



Type: Magazine Article

---

## The Liahona's Cousins

Author(s): Hugh W. Nibley

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (February 1961)

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

Page(s): 87–89, 104, 106, 108–111

---

**Abstract:** This article gives an analysis of the Liahona, especially in light of Arabic divination arrows. It also proposes an etymology for this name.



# THE LIAHONA'S COUSINS

BY DR. HUGH NIBLEY

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AND RELIGION,  
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY



Biblical archaeologists have long since given up the old practice of identifying every stone and artifact with something specifically mentioned in the Bible. But that does not mean that their discoveries do not support and explain the scriptures: to show the authentic "Egypticity" of the book of Exodus, for example, does not require the identification of specific names, dates, and places at all; what it does require is the accumulation of data of a general sort that can serve to establish the Egyptian background and coloring of the book.<sup>1</sup> Schliemann did not discover the treasure of Atreus, as he supposed he had, but he discovered something just as good—the lost world of Atreus. If the Vaphio cups were not used by Nestor or Priam or Menelaus they at least are exactly like the cups which Homer says *were* used by them; they vindicate the reality of the world of Homer as effectively as if they had the royal names inscribed on them.

So it is with the Book of Mormon. Years have been spent in attempting to dis-

cover objects that could be identified with specific persons, places, and times mentioned in that book. The long experience of Classical and Near Eastern archaeology indicates a less "dogmatic" approach, and suggests that real progress can be made by dealing with types and patterns instead of trying to pinpoint persons and things.<sup>2</sup> We have in the Book of Mormon, for example, a most interesting apparatus called the Liahona. Now the chances of finding a genuine Liahona are, to say the least, remote; but what if something just like it showed up in the hands of Lehi's relatives? That should certainly come as a surprise, and even provoke some thought. The Liahona has given rise to endless merriment and mockery among critics of the Book of Mormon; only the shining stones of the Jaredites can equal it as a laugh-getter. Even the present writer, for all his curiosity about Book of Mormon oddities, has always passed it by in an abashed silence—it was like nothing he ever heard or read of—until the year 1959. For it was less than two years ago that an Arabic scholar by the name of T. Fahd published the hitherto scattered, scanty, and inaccessible evidence that makes it possible for the first time to say something significant about the Liahona. But before we consider his report, let us see what the Book of Mormon has to say on the subject. This is what the first edition tells about the Liahona:

(P. 38, 1 Nephi 16:10) "And it came to pass that as my father arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness."

(P. 40 f., 1 Nephi 16:28-30) "And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the faith, and diligence, and heed, which we did give unto them. And there was also written upon them, a new writing, which was plain to be read, which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord; and it was written and changed from time to time, accord-

ing to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it: And thus we see, that by small means, the Lord can bring about great things.

"And it came to pass that I, Nephi, did go forth up into the top of the mountain, according to the directions which were given upon the ball. And it came to pass that I did slay wild beasts, insomuch, that I did obtain food for our families. . . ."

(P. 155, Mosiah 1:16 f.) "And moreover, he also gave him charge concerning . . . the ball or director, which led our fathers through the wilderness, which was prepared by the hand of the Lord that thereby they might be led, every one according to the heed and diligence which they gave unto him. Therefore, as they were unfaithful, they did not prosper nor progress in their journey."

(P. 329 f., Alma 37:38-47)

"And now my son, I have somewhat to say concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director or our fathers called it liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass; and the Lord prepared it. And behold, there cannot any man work after the manner of so curious a workmanship. And behold, it was prepared to shew unto our fathers the course

which they should travel in the wilderness; and it did work for them according to their faith in God; therefore if they had faith to believe that God could cause that those spindles should point the way they should go, behold, it was done; therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God, day by day; nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means, nevertheless it did shew unto them marvelous works. They were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence, and then those marvellous works ceased, and they did not progress in their journey; therefore, they tarried in the wilderness, or did not travel a direct course, and were afflicted with hunger and thirst, because of their transgressions.

"And now, my son, I would that ye should understand that these things are not without a shadow; for as our fathers were slothful to give heed to this compass, (now these things were temporal,) they

#### MORE KEEPSAKES

BY BESSIE SAUNDERS SPENCER

More keepsakes in my hands, to save,  
To carry to the attic chest  
That opens like a little grave,  
Where memories rest.

On top a baby's ring of gold,  
An agate taw, a pocketknife—  
These are not keepsakes that I hold,  
But chips of life!

did not prosper; even so it is with things which are spiritual. For behold, it is as easy to give heed to the word of Christ, which will point to you a straight course to eternal bliss, as it was for our fathers to give heed to this compass, which would point unto them a straight course to the promised land. And now I say, Is there not a type in this thing? . . .

"O my son, do not let us be slothful, because of the easiness of the way; for so it was with our fathers; for so it was prepared for them, that if they would look, they might live; even so it is with us. The way is prepared and if we will look, we may live forever."

