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Changing Thought on the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: This article is a published summary of Merrill's thesis, written in 1940, wherein the author examined publications dealing with the Book of Mormon and noted the themes emphasized during the periods 1830-1855 and 1915-1940.

CHANGING THOUGHT

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THE Book of Mormon was published in the year 1830. Since that time, volumes have been written concerning it and many discourses have been published, the authors of which have either condemned or defended it. It would seem that almost every phase of Book of Mormon controversy should have been elaborated in the meantime, in great detail.

Since its publication, the whole trend of human events has been greatly influenced by the discoveries of science and the dominance of new philosophies. Scholars, speakers and writers—even the so called common people—are not thinking today as they did at the time the Book of Mormon was published.

The desire to ascertain the changes which have taken place in emphasis or in the presentation of new ideas as found in the published discourses of the speakers and writers who have dealt with the Book of Mormon impelled a study of this problem.

In pursuing this study, the authors divided the time element, that is, the time that has elapsed since the Book of Mormon was published, into two periods, namely, from the year 1830 to 1855, and from 1915 to 1940. In all, 1950 articles were examined.

For data concerning the first period, all of the available copies of the following publications were examined:

The Deseret News, Evening and Morning Star, The Millennial Star, Nauvoo Expositor, The Seer, and Times and Seasons.

Data for the second period were gathered from the following publications:

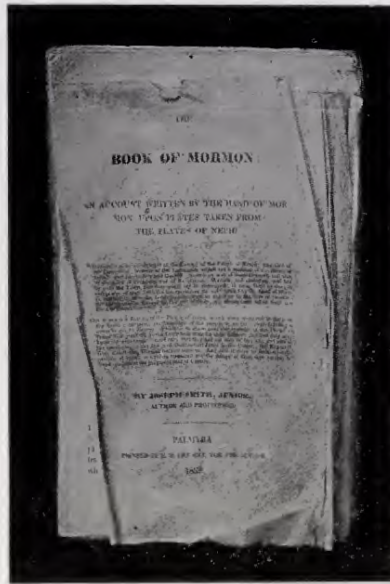
Conference Report, The Deseret News, The Millennial Star.

Although the sources of reference were fewer for the second period than for the first, much more data were obtained from the sources of the latter period than from the first.

Other publications in both periods were examined, but since these reveal nothing of importance that was new, it was felt that an adequate

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amount of data to justify conclusions concerning this problem was found in the publications examined. After examining many articles from both periods, it was observed that thirty-seven topics had engaged the thinking of the authors. When new topics appeared in subsequent articles, these also were listed in their alphabetical order and formed a part of the permanent list. The number of times each topic was discussed, or even mentioned, was recorded on a table, the data from which formed the basis for the conclusions arrived at.

The thirty-seven topics were as follows:

- Animals
- Anthropology
- Archeology
- As a history
- Authorship
- Biblical corroboration
- Braille
- Content
- Copied from other sources
- Copyright
- Doctrine
- Distribution
- Divine authority
- Evidences of truthfulness from literature
- Geography
- Mere mention
- Miscellaneous criticism
- Origin
- Origin of nickname
- Personalities of
- Pictorial illustrations
- Plates
- Printing
- Prophecies
- Publications

- Purposes served
- Reference to discourses concerning
- Sale of
- Study of
- Style
- Teaching
- Testimony and reference to witnesses
- Testimony concerning
- Tradition
- Translation
- Truthfulness revealed
- Writing about

HAVING thus tabulated all the data from the 1,950 articles and having evaluated the articles as to length and significance, the following conclusions seemed to be justified:

1. The speakers and writers of both periods emphasized the materials found in the Book of Mormon as a source of doctrine.
2. The content phase, including story and events, made a large appeal to the writers and speakers of both periods. This was especially noticeable during the latter period.
3. There is a tendency to engage in more thorough and meaningful discussions about the Book of Mormon in the latter period than in the former, but in both periods there is a tendency on the part of many speakers and writers merely to mention the Book of Mormon without entering into the meaningful discussion.
4. In both periods the writers and speakers dealing with the Book of Mormon were concerned mainly with relatively few topics. Their treatment of these topics revealed a marked similarity.
5. The writers and speakers did not make as frequent reference to the prophecies of the Book of Mormon in the latter period as during the former period.
6. The facts concerning the archeological remains as collateral evidence of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon engaged the attention of the writers and speakers less during the second period than during the first.
7. Speakers and writers gave but little attention to the importance of a study of the Book of Mormon.
8. Judging from the number of references to such topics as animals mentioned in the Book of Mormon, anthropology, authorship, Braille, copied from other sources, copyright, evidence of truthfulness from literature, geography, miscellaneous criticism and tradition, were of very minor importance. All save one of these, namely miscellaneous criticism, were included only in the latter period.
9. The style in which the Book of Mormon was written engaged the attention of the speakers and writers in both periods. More attention, however, was given to the topic during the first period than during the second period.
10. Judging from the frequency of reference in the literature, the sale and distribution of the Book of Mormon did not receive major emphasis, especially in the first period. In the second period, however, especially in those sources published in the mission fields, both of these topics received considerable emphasis.