and then proves the necessity of a Redeemer's coming to lift up fallen man. Notice how he works into the body of his subject and states that beautiful passage on "opposition," thereby showing that even the devil has a duty to perform. His force, pitted against that of advancement, develops the dormant qualities of the soul and makes improvement a fact.

Opposition is an absolute necessity in all things. Without it the universe would be an inactive mass. Contending powers are always demonstrating this principle in every avenue of nature, and furnish a myriad of illustrations. The sun's heat lifts up untold millions of tons of water every year and overcomes the resisting law of gravity. Our planets, gyrating with fearful velocity around the sun, are only kept in position by the attraction of that orb. Scientists tell us that the earth is charged with dormant electricity, which only needs to be separated into its two kinds in order to set the wheels of civilization in motion. The greater the force exerted in tearing them apart, the more intense the resistance and the greater their capacity for doing work. When no resistance is offered no light is produced, when no opposition is brought to bear no heat is engendered; or in other words, without opposition there is no progress in any part of nature. What is true of material things is also true of spiritual ones. Without an adversary we are nothing, neither can we bring forth anything.

Adam in the pleasant vales of Paradise, untrammelled, uninterrupted, was as helpless and unprogressive as a babe, and until the evil power placed itself in antagonism to his better self, there was no progress and no retrogression. An opposite was necessary to further the ends of creation.

THERE MUST BE A GOD.

We pass on to the thirteenth verse—that grand passage which contains more beauty and truth in less words than any similar one in the realm of literature.

“And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness, there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness, there be no punishment nor misery. And if these things are not, there is no God. And if there is no God, we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore, all things must have vanished away.”

Let us analyze the verse. Why is there no sin when there is no law? Because law is order; sin is disorder. If the principle of order did not exist, there could be no antithesis. Law is harmony, sin is discord; and discord is determined by comparison with harmony. What would be harmony to the untrained ear, would be discord to the trained one. The Chinese fiddler plays according to harmony as he understands it, while the violinist of a Berlin orchestra would discover nothing but a confused mixture of discordant noises. Sin is a transgression of law. Where there is no law there can be no transgression, and consequently no sin. The savage African understands nothing about the English constitution. He governs himself according to the standard of right implanted in his conscience. We cannot judge him by the laws of civilized man, but by the light he has received. He commits a legion of deeds which would place him behind the bars in any European country, but he considers them as perfectly justifiable. He is not under our law, therefore he does not sin against it. Law represents the road to progress; sin, that to retrogression. If there be no way to the former, there can be none to the latter, because in order to move backward one must have a starting point. Law is the organization, the harmony, the order of the universe; sin is the disruption, the disunity, the chaos. One cannot exist without the other any more than high tide can be without its ebb.

HOW HAPPINESS COMES.

This brings us to the next statement: “If there is no sin there is no righteousness.” Righteousness is the conformity to law; it signifies love for right; it means an active, vigorous fight for advancement; it opposes sin and upholds order. To be able to resist, there must be something to withstand. With no contending power, resistance cannot exist. Our righteousness is determined in proportion to the efforts we exert to battle with evil. Goodness is only a negative virtue until it is tried by fire; and sin is the furnace through which righteousness must go in order to prove itself. It then becomes a positive virtue. A truly righteous man is one who has spent his life in combating with the forces of sin and has overcome them. In true righteousness there is no such thing as standstill; it is a sustainer of the law, the victor over evil, and its reward is the happiness secured through effort to do good. Therefore, if there is no righteousness, there is no happiness.

We must not confuse happiness with pleasure, which can just as easily be a reward of sin as of uprightness. Pleasure can result from a gratification of evil desire, just as well as from the realization of a noble one. But happiness results only after a struggle for right—after passing through an ordeal in the conquering of sin. Pleasure is fleeting, happiness is permanent. We may take pleasure in committing a deed against law, or we may find pleasure in the performance of some good act, while happiness is the result of a righteous life—the sum total of a number of good deeds. It is a good thing to be happy, but real happiness is only secured in endeavoring to make others happy, and this requires a righteous and virtuous conduct. Who ever heard of a sinful man's making other people happy, or of his being so himself, except he turn from his evil ways and do good? Who ever heard of a lazy man's being righteous or of his living in happiness? His happiness is no greater than that of a stone image, and his influence upon other people is no greater for good.

HEAVEN AND HELL.