(P. 48 f., 1 Nephi 18:12 and 21) "And it came to pass that after they had bound me, insomuch that I could not move, the compass, which had been prepared of the Lord, did cease to work; wherefore, they knew not whither they should steer the ship. . . . And it came to pass that after they had loosed me, behold, I took the compass, and it did work whither I desired it."

Listing the salient features of the report we get the following:

1) The Liahona was a gift of God, the manner of its delivery causing great astonishment.

2) It was neither mechanical nor self-operating, but worked solely by the power of God.

3) It functioned only in response to the faith, diligence, and heed of those who followed it.

4) And yet there was something ordinary and familiar about it. The thing itself was the "small means" through which God worked; it was not a mysterious or untouchable object but strictly a "temporal thing." It was so ordinary that the constant tendency of Lehi's people was to take it for granted—in fact, they spent most of their time ignoring it: hence, according to Alma, their needless, years-long wanderings in the desert.

5) The working parts of the device were two spindles or pointers.

6) On these a special writing would appear from time to time, clarifying and amplifying the message of the pointers.

7) The specific purpose of the traversing indicators was "to point the way they should go."

8) The two pointers were mounted in a brass sphere

whose marvelous workmanship excited great wonder and admiration. Special instructions sometimes appeared on this ball.

9) The device was referred to descriptively as a ball, functionally as a director, and in both senses as a "compass," or Liahona.

10) On occasion, it saved Lehi's people from perishing by land and sea—" . . . if they would look they might live." (Alma 37:46.)

11) It was preserved "for a wise purpose" (Alma 37:2, 14, 18) long after it had ceased to function, having been prepared specifically to guide Lehi's party to the promised land. (*Idem*, vv. 39 f.) It was a "type and shadow" of man's relationship to God during his earthly journey.

We should not pass by Alma's description without noting a most remarkable peculiarity of verses 40 and 41. (chap. 37.) Let us read these verses without punctuation, as the ancients did:

" . . . therefore they had this miracle and also many other miracles wrought by the power of God day by day nevertheless because those miracles were worked by small means nevertheless it did shew unto them marvellous works they were slothful and forgot

to exercise their faith and diligence and then those marvellous works ceased."

The meaning is perfectly clear: though Lehi's people enjoyed daily demonstrations of God's power, the device by which that power operated seems so ordinary (Alma includes it among "small and simple things . . . very small means . . ." vv. 6-7) that in spite of the "marvellous works" it showed them they tended to neglect it. We could punctuate the passage accordingly:

"Therefore they had this miracle, and also many other miracles, wrought by the power of God day by day. Nevertheless, because those miracles were worked by small means (albeit it did show unto them marvellous works), they were slothful and forgot to exercise their faith and diligence. . . ."

A comparison of various editions of the Book of Mormon will show that others have tried their hand at punctuating these phrases.

The point of this (Continued on page 104)

#### THE SEARCH

BY VIOLET ADAMS

Hungry are the pangs of youth  
That they may search forever,  
Looking for the fruits of truth  
To make their lives seem better—  
Better for the joys of peace,  
Full and glad and glorious,  
And when their life on earth is done  
Return to God—victorious.

(Continued from page 89)

pedantic little digression is that there is an odd incongruity in finding perfectly intelligible phrases so punctuated that their meaning is destroyed. Yet this strange anomaly occurs often in the Book of Mormon, requiring many of the "Two Thousand Changes" in the book over which Lamoni Call and generations of anti-Mormon writers have used as "proof" that the book was not inspired. Actually it proves that no man or men sat down and composed the thing as ordinary books are written.

If the Book of Mormon were devised by clever and scheming men, as the world has always insisted, how could they have sent their skillfully contrived sentences to the printer in such a form that "every Chapter . . . was one solid paragraph, without a punctuation mark, from beginning to end"?<sup>3</sup> Was there ever before an author of a large book who didn't know how to punctuate his own writing? Who didn't even try?

Since to punctuate the Book of Mormon would be infinitely easier than to write it, it is inconceivable that any man with the wit and enterprise to compose such a large and complicated tome would be either unwilling or unable to clarify his own remarks by the simple rules of punctuation. Nor can the omission of all punctuation have been a cunning ruse, since the printer was authorized to complete the task. If the words which were dictated to Oliver Cowdery by Joseph Smith were also composed by him or by the two men working together, the hopeless and complete inadequacy of the punctuation (a phenomenon which was never publicized or exploited in any way) would be simply unaccountable.

But it is time to turn to Mr. Fahd's study of *belomancy* in the ancient Near East. *Belomancy* is the practice of divination by shooting, tossing, shaking, or otherwise manipulating rods, darts, pointers, or other sticks, all originally derived from arrows. Over ten years ago the present writer made a fairly exhaustive study of ancient arrow-divination, and some years later presented in the pages of the *Era* a long discourse on the ritual use of sticks and rods, especially in ancient

Israel.<sup>4</sup> Yet it was not until he saw Fahd's study, the first full-length treatment of old Semitic arrow-divination, that it dawned upon him that these old practices might have some connection with the Liahona. For the commonest use of divination arrows, and probably their original purpose, was, according to the forgotten evidence unearthed by the diligent Fahd, the direction of travelers in the desert.

