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The Lamanites (A Book of Mormon Sketch)

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Abstract: This series sketches out the character of the Lamanites. Reynolds also writes concerning Sariah, Lehi's wife. The first part begins the series.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS' MILLENNIAL STAR.

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles; these are the beginnings of sorrows."—MARK xiii, 8.

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THE LAMANITES.

(A Book of Mormon Ske'ch.)

BY ELDER GEORGE REYNOLDS.

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Whilst the history of the people of Nephi has a peculiar charm to all believers in the great latter-day dispensation, the Lamanites, also, must claim a portion of their regard, not only because of the peculiar position they occupied in ancient American history, but also because of the important part their modern representatives will play in the great drama of the last days, and in the unfolding of events, diverse, terrible and glorious, that will precede the millennial reign of Christ on the earth. And when considering the part the Lamanites will fill in this pregnant age, we must not narrow down our ideas to the remnants of the scattered and spoiled tribes that Gentile injustice, greed and lust have almost extinguished, but we must remember the millions of Lehi's children who dwell in Mexico, Central America, Peru, Chili, Brazil, etc., in whose veins flow the unmixed blood of Jacob, many of whom even now (a faint foreshadowing of the coming era), can be found among the wise and the learned,

rulers and governors in the lands of Mannasseh, only exceeded in culture and refinement by the nations in which the blood of Ephraim predominates, and unrecognizedly wields the powers of Jehovah's First-born.

The history of the ancient Lamanites may be consistently divided into three epochs:

The first, when their nation was almost entirely composed of the literal descendants of Laman, Lemuel and Ishmael.

The second, when it consisted of those, no matter their descent, who rejected the Gospel and fought against its principles.

The third, when the name was used to designate those who, after the dispensation opened by the personal appearing of the Messiah on the American continent, turned away from His teachings, and again promulgated the old falsehoods, nurtured the old hatreds, and resurrected and delighted in the ancient abominations.

In the consideration of the Lamanite character, we must always bear in

mind that from their standpoint they had right and justice on their side. They had no records to which they could appeal, but had to rely entirely on the traditions that were handed down to them from generation to generation. These traditions taught them that their fathers—Laman and Lemuel*—were robbed both of the kingly and priestly authority by their younger brothers—Sam, Nephi, Jacob and Joseph—of whom Nephi was the leader, and that he, by cunning and falsehood, usurped the rights pertaining to the first born, lorded it over his brethren, and was accepted by part as their king, whilst those to whom this dignity rightfully belonged very properly rejected this arrangement, claimed their just dues, and thus gave rise to the division of the colony and the establishment of the two hostile powers. The Nephites thus came to be regarded as usurpers and robbers whom to destroy was virtue, to despoil was righteous gain. It was because of these traditions, implanted in the womb, nurtured at the breast, and strengthened by every succeeding year of life, that the Lord showed such abundant mercy to this people whenever they manifested a desire to turn from their loathsomeness and blindness, and learn of His ways that they might walk in His paths.

The natural disposition, peculiarities of character, etc., of the founders of the Lamanite race, were strongly impressed on their after generations. If we read carefully the account given of the conduct of Laman and Lemuel from the time they are first introduced to the reader of the Book of Mormon, through the toils and troubles in the wilderness and on the sea, as well as those after their advent on Joseph's greater Land of Promise, to the time of the separation of the two peoples (Nephites and Lamanites), and analyze their conduct, we cannot but be impressed with the thought that the most striking peculiarities of the La-

manitish character can readily be found embodied in Laman and Lemuel. Such character as was theirs would not be likely to give birth to a race distinguished for the nobler virtues and more exalted wisdom of the races who rule in the strength of right and righteousness. We find the Lamanite people bloodthirsty, indolent, revengeful, shiftless and careless, and their rulers despotic and tyrannical. All power of life and death appears to have been in the hands of the ruling monarch, who, if a strong character, carried out his autocratic will to its utmost limit; if weak, he had to simulate a regard for his people, and flatter them into the execution of his purposes. There was also a marked want of originality in the Lamanite character; but, as is the case with most semi-civilized races, imitation was largely developed. Where the Nephites led they followed, especially in the tactics and strategy of war, in fortifications, armor, weapons, etc.

One phase of Lamanite character, originating, doubtless, in their Israelitish ancestry, is worthy of our warm commendation; it was the great strength of their domestic affections, their love for their wives, their kindness to their families. Nor is there anything in this incompatible with the ferocity of their character or their blood-thirstiness in war. It must not be forgotten, as an illustration, that in Britain, whose people talk more of home and home virtues than almost any other race, at the commencement of this present century there were two hundred and twenty-three crimes on the calendar the punishment for which was death, a most savage code.† In the earlier ages of the Lamanite nationality, rigid chastity was observed by the men as well as by the women; indeed, it may be said that whilst they manifested most of the prominent vices of semi-barbarous people, they also possessed the virtues that such races, uncontaminated by a more luxurious mode of life, generally show. Nor would it be consistent, nor historically true, to give one general description and apply it to the

* The pretended grievance of the descendants of Ishmael was that he had been ensnared by the cunning of Nephi to leave his home, etc., in Jerusalem, to suffer the miseries of their wandering in the wilderness, and all the evil that had since overtaken them.

† See McKenzie's "Nineteenth Century."

whole Lamanite race, for as their numbers increased the state of society amongst them grew more complete, and we read of different grades of civilization in their midst. It must not be forgotten that they occupied a much wider extent of country than did the Nephites, and in this vast area were found people who dwelt in cities and cultivated the arts to the extent generally found amongst races of the same grade and characteristics, whilst others degraded in life and habits wandered in the wilderness, building no houses, forming no permanent abiding places, but meandering from place to place, and depending for food and clothing upon the animals they caught in the chase, the fishes that abounded in the waters, and whatever they could steal from the hated Nephites, or indeed of their somewhat more highly civilized fellow-countrymen.

