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Chapter LIX

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—The Learning of Egypt

and became skilled in the pursuits of industry. As an example, we read, in the days of the Judges, of many of these people joining the people of Ammon (their former brethren), when they did begin to labor exceedingly, tilling the ground, raising all manner of grain, and flocks and herds of every kind.

CHAPTER LIX.

SCIENCE AND LITERATURE AMONG THE NEPHITES—THEIR
ASTRONOMY AND GEOGRAPHY—THE LEARNING OF
EGYPT.

THE NEPHITES were unusually happy in having, as the founders of their nation, men who were not only wise in the ways of the Lord, but also learned in the knowledge of the world. Most races that have made a mark in history have had to grope their way for centuries from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge. Little by little such races have advanced in the path of civilization, falling into manifold errors, and committing grievous blunders. With Lehi and his posterity it was not so. They were taken from the midst of a people who were surrounded by the most powerful and refined nations of antiquity, with whose wisdom and learning Lehi was undoubtedly well acquainted. We can readily conceive that the Lord, in planting this mighty and vigorous offshoot of the house of Joseph, on the richest and most favored land of all the world, would not only choose one of his most faith-

ful, but also one of his most intelligent servants, to commence the work. Indeed, on the very first page of the Book of Mormon, Nephi incidentally refers to the learning of his father; which learning, we infer from many passages in the sacred record, was obtained by Lehi in Egypt, as well as in Palestine, the associations between the inhabitants of these two countries being, in his day, very close, and the inter-communication very frequent.

As the foundation of their literature, Lehi and his colony carried with them a copy of the sacred scriptures, which contained not only an account of God's dealings with mankind, from the creation to the age of Jeremiah, but also the only complete history in existence of the people who lived before the deluge. The Egyptians, Chaldeans and other nations had mangled, mythic and jumbled-up accounts of man's history from the creation to the flood; but the Nephites possessed the details of this epoch in much greater completeness than even Christendom does to-day. These scriptures—historical and doctrinal—being numerous reproduced and scattered among the people, formed the basis of Nephite literature, giving them the immense advantage over all other people of possessing the unpolluted word of God in every age then past, supplemented by a correct and undisputed history of the results, to the world, of man's obedience or disobedience to these heavenly messages. How much more complete these scriptures were than the Bible of Christendom, is shown by the numerous references to the lives, and quotations from the teachings, of ancient worthies, Melchizedek, Jacob, Joseph and others; to the acts and infamies of Cain, etc., not found in the

Bible, as well as by lengthy quotations from ancient prophets, whose names—Zenos, Zenoch, Neum, Ezias—are not even mentioned in its pages. How much modern Christianity has lost by these omissions may be partially inferred from the beauty and grandeur of the extracts given in the Book of Mormon, from the writings and prophecies of Zenos alone. Take, as a single instance, his inspired parable of the wild and tame olive trees, given in the Book of Jacob; no more important, no more sublime prophecy can be found in the whole contents of the holy scriptures.

The connection of Lehi with Egypt, whose language he appears to have adopted, doubtless gave him a practical knowledge of the condition of the whole civilized world in his day, when the glories of Chaldea had departed, and those of Assyria and Egypt were passing away; when Babylon was at the zenith of its power, and the growing strength of Persia and Greece was as yet scarcely felt. To this personal information he, like Moses, added an acquaintance with the learning of the Egyptians, a people wise above all other uninspired races in the numerous branches of science and art in which they excelled. With this knowledge, combined with the information of immeasurable value contained on the sacred plates, the foundation was laid for a stable civilization, guided by past revelation and present inspiration; to which was added the experience of other nations, as beacon-lights to warn the Nephites of the dangers to which all communities are subject, and to guide them to havens of governmental and political safety.

The Nephites, then, from their earliest day had at least all the important historical and geographical

knowledge possessed by the most favored communities of the eastern hemisphere, with as much more as it pleased heaven to reveal. They had one advantage over the peoples they had left—they were well acquainted with them and their condition; but of the Nephites the dwellers in the old world knew nothing. With regard to the knowledge received through revelation, it is evident, from several incidental expressions scattered through the record, that the Lord did give to his faithful servants information with regard to historical and geographical matters. We will cite one instance: Jacob, the brother of Nephi, in one of his impressive exhortations, while encouraging his brethren (often somewhat downcast on account of their lonely condition, so far from the rest of mankind), remarks: We have been led to a better land, for the Lord has made the sea our path, and we are upon an isle of the sea. But great are the promises of the Lord unto they who are upon the isles of the sea; therefore, as it says isles, there must needs be more than this, and they are inhabited also by our brethren.