#### SINGAPORE

BY MARY JEFFREY

When teacher talks of Singapore  
I see blue mountains, jade-green shore,  
Tall palm trees, dark against the skies,  
Bright, flashing birds with curious cries.  
From a height above the town  
A Buddha, gray in stone, looks down;  
And well I know, beyond the bay  
Are jungles deep where monkeys play.  
Chattering children, bare and brown,  
Roam the streets of this strange town.  
Ladies, swathed and saddled, pass  
With clinking anklets, gold and glass.  
Merchants, sitting in market squares,  
Offer enchanting, curious wares;  
And far away, as in a dream,  
I think I hear a tiger scream.  
A sunray, glinting on notes of chalk  
Rouses me to the teacher's talk:  
I sit fourth row from the schoolroom door—  
But my soul has been in Singapore.

Fahd begins by pointing out that the "arrows" used in divination, called *qid-h* or *zalam*, were devoid of heads and feathers, being mere shafts or pointers.<sup>5</sup> Since Lane has given a fuller description of these objects from the sources, we can do no better than quote *his* quotations.

"*zalam*, pl. *azlām* [divining—] arrows by means of which the Arabs in the Time of Ignorance (i.e., before Islam) sought to know what was allotted to them: they were arrows upon which the Arabs in the Time of Ignorance wrote 'Command' and 'Prohibition'; or upon some of which

was written 'My Lord hath commanded me'; and upon some, 'My Lord hath forbidden me'; or they were three arrows; upon one of which was written 'My Lord hath commanded me'; etc., . . . and the third was blank; and they put them in a receptacle, and took forth an arrow; and if the arrow upon which was 'Command' came forth, he went to accomplish his purpose; but if that upon which 'Prohibition' was written came forth, he refrained; and if the blank came forth, they shuffled the second time . . . The *zalam* [were arrows that] belonged to the Kureysh, in the Time of Ignorance, upon which were written 'He hath commanded,' and 'He hath forbidden,' and 'Do thou' and 'Do thou not'; they had been well shaped and made even, and placed in the Kaabeh (the holy shrine of Meccah) . . . and when a man desired to go on a journey, or to marry, he came to the minister, and said, 'Take thou forth for me *zalam*'; and thereupon he would take it forth and look at it. . . . There were seven arrows thus called with the minister of the Kaabeh, having marks upon them, and used for this purpose: and sometimes there were with the man two such arrows, which he put into a sword-case; and when he desired to seek knowledge of what was allotted to him, he took forth one of them."<sup>6</sup> But why arrows? Because, as we have shown elsewhere, the shooting of arrows is a universal form of divination, "as is evident in the prayers that the legendary heroes of the steppe—Finnish, Norse, Russian, Kazakh, Turkish, and Yakut—address to their three enchanted arrows before releasing them, and for instance, in the arrow-prayers of the Indian and Bedouin, all eloquently expressing the humility of men about to entrust their lives and their fate to a power beyond their control."<sup>7</sup> The consultation of the arrows by one about to marry was, according to Gaster, also an old Jewish custom: the parties concerned would throw rods into the air "reading their message by the manner of their fall; this, Gaster observes, is 'tantamount' to the shooting of arrows."<sup>8</sup> Other substitutes for shooting were shaking or drawing from a bag or quiver, balancing on the finger, or spinning on a pivot."<sup>9</sup>

In the New World "the autotype . . . possibly of all Indian dice games is one in which the arrows or darts

are tossed or shot at an arrow tossed or shot to the ground so that it falls across the other. . . ." More often than not, the arrows in question were mere sticks or pointers.<sup>10</sup> In Arabic *sāhamahu* means both to shoot arrows with another and to draw lots or practise sortilege with one. There was no more popular form of divination among the magic-minded Babylonians than arrow-lottery, and Meissner suggests that 'casting lots' in Babylonian (*salu sha puni*) refers to an original shaking or shooting of arrows.<sup>11</sup>

All this shaking, tossing, and shooting emphasizes the divinatory office of arrows as *pointers*;<sup>12</sup> but along with that they also conveyed their message, as the passages from Lane demonstrate, by the *writing* that was upon them. Fahd notes that "on the arrows words were inscribed, determining the object of the cleromantic consultation."<sup>13</sup> Whenever divination arrows are described, they are invariably found to have writing on them, like the Zuni "word-painted arrows of destiny."<sup>14</sup> The Arabic proverb for "Know thy-

self!" is *absir wasma qidhika*, literally, "Examine the mark on thy divination-arrow!"<sup>15</sup> It has even been maintained that writing originated with the marking of arrows,<sup>16</sup> but whether this be so or not, it is certain that men from the earliest times have sought guidance by consulting the pointings and the inscriptions of headless and tailless arrows.