The idea has been presented to the writer, from a study of the peculiarities of the children of Lehi and Sariah, that possibly the mother was descended from a somewhat stiff-necked and back-sliding family in Israel, and at the time of her marriage she partook measureably of that influence, but was elevated and improved by the holy example and loving life of her husband. It most certainly appears that her children, from Laman to Nephi, gradually and unmistakably improved. Laman was a vicious, spiteful, faithless, wayward and determined character, and was the leader in all the outbursts against God and his father that imperilled the journey through the wilderness and on the sea. Lemuel was another Laman toned down and modified, he inclined to evil, but his character was not as strong in any direction as was his elder brother's; he would follow, but seldom lead. Gam was also somewhat lacking in strong traits of disposition, but his leaning was towards righteousness when there was some one in the van. He stood to Nephi as Lemuel did to Laman, as a backer or assistant. Then we have Nephi, a godly ruler by nature, a lover of virtue, a man of unfaltering faith, as much greater than the rest of his brothers in active righteousness as

Laman was in evil. The younger ones—Jacob and Joseph—also partook largely of the pre-natal influences incidental to the peculiar circumstances and surroundings of their parents in the wilderness. They inherited the devotion to God's will and strong bodily constitution with which their father and mother were blessed at the time of their birth.

It is but little we are told of the history of the Nephites during the first four hundred years of their national existence; it is still less that we know of the Lamanites. The parting of the two branches of Lehi's family was evidently in anger, at any rate it was so with those who joined themselves to Laman and Lemuel. These two brothers had long murmured against Nephi's growing influence, now they sought his life. Such was the condition of affairs when the Lord warned Nephi to take those who would go with him and flee into the wilderness. Nephi unhesitatingly obeyed and journeyed a great distance to the northward, leaving the Lamanites in undisputed possession of their first homes on the land of promise. But this did not suit the excited passions of the elder brothers, they did not crave peaceful homes and undisturbed sovereignty of a land so vast, that by its side the broad bounds of Solomon's extended sway were dwarfed into insignificance. They sought authority over all their brethren, and revenge for fancied wrongs. With this unhallowed feeling burning in their hearts, they followed the Nephites to their new land of rest.

The condition of the Lamanites was now pitiable, they had cut themselves off from the presence of the Lord, the priesthood was withdrawn from them, the records and scriptures were beyond their grasp: hatred and malice reigned supreme in their souls; they had no inclination for the arts of peace; they were restless, cunning and idle, whilst they sought in the wilderness the food necessary to sustain life. Already the curse of God was falling upon them; least they should appear pleasant to Nephite eyes, their fair and beautiful skins grew dark and repulsive, their habits became loathsome and filthy, and this same skin

of darkness came upon the children of all those who intermarried with them.

So quickly did they follow up the Nephites, that in less than forty years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem, there had already been war and contentions between the two peoples, both of whom had established a monarchical form of government.

Whilst the early Nephites were polygamists, and unfortunately unrighteous ones, the Lamanites were monogamists, which form of marriage they appear to have ever after retained. As we shall have to refer so often to their vices, we must, in justice to them, here insert the description of their domestic virtues given by Jacob, the son of Lehi. He says (134*), "Behold, their husbands love their wives, and their wives love their husbands; and their husbands and their wives love their children; and their unbelief and their hatred towards you, is because of the iniquity of their fathers."

Even as early as Jacob's days,

* The figures refer to pages in the Book of Mormon.

"many means were devised to reclaim and restore the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth" (149), but it was all in vain, for they cherished an eternal hatred towards their Nephite brethren, and would accept no good thing at their hands. These efforts to reclaim were diligently continued in the days of Enos, the son of Jacob, but with no better success. The Lamanites were growing more hardened rather than to the contrary. Enos describes them (151) as wild, ferocious and blood-thirsty, full of idolatry and filthiness, feeding upon beasts of prey which they devoured raw. They dwelt in tents, and wandered from place to place as their fancies led, or their necessities compelled. Their clothing was simply a short skin girdle about their loins; they shaved their heads, and were skilful in the use of the bow, the axe, and the cimeter. Such was the sad depth of degradation to which they had fallen in the second generation, which, like the previous one, expended its meagre energies in repeated depredations upon the Nephites.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

MR. LAWRENCE OLIPHANT'S SCHEME FOR THE COLONIZATION OF PALESTINE BY THE JEWS.

Although Mr. Lawrence Oliphant has returned from Constantinople without having obtained the signature of the Sultan to the Irade authorizing the formation of a company for the purpose of colonizing the fertile and unoccupied lands to the east of the Jordan with Jews, he by no means despairs of ultimate success. The present political situation at Constantinople is altogether exceptional, and it is quite impossible that it can last. The opposition to all reform and to all foreign influence calculated to ameliorate the present desperate condition of the Turkish Empire, emanates from the Sultan and from the fanatical clique by whom he is surrounded at the palace, and is directed, not against Mr. Oliphant's scheme alone, but against every project which has been suggested during

the past year either by foreign governments or individuals, no matter how politically or pecuniarily advantageous they may have been. This attitude of fixed resistance to foreign influence, applied as it has been to the Treaty obligations of Turkey, has placed the English Government as well as the Governments of other European Powers under the necessity of adopting a course of action which must sooner or later break down the Palace obstructiveness, and restore to power the Turkish statesmen who are willing and able to adopt a liberal and enlightened policy. Mr. Oliphant received the most positive assurances from the Minister of Foreign Affairs that his scheme had been unanimously approved even by the existing Cabinet, and that the Sultan's suspicions of all foreign proposals alone prevented it.