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Influences of Book of Mormon

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Abstract: This series deals with a wide variety of aspects of the Book of Mormon including Joseph Smith, Obadiah Dogberry, ancient fortifications, metal plates, Spaulding theory, clarifications of biblical doctrine, the abridging work of Mormon, record of the Jaredites, differences between the Bible and the Book of Mormon, witnesses of the Book of Mormon, history, literary qualities, Hebrew traits in the book, its relation to the Bible, and evidence of its antiquity. The final part discusses influences of the Book of Mormon.

Influences Of Book Of Mormon

By E. CECIL MCGAVIN

THE last chapter in the Book of Mormon exhorts its readers to "ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, He will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost." ((Moroni 10:4.)

The world might doubt the miracles of Joseph Smith, deny his seership, reject his prophecies and question his inspiration in establishing a Church, but the Book of

CONCLUDING INSTALMENT OF
"A MARVELLOUS WORK AND
A WONDER"

Mormon was tangible evidence which demanded consideration.

Of all the claims of Joseph Smith this was the one outstanding thing that could be given the pragmatic test.

In the days of Jesus there were many people who doubted His miracles and denied His divine guidance, but when an angel declared that "He is risen!" it set the divine seal of approval upon all the miracles of the Lord. This was the climax of His miraculous ministry, the grand finale to His divinely inspired course.

Likewise, the Book of Mormon was the climax of the divine inspiration of Joseph Smith. Elder John Henry Evans has written of this feature of the restoration:

"The Book of Mormon was something to look at, to hold in the hand, to feel with the fingers. It was not an abstract idea hard to get your mind around, but a tangible thing. It could be bought and read. Two dollars and fifty cents

would put it on your bookshelf, to be taken down any time and looked into.

"But the Book of Mormon did more than appeal to the sense of sight and touch. It found a ready response in the religious mind. Especially did it appeal to the Christian. Did you believe in the miracles of the Bible? And would you have miracles today? Very well, here was a miracle at your door." (Joseph Smith, An American Prophet, p. 45.)

For more than a century thousands of sincere readers have received a divine witness and testimony that the Book of Mormon is an inspired record that touches the heart of the prayerful reader.

The following tribute to the Bible is equally true of the Book of Mormon: "It touches the heart, and men become noble with a new life. Money, talents and influence are laid upon the altar of sacrifice; asylums, hospitals and homes for the indigent and unfortunate are founded; houses of worship rise on hill and in valley; missionaries go forth to other benighted lands with the glad news of salvation upon their lips; and everywhere, beneath the touch of this celestial talisman, morality and religion thrive, to bless mankind and beautify the earth." (F. C. Gilbert, "The Bible, A Twentieth Century Book," p. 7.)

A STRANGE BOOK

When the book first came from the press it had a similar effect upon the lives of its readers. Elder Parley P. Pratt read a borrowed copy of the Book of Mormon before he had heard a thing about the Mormons except what was told him by the prejudiced person who invited him to read the book. His

immediate reaction to this strange book is thus described:

"We visited an old Baptist deacon by the name of Hamblin. After hearing of our appointment for the evening, he began to tell of a book, a strange book, a very strange book! in his possession, which had been just published. . . .

"Next morning I called at his house, where, for the first time, my eyes beheld the 'Book of Mormon,'—that book of books—that record which reveals the antiquities of the 'New World' back to the remotest ages, and which unfolds the destiny of its people and the world for all time to come;—that book which contains the fulness of the Gospel of a crucified and risen Redeemer;—that book which reveals a lost remnant of Joseph; and which was the principal means, in the hands of God, of directing the entire course of my future life.

"I opened it with eagerness, and read its title page. I then read the testimony of several witnesses in relation to the manner of its being found and translated. After this I commenced its contents by course. I read all day; eating was a burden, I had no desire for food; sleep was a burden when the night came, for I preferred reading to sleep.

"As I read, the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I knew and comprehended that the book was true, as plainly and manifestly as a man comprehends and knows that he exists. My joy was now full, as it were, and I rejoiced sufficiently to more than pay me for all the sorrows, sacrifices and toils of my life. . . .