The word for "divination-arrow" in the above proverb was *qidh*, defined in Lane as one of the "two arrows used in sortilege." The original and natural number of arrows used in divination seems to have been two. Even when the "magic three" were used, the third was a dud, the *manih*, which is a blank "to which no lot is assigned."<sup>17</sup> It is the other two that do the work. On the same day on which the king of Persia shook out the divining-sticks (the *baresma*), the Jews would draw three boxwood lots to choose the scapegoat; but the Talmud says there were only two lots, and they were of boxwood or gold.<sup>18</sup>

The reason for the two basic staves is apparent from their normal designation as "Command" and "Prohibition." To this the priests at some shrines added a third arrow called the "Expectative"—"Wait and see!"<sup>19</sup> But the original arrangement was that "two arrows designated the advisability or inadvisability of a journey"; they were designated as "the *safr* (*Go ahead!*) and the *khadr* (*Stay where you are!*)."<sup>20</sup> From passages in Lane it is clear that the regular consultant of the arrows were those faced with travel-problems—all others are secondary. The patron of the caravans of the Hejaz from time immemorial was the archer-god Abgal, "the lord of omens," in his capacity of the master of the arrows of divination.<sup>21</sup> The inscriptions on the arrows themselves give top priority to travel: typical examples from the various systems, which employ from two all the way to ten arrows, are "Go slow!" (*bata*), "Speed up!" (*sari*), "Water!", "Stay where you are!" "Get moving!" "You are in the clear," etc.<sup>22</sup>

It would be an obtuse reader indeed who needed one to spell out for him the *resemblance* between ancient arrow-divination and the Liahona: two "spindles or pointers" bearing written instructions provide superhuman guidance for travelers in the desert. What more could you want? But what is the *relationship*

## "... to think as he ought . . . "

RICHARD L. EVANS



Today we should like somewhat to summarize our subject of some weeks on our responsibility for all the thoughts we think, for our actions and utterances, and for turning from wrong ways; and the fallacy of being resigned to wrong, once we have made a mistake—the fallacy of postponing repentance when we have done wrong things, when we have thought wrong thoughts. This whole subject seems somehow to be summarized in a single sentence from Pascal, who said: "Man is obviously made to think. It is his whole dignity and his whole merit; and his whole duty is to think as he ought."<sup>1</sup> It follows, of course, that if he thinks as he ought, he will do as he ought, for thought is the forerunner of all action and utterance. It is the power to think, to reason, to choose, that sets man apart, that gives him his high destiny if he uses well what the Lord God has given. It is with our thoughts, and the physical fulfillment of our thoughts, that we are all writing our own record—a record which one eminent scientist has said "is written in indelible script in space and time."<sup>2</sup> Of course we should not always or inordinately think the same thoughts. (Obsessions can be as undersirable as too much trivia.) We all need diversity of thought, some relaxation, some change of pace, some leisure, but not so much that idle and evil thoughts are invited to enter in. What we need, all of us, always, is control: self-control, self-discipline, control of thought, of appetite, of utterance, of action; the control to turn our attention to what we want to turn it to, to what we ought to turn it to, with an awareness that we are making ourselves what we shall be, that "what we are to be, we are becoming"<sup>3</sup>—which fact would plead the importance of controlling self; of turning to the positive and purposeful use of life, of mind, of time, of talent; of directing to right ways the whole intent of the heart—of thinking what we ought to think, and refusing to resign to wrong ways. "Man is obviously made to think. It is his whole dignity and his whole merit; and his whole duty is to think as he ought."<sup>1</sup>

"The Spoken Word," from Temple Square presented over KSL and the Columbia Broadcasting System, November 27, 1960. Copyright 1960.

<sup>1</sup>Pascal's *Thoughts*, Sec. ii:146.

<sup>2</sup>Gustaf Stromberg, *The Soul of the Universe*.

<sup>3</sup>Chinese proverb.

between them? On this the Book of Mormon is remarkably specific. Both Nephi and Alma go out of their way to insist that the Liahona did not work itself, i.e., was not a magic thing, but worked only by the power of God and only for appointed persons who had faith in that power.

Moreover, while both men marvel at the wonderful workmanship of the brass ball in which the pointers were mounted, they refer to the op-

eration of those pointers as "a very small thing," so familiar to Lehi's people that they hardly give it a second glance. So contemptuous were they of the "small means" by which "those miracles were worked" for their guidance and preservation that they constantly "forgot to exercise their faith" so that the compass would work. This suggests that aside from the workmanship of the mounting, there was nothing par-

ticularly strange or mystifying about the apparatus which Alma specifies as a "temporal" thing.