How could Jacob have known, except by revelation, that the vast continent which the Nephites inhabited was entirely surrounded by the waters of the great oceans? He and his companions had, but a few short years before, first landed on its shores, and had now explored but a very small portion of its wide extent, and there were no others in communication with them who could supply the information that North and South America were one immense island. Evidently the Lord had revealed this fact to them. And, by the way, this simple statement is strong testimony of the divine authenticity of the Book of

Mormon. At the time that this portion of the sacred plates was translated (A. D. 1827-8), or even when the whole book was published and the Church of Jesus Christ was organized (A. D. 1830), it was not known to modern science that the American continent was indeed an island. Joseph Smith could not have received knowledge of this fact, so unhesitatingly affirmed, from any learned geographer or practical navigator. The hope of centuries, in Europe, had been to discover a northwest passage to India, but to that date all attempts had met with disastrous failure, so far as the chief object was concerned. Little or nothing was then known of the North American coast, west of Hudson's Bay. It was not until after repeated expeditions, that in May, 1847, the truth of the statement of Jacob could be affirmed, from actual knowledge of the geographical features of the country, as at that date the explorations and surveys by land and sea, from east and west, were brought sufficiently near to leave the matter without a doubt. It was not until 1854 that the first ship's crew (that of Captain McClure), which ever sailed across the Arctic Ocean from the Pacific to the Atlantic, along the northern coast of America, returned from their perilous voyage. We thus find that human geographical knowledge could not have aided the prophet Joseph Smith in making this statement, had it originated with him and not with the son of Lehi.

While ancient Greek and other philosophers were groping among the fallacies of the absurd system of astronomy given to the world by Ptolemy, and teaching that the sun with all the stars revolved around the earth, the Nephites were in possession of the true

knowledge with regard to the heavenly bodies, etc. Possibly they were the only people of their age blessed with a comprehension of these sublime truths. It is altogether probable that among their scriptures were copies of the Book of Abraham, from which they could acquaint themselves with the beauties and harmonies of celestial mechanism. They undoubtedly had the writings of Joseph the son of Jacob, as these are quoted in the Book of Mormon; and, as the prophet Joseph Smith found the writings of Abraham and Joseph together in the Egyptian mummies, it is far from improbable that the Nephites, as well as the early Egyptians, possessed both. To show the astronomical knowledge possessed by the Nephites, we will draw attention to the words of two of their prophets. The first extract is from the reply of Alma to Korihor, the Anti-Christ (B. C. 75), when the latter asked for a sign to prove the existence of a God. His words are: Thou hast had signs enough; will ye tempt your God? Will ye say, Show unto me a sign, when ye have the testimony of all these thy brethren, and also all the holy prophets? The scriptures are laid before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion; yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form, doth witness that there is a Supreme Creator. The next quotation is from the reflections of one of the servants of God (probably Mormon) inserted into the Nephite history of about seventy years later. The writer is speaking of the greatness and goodness of God, and among other things declares: Yea, by the power of his voice doth the whole earth shake; yea, by the power of his voice doth

the foundations rock, even to the very center; yea, and if he say unto the earth, move, it is moved; yea, if he say unto the earth, thou shalt go back, that it lengthen out the day for many hours, it is done; and thus according to his word, the earth goeth back, and it appeareth unto man that the sun standeth still; yea, and behold, this is so; for sure it is the earth that moveth, and not the sun. Thus we find that in these points, the astronomical knowledge of the Nephites was, at least, equal to that of the moderns.

CHAPTER LX.

THE ART OF WAR AMONG THE NEPHITES—THEIR WEAPONS,
ARMOR AND FORTIFICATIONS—MORONI'S LINE OF DE-
FENSE.

NO sooner had the separation taken place between the families of Nephi and Laman, and the foundation been laid for the two nations that for a thousand years contested for the supremacy on this continent, than Nephi, to protect his people from the threatened attacks of the Lamanites, found it necessary to prepare for war. He took the sword of Laban, and, using it as a pattern, fashioned many others, which he distributed among his subjects as a means of defense. These swords, with cimeters, spears, javelins, darts, bows and arrows, slings and stones, appear to have been the principal weapons of war used by the Nephites throughout their entire national existence, though