"This discovery greatly enlarged my heart, and filled my soul with joy and gladness. I esteemed the book, or the information contained in it, more than all the riches of the world. Yes; I verily believe that I would not at that time have exchanged the knowledge I then

possessed for a legal title to all the beautiful farms, houses, villages and property which passed in review before me, on my journey through one of the most flourishing settlements of western New York." ("Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt," pp. 37, 38, 40.)

While the Book of Mormon was still on the press, Thomas B. Marsh heard about it while visiting in New York. His curiosity was so aroused that he went to Palmyra, had conversations with Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris and obtained some galley proofs from the printer which he took to his home in Boston. After reading these sheets he moved to western New York and joined the Church.

Soon after the book was printed, Joseph Smith's younger brother, Samuel, set out as a missionary, offering the new book for sale. In a neighbouring city he called on a Methodist minister, John P. Greene, who was ready to depart on a missionary tour and was reluctant to take a copy of the book. Finally, the young missionary persuaded the preacher to accept a copy on consignment and try to sell other copies to the members of his church.

Perhaps as a means of dismissing the missionary he accepted the book. A few weeks later when the missionary returned to see if the preacher had found sale for several copies, the minister's wife told him she had read the book and was very much exercised over it. She was so impressed with the message of the strange book that she asked Samuel to pray with her about it—which he did. When he was ready to depart he felt impressed to leave the book with her. Later she persuaded her husband to read it.

The minister was so favourably impressed by the book that he invited two friends, Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball, to read it. These three prominent families were converted to the new Church

as they read this borrowed copy of the Book of Mormon.

In Richmond, Mass., a physician, Willard Richards, borrowed a copy of this strange volume which Brigham Young had left with a relative. After reading half a page he exclaimed, "God or the devil has had a hand in that book, for man never wrote it." He read it twice within ten days and proceeded to sell his equipment and medicine, settling his accounts and making preparations to move to Kirtland, Ohio, where he became a prominent leader in the new movement.

When the first Mormon missionaries arrived in Ohio and told the people about the Book of Mormon, another physician, Dr. Frederick G. W. Williams, abandoned the practice of his profession and accompanied the missionaries on their long journey to western Missouri.

These same missionaries called on Sidney Rigdon, a prominent Campbellite preacher, inviting him to read the new book. As they fervently presented the claims of the restoration he remonstrated in this tone: "No, young men, you must not argue with me on the subject; but I will read your book and see what claims it has upon my faith and will endeavour to ascertain whether it be a revelation from God or not."

He earnestly read the book, praying to the Lord for direction. Within two weeks after the book had been placed in his hands he was fully convinced of the truthfulness of the work, by a revelation from the Lord. Concerning his convincing testimony he exclaimed, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto me, but my Father which is in heaven."

Moroni's admonition has been put to the test and tens of thousands of devout readers have

received a heavenly witness that the Book of Mormon is an inspired record worthy of being inscribed on the permanent sheets of gold and translated by the inspiration of the Lord.

Like the Bible, the Gibraltar strength of this modern book of scripture has withstood the fiercest attacks of its critics. In this scientific age when the appearance of angels and the existence of gold plates and seer stones and other superhuman agencies are questioned by thousands of people; when revelations are said to have been done away and the canon of scripture forever closed, what shall we say of the tremendous circulation and multiplied translations of this remarkable book?

ENSHRINED IN HEARTS

This is predominantly an age of fiction reading. Popular books of fiction are known but for a few years, while this book does not fail to touch the hearts of readers after more than a century as no other book has done except the Holy Bible.

Take this sacred book out of our religious life and out of our churches, cut off every reference to it from our literature, eradicate its influence on the theological pattern of the Church, snuff out its inspiration from our characteristic Mormon music and poetry, snatch away from its devout readers its potent authority over their actions and behaviour, and we shall have suffered a great loss which is comparable to taking the Bible out of our midst.

Let the opponents of this book produce another such book, let them match its hold on the lives and actions of men and we shall seriously feel that they have a case.

The Book of Mormon is enshrined in the hearts of its sincere readers as one of the greatest books in the world, the Holy Bible being its only superior.