Here we have an instructive parallel in the ship and the bow that Nephi made. Without divine intervention those indispensable aids to survival would never have come to the rescue of Lehi's company—their possession was a miracle. Yet what were they after all? An ordinary ship and an ordinary bow. Just so, the Liahona was "a very small thing" for all its marvelous provenience, having much the same relationship to other directing arrows that the ship and the bow did to other ships and bows. We must not forget that the ancients looked upon even ordinary *azlam* as a means of communication with the divine: "In view of the importance of religious sentiment in every aspect of the activity of the Arab and of the Semite in general," writes Fahd, "I do not believe that one can separate these practices (i.e., of arrow-divination) from their character as a consultation of divinity . . . they always believed, however vaguely, in a direct and constant intervention in human affairs."<sup>23</sup>

Like the wonderful staff of Moses in Jewish history, these things suggest remote times and occasions when, according to popular belief, God communicates more directly with men than he does now. This is certainly implied in the status of the ritual arrows or marked sticks among the American Indians, regarding which Culin writes: ". . . behind both ceremonies and games there existed some widespread myth from which both derived their impulse, though what this mysterious tradition is he does not know."<sup>24</sup> Consistent with their holiness, "the consulting of the mantic arrows," according to one Ibn Ishaq, "seems to have been reserved to questions of general public concern and to solemn occasions of life and death."<sup>25</sup> Which again reminds us of the Liahona, ". . . that if they would look, they might live." (Alma 37:46.)

Was the Liahona, then, just old magic? No, it is precisely here that Nephi and Alma are most emphatic—unlike magic things, these pointers worked solely by the power of God, and then, too, for only those designated to use them. *Anybody* about to make a journey could consult the mantic arrows at the shrines, and

## The average: not the absolute nor ideal

RICHARD L. EVANS



Last week we closed with this comment: "Man is obviously made to think. It is his whole dignity and his whole merit; and his whole duty is to think as he ought."<sup>1</sup> And now we should like to turn to what follows from the thoughts we think: the doing, the learning, the practicing, the performing—and would preface what follows with a quotation from Carlyle: "Men do less than they ought, unless they do all that they can."<sup>2</sup> This suggests, of course, the willingness to participate, the willingness to work, the willingness to use as fully as we can the gifts, the talents, the abilities, and the opportunities that the Lord God has given. Some of us may waste time and opportunity by being fearful of doing too much. Some may impair capacity by holding back for fear of doing more than a fair share, by not wanting to do more than someone else does, by not wanting to exceed an average amount of effort or activity. But we shouldn't let comparison with the average of others hold us back from being or doing our best. Capacity is increased by practice and performance; and if we hold our performance to the pace of the less able, or the less willing, or even to the average, we retard our own improvement; we impair our own capacity; and we impoverish ourselves, comparatively, and others also. Worship of the average is wasteful. The Master's parable of the talents still presents one of the most basic lessons of life—for all the servants in the parable did not receive the same. But even though there was not an equality of endowment, there was seemingly an equality of accountability in that they all were judged by what they did with what they had. We cannot reach our full powers or capacity if we are held back by the average, by the problem of comparative performance. The average is only what it is because some do more and some do less, and it is not in any sense an absolute or an ideal. And insofar as it would lead us to seek a lesser level, the worship of the average is false and futile. All men and all things will only be raised as people are willing to improve performance. Again, in closing, we would quote Carlyle: "Men do less than they ought, unless they do all that they can."<sup>2</sup>

"The Spoken Word," from Temple Square presented over KSL and the Columbia Broadcasting System, December 4, 1960. Copyright 1960.

<sup>1</sup>Pascal's *Thoughts*, Sec. ii: 146.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Carlyle.

to this day throughout the world mantic arrows are still being consulted. But it is clear from Alma's words that in his day the Liahona had been out of operation for centuries, having functioned only for a true man of God and only for one special journey.

Another man of God, Lehi's great contemporary, Ezekiel, showed a remarkable interest in divinatory sticks and rods, as we have pointed out elsewhere, and he describes how the fate of certain wicked cities is sealed as God "shakes out the arrows," each one being marked with the name of a condemned city.<sup>26</sup>

Where, then, does one draw the line between the sacred and the profane? Religion becomes magic when the power by which things operate is transferred from God to the things themselves. As Fahd notes, the Arabs were extremely vague about the powers with which they dealt, as "primitive" people are everywhere. When men lack revelation they commonly come to think of power as residing in things. Did the staff of Moses make water come from the rock or cause the Red Sea to part? Of course not; yet in time the miraculous powers which were displayed through its agency came to be attributed by men to the staff itself. It became a magic thing, like Solomon's seal, which possessed *in itself* the wonder-working powers which gave Solomon his ascendancy over men and beasts.