These three things—law, righteousness and happiness make heaven, a place for the blest. Punishment is meted out for some unrighteous deed, and produces misery, the opposite to happiness. Just as surely as happiness follows a virtuous and just life, just so surely does misery, the punishment for wrong-doing, follow the breaking of the law. Our misery varies in proportion to the felicity we have enjoyed. All beings cannot live in the same state of bliss, therefore, degrees of punishment differ according to the capacity to enjoy.

The man who has reached the highest round on the ladder of progress has a much greater distance to fall than the one who has just begun to climb, and necessarily the highest can receive the greatest chastisement. It is no punishment to the Indian to live on raw flesh and spend his days in a tent of skin, while a like existence would probably mean death to the king of a civilized land. The transgressor feels no pangs of anguish when banished on a desolate island, if this represents all the blessings of his former life, and if he can live in the association of kindred spirits. If he has not had intercourse with his superiors, he experiences no sorrow in being debarred from their society. The holy man's keenest torture is exclusion from the presence of those influences which lead him upward. His first condition of happiness makes it possible for him to live in wretchedness.

Hell is nothing more than the torments of a mind once in the vales of Paradise. Our punishment after death will be nothing more than an everlasting burning of our consciences as we brood over what we might have been. And the higher the position we could have attained, the more bitter and excruciating our suffering. The righteousness and the happiness we see far ahead of us and out of our reach will be the flaming brands which burn forever in our sensitive souls. This is the consuming fire which ascends up forever and ever. If we do wrong, we place just one stumbling block in the way of our progress, and, all other things being equal, we shall not be able to reach as high a position throughout all the ages of eternity as if we had never committed this wrong. Therefore, punishment and misery result not from the absence of righteousness and happiness, but from their everlasting presence.

THE CREATOR AND CREATION.

If there is no law, no righteousness, no happiness, there is no God. Why?

Because God is the maker of the law, the organizer of chaos and the destroyer of sin. He is the grand Cause back of all other causes—the supreme Head, who sets the wheels of the universe in motion. He is the creator of all things. When we say that nature is the controlling influence, we only give another more indefinite name to omnipotence, and that is what the atheist loves. The atheist worships the effect while the deist worships the Cause. The atheist denies the existence of a God, but crowns with a divine diadem the more undignified nature and accepts it as the object of his devotion, while the deist recognizes in nature only the product of volition. The atheist adores law, the deist reverences the Will controlling the law. The atheist venerates “that which was made;” the deist, the Maker. The atheist says that something always existed and organized itself out of confusion, the deist places the great *I AM* at the head and acknowledges His works, and without Him we are not, neither the earth; for both are organisms and are controlled by law. Without Him no creation of things could have taken place. Things or bodies are composed of organized matter. To act or to be acted upon requires Will, and therefore, without God they could not have existed and must have vanished away, or resolved themselves into their primitive elements which are co-existent with God, and which even He cannot annihilate. How great the wisdom of this Will, which calls into being all things and vivifies them with His infinite Spirit, filling men with His boundless love and with ineffable happiness!

AN ENSIGN.

Such is the philosophy of one verse in the Book of Mormon. Its equal is not to be found in the most lucid paragraphs of Plato, the clearest passages of Bacon, or the happiest thoughts of Emerson. Neither have Voltaire, Montaigne or Paine, with all the power of their oratory and genius, expressed one idea that shakes its invincible logic. It stands in the clear atmosphere of truth, as exalted above the philosophies of men as transparent crystal excels the dust of the earth. This book has reared a standard of philosophic thought, that will serve as an ensign to generations yet unborn. It lifts the so-called rationalists out of the quagmire in which they have been wallowing for centuries, and places them securely on the rock of pure reason. It gives a new impetus to the sluggish spirits of men and inspires their souls with ideals such as have not been produced since Christ startled the lethargic world some nineteen centuries ago. As the Son of Man illuminated the night of time with His wonderful philosophy, though perverted by the evil ways of men, so this restores it to its primitive purity, and rekindles the smouldering fire, whose flame will serve as a beacon to the ages.

And Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon? An unlettered and obscure boy conceive such perfect thoughts? An imposture? The production of such a work at the hands of so young and inexperienced a man would be a greater wonder than the appearance of the Savior himself. Moreover, Joseph Smith never placed his name as the author of the great book, but ever maintained that he was only a weak instrument in the Lord's hands to bring it forth. If the world can not accept the account of its origin it will have to resort to means other than the cry of “imposture” to overcome it, for it has been tried and not found wanting, and, against every onslaught of its opponents, it stands to-day as firm and unflinching as the everlasting hills.