In time the Bible became a magic book in men's eyes, conveying all knowledge by its own power, without the aid of revelation. So, after a fierce controversy on the matter, the priesthood received the status of a thing that automatically bestows power and grace, regardless of the spiritual or moral qualifications of its possessor—it became a magic thing. Strangest of all, science has consistently supplanted religion by magic when dealing with final causes. When Sir Charles Sherrington, for example, after describing the incredibly complex and perfect workings of the eye, insists that it is the cells *themselves* that agree to co-operate in the miracle of seeing, following an indescribably complex plan of development which they themselves have worked out, in short, that the eye makes *itself*, he is simply appealing to the old doctrine of the magicians, that things in

themselves possess wondrous powers of performance.<sup>27</sup>

Hunters and medicine men throughout the world who use arrows to bring them luck pray to their arrows, blow on them, and talk to them, as gamblers do to dice and cards—for at an early date "the use of divination arrows drifted down into the vulgarization of gaming cards," i.e., the practice quickly de-

generated to magic.<sup>28</sup> That is why it is so important to understand, and why the Book of Mormon is at such pains to make perfectly clear, that the Liahona was *not* magic. It did not work itself, like other divination arrows, in any sense or to any degree.

And yet it seems to have been an ordinary and familiar object, a "temporal thing," which could also

## What takes our time . . . ?

RICHARD L. EVANS



Last week we talked of the waste of worshiping the average, and that the average is neither an absolute nor an ideal, and is not something with which we should necessarily be satisfied, and this we quoted from Carlyle: "Men do less than they ought, unless they do all that they can."<sup>1</sup> In this day and season of many pressures, we frequently feel we ought to do more than we reasonably can. We feel both the shortness of time and the magnitude of our tasks. We think of knowledge we wish we had acquired, of talents we wish we had improved, of service we wish we had given, of things we wish were ready, of work we wish we had behind—and no matter how much we do each day, we frequently feel ourselves frustrated, and frequently spread ourselves so thin that we fail to be fully effective. We intend so much, but get caught in the mechanics of living, in the routine, in the daily detail, some of which is exceedingly essential and some of which is much less so. But no matter how much we do or fail to do, we must sometime arrive at an awareness that we have to choose, always, as to what we permit to take our time. This is a matter of daily, of hourly decision: what is most important, what to give first place, and what should be secondary. On this point James Bryce had this to say a half century or so ago: "If thoroughness is a virtue to be cultivated, still more is time a thing to be saved. The old maxim, 'Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well,' is less true than it seems, and has led many people into a lamentable waste of time. Many things are worth doing if you can do them passably well with a little time and effort, which are not worth doing thoroughly if so to do them requires much time and effort. Time is the measure of everything in life, and every kind of work ought to be adjusted to it. One of the commonest mistakes we all make is spending ourselves on things whose value is below the value of the time they require. . . ."<sup>2</sup> It isn't the feverish pace nor the sudden impulse that is most effective, nor the boastful biting off what is too big—but the steady purpose, the quiet conscience, the doing of duty, the finishing, the enduring, the seeing things through, the thoughtful quiet consistency—always with an awareness that among life's most important decisions is what we permit to take our time—"for which," said Benjamin Franklin, "God will certainly reckon . . . with us, when Time shall be no more."

"The Spoken Word," from Temple Square presented over KSL and the Columbia Broadcasting System, December 11, 1960. Copyright 1960.

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Carlyle.

<sup>2</sup>James Bryce, Address to the Students of Rutgers, October 1911.

<sup>3</sup>Benjamin Franklin, The Preface, *Some Fruits of Solitude*.

serve as "a type and a shadow," teaching us how God uses "small things" to bring about great purposes. As we said at the outset of this study, what interests us in Book of Mormon oddities is the *type* of thing they represent. And what person after considering the divination arrows, portable or enshrined, of other travelers in the desert will deny that in the Liahona we have an implement which, far from being the invention of a brain-sick imagination, was not without its ancient counterparts?

If we were to stop here, this would probably be the only article ever written about the Liahona that did not attempt to explain the meaning of the name. Fortunately the Book of Mormon has already given us the answer: "... our fathers called it Liahona, which is, being interpreted, a compass." Liahona is here clearly designated as an Old World word from the forgotten language of the fathers, which must be interpreted to present readers. But what is a compass? According to the Oxford dictionary, the derivation of the word remains a mystery; it has two basic meanings, but which has priority nobody knows: the one is "to pass or step together," referring always to a *pair* of things in motion; the other refers to the nature of that motion in a circle, "to pass or step completely," to complete a "circumference, circle, round," to embrace or enclose completely. Thus whether it refers to the ball or the arrows, "compass" is the best possible word to describe the device, though generations of Book of Mormon critics have laughed their heads off at the occurrence of the modern word in what purports to be an ancient book.

The usual practice in explaining the word *Liahona* is to consult dictionaries of Hebrew and cognate languages, searching out words that begin with li-, aho-, hona-, etc., and to speculate on the most likely combinations. It is a pleasant game that anyone can play, and since there are well over a hundred possible combinations which, if we allow for simple and well-known sound-shifts, can be run into thousands, there is plenty of fun for everybody—provided we don't get the idea that our guesses are significant. When we are dealing with possible meanings of possible syllable combinations, there is such latitude that rigorous demonstration is out of the question.

It is only when the Book of Mormon is both peculiar and specific—in such names as Paanchi, and such tales as the story of Joseph's two garments—that parallels become significant. Our own preference has always been for *le-yah-hōn-na*, literally, "to God is our commanding," i.e. "God is our guide," since *hōn*, *hwn*, is the common late Egyptian word for "lead, guide, take command." This might be supported

## FUNNY WEATHER

BY FRANCES GORMAN RISSER

Dame Nature thought she'd like to try

A brand new weather cake;  
She looked up on her pantry shelf,  
Deciding what she'd make.

"I'm tired of snow cake iced with sleet;

Perhaps a sunshine tart  
With whipped cloud icing would be good."

She said, but couldn't start.  
She thought of storm cloud chocolate sponge

Stirred with a west wind spoon,  
Or star cake filled with silver dew  
And beams fresh from the moon.  
At last she just threw everything

Into the bowl of sky  
And stirred and mixed and baked  
like mad,

A twinkle in her eye.  
Today it snowed while sun shone down

And dark clouds turned to white—  
Oh, what a funny weather cake  
Dame Nature made last night!

by the oldest and commonest of all known inscriptions on divination arrows: "My Lord hath commanded me," but as long as scores of *other* explanations are possible, it is nothing but the purest guesswork.

We should not leave the Liahona without noting a recent instance in which higher criticism has sought to discredit it. This is what Mrs. Brodie writes:

"Joseph's preoccupation with magic stones crept into the narrative here as elsewhere. The Jaredites had sixteen stones for lighting their barges . . . He had given the Nephites, on the other hand, two crystals with spindles inside which directed the sailing of their ships."<sup>29</sup> Here surely is "a type and a shadow"

—an example and a warning. In her zeal to convict Joseph Smith of a morbid preoccupation with stones, Mrs. Brodie, with characteristic accuracy and objectivity, has invented two new wonderstones of her own—"two crystals with spindles inside"—to take the place of the brass ball. Such are the ways and pitfalls of those who "with great swelling words" seek to explain away God's dealings with men.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

<sup>1</sup>So H. G. Tomkins, in *Palest. Explor. Fund Quart.*, 1884, p. 54. For a general treatment, see M. Burrows, *What Mean These Stones?* (New Haven, 1941), pp. 1-6.

<sup>2</sup>H. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, etc.*, (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952), pp. 1 f., 128-139, 143-8, 256-9.

<sup>3</sup>Such is the report of the printer, John H. Gilbert, in his Memorandum printed in the preface of W. C. Wood, *Joseph Smith Begins His Work*, Vol. I (Book of Mormon, 1830 First Edition) (S.L.C.: Deseret News Press, 1958).

<sup>4</sup>"The Stick of Judah and the Stick of Joseph," *Improvement Era*, Vol. 56 (Jan. to May, 1953).

<sup>5</sup>T. Fahd, "Une Pratique cléricale antique à la Ka'ba preislamique," *Semitica*, VIII (1958), p. 61.

<sup>6</sup>E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, I, 1247, s.v. *zalam*.

<sup>7</sup>H. Nibley, "The Arrow, the Hunter, and the State," *Western Political Quarterly*, II (1949), pp. 330 f.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 335.

<sup>9</sup>Thus the priests at Jerusalem used to practise divination "by tossing their writing-pens," J. Wellhausen, *Reste Arabischen Heidentums* (Berlin, 1897), p. 133. G. Jacob, *Altarabisches Beduinenleben* (Berlin, 1897), p. 110, n.2, comments on the resemblance between the shaking of Arab divination arrows and "the tossing of rune-staffs" by our own northern ancestors. In all Celtic languages divination by rods is called "throwing the wood," according to G. Dottin, in *Hastings Encyclop. of Relig. & Ethics*, IV, 788. For cases of balancing and spinning, K. F. Karjalainen, *Die Religion der Jurga-Völker, in Folklore Fellows Communications*, No. 63 (Helsinki, 1927), pp. 322 f.

<sup>10</sup>S. Culin, *Games of the North American Indians* (Washington: Smithsonian Inst., 1907), pp. 383, 33, 45.

<sup>11</sup>B. Meissner, *Babylonien u. Assyrien* (Heidelberg, 1926), II, 65, 275, citing Ezek., 21: 21ff.

<sup>12</sup>Abaris, the missionary who brought the cult of Apollo to Greece from the far North in prehistoric times, was guided in his travels by his patron's mantic arrow, just as later the traveling mystic Pythagoras had a special arrow "that showed him the way to go, and supplied him with substitutes for food and drink" in his wanderings; see Crusius, in Roscher's *Lexikon*, I, 2815-7, 2822; E. Bethe, in Pauly-Wissowa, *Realenzyklop. der Altertumswiss.*, I, 16. Instances of the magic arrow that shows where to find the princess, build the shrine, locate lost treasure, etc., may be found in Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington, Ind., 1932-6), D 1653; H. Bachtold-Staubli, *Handwörterbuch des dt. Aberglaubens* (Leipzig, 1927ff.), 6, 1957-8; P. Sebillot, *Le Folk-Lore de France* (Paris, 1907), 4, 116, etc.

<sup>13</sup>T. Fahd, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup>This phenomenon is discussed at length by Nibley, *op. cit.*, pp. 329-339.

<sup>15</sup>Lane, *Lexicon*, s.v. *wasm*.

<sup>16</sup>This was Hilprecht's theory, Nibley, *op. cit.*, pp. 338 f.

<sup>17</sup>Wellhausen, *op. cit.*, pp. 46 f. Throughout the East three is the usual number of arrows used in divination, G. Jacob, *op. cit.*, p. 110. F. Hommel, *Ethnologie und Geographie des alten Orients* (Munich, 1926), pp. 717, 733 f., speculates on the possible identity of the oracular arrows of the Arabic Hobal with the three divination arrows of Apollo, which "appear to have resembled Zulu divining sticks," according

to L. R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, IV, 188. The oracular gods of the Aztecs carried three divination arrows and an atlal stick, E. G. Seler, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* (Berlin, 1902), III, 341.

<sup>18</sup>II Nacc. VI, 7; Joma III, x (in Goldschmidt, II, 854); Levit. 16: 8.

<sup>19</sup>Fahd, *op. cit.*, pp. 67 f.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 68-70.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 71 f.

<sup>24</sup>S. Culin, *L.c.* The Indians would learn their fortunes for the coming year by consulting divination arrows, A. C. Fletcher & F. La Flesche, in *U.S. Bureau of Ethnology*, XXVII (1905-6), 274. La Flesche notes, *Smithsonian Rept.*, 1926, p. 494, that "each of the seven principal gentes (of the Omaha) is represented by one of these mystic arrows, which are used to foretell what will happen, good or bad, to each gens during the year following," and also that the Indians give their sons names which "refer to the mysterious characteristics of the divining arrow." A sacred arrow-hundle, the most prized possession of the Cheyennes, is compared by Fowkes, *Bur. Ethnol.*, XIII (1891-2), p. 116, to the Hebrew Ark of the Covenant, which also contained divination rods, for which see Nibley, *op. cit.*, p. 337, and Improvement Era, 56 (Feb. 1953), p. 91.

<sup>25</sup>Fahd, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>26</sup>Ezek., 21: 21-26, discussed by Meissner, *op. cit.*, II, 275. St. Jerome, an expert in Jewish customs, says these staves bore "cut or painted upon them the names of individuals," (cited by Wellhausen, *Reste*, p. 132). Fahd, p. 73, notes that the original meaning of the Hebrew word *qesem* "divination," is "to consult the arrows." Actually it means to cut the arrows, being the exact equivalent of the Old Norse expression *skera or upp*.

<sup>27</sup>Sir Charles Sherrington, *Man on his Nature* (N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1953), Ch. iv, "The Wisdom of the Body."

<sup>28</sup>W.M.F. Petrie, *Scarabs and Cylinders with Names* (Br. Mus., 1917), p. 4.

<sup>29</sup>F. M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (N.Y.: Knopf, 1947), p. 71.

## Old Enough to Choose

(Continued from page 93)

said that she wanted to become a librarian, but her mother wouldn't let her. She absolutely refused to allow it."

It was getting late in August, and still Mom wouldn't talk about anything but Briarwood. Miss Kerwin was waiting for my decision. I had asked her to put me on the list of applicants and had procured a transcript of my grades for her.

Today we're going to settle this, I thought, as I drove home from the hospital. I can't wait any longer. Dad was home, stretched out in the hammock on the patio. I slipped into a chair opposite him and kicked off my shoes.

"Where's Mom?"

Dad shook his head. "Out. She'll be along presently." As if in answer to his prophecy, we heard the crunch of tires on the gravel. Mom came around the corner, and dropped into a chair.

"Hi, Family! Is it ever hot!" She sat there a few minutes. "I stopped



Another First by **WICKS**

New Modern Design,

Custom-Built

Forward "3"

Majestic tone . . . instant response . . . fine blending of voices . . . custom-built to suit the individual buyer. All are characteristic of Wicks Pipe Organs; all are incorporated onto the new Forward "3".

Designed to fit into limited space, this instrument has two full keyboards and full pedal board. The pipes are completely enclosed, with blower built in . . . no extras, no wiring, no tinwork. The purchaser can select the wood finish that best suits his taste.

If, because of lack of space or finances, you or your church have been deprived of the musical perfection which only a real pipe organ can give, find out about Wicks new Forward "3".

Write today for information. No obligation.



THE HOUSE OF WICKS • WICKS ORGAN COMPANY • HIGHLAND, ILL.

## ON A 4c STAMP



Your Teacher Comes To  
Your Home Through

**Home Study**

Please send a free HOME STUDY catalog to

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Send to  
HOME STUDY  
Adult Education and Extension Services  
Brigham Young University  
Provo, Utah