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Time Occupied in Translating the Book of Mormon

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Abstract: This article is an analysis of how long it took to translate the Book of Mormon and how many pages were completed per day. From April 7 to May 15 Joseph Smith translated 503 pages and from May 15th to June 11th he translated 120 pages.

TIME OCCUPIED IN TRANSLATING THE BOOK OF MORMON.

BY G. R.

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Objection has been made to the divinity of the Book of Mormon on the ground that the account given in the publications of the Church, of the time occupied in the work of translation is far too short for the accomplishment of such a labor, and consequently it must have been copied or translated from some work written in the English language, most probably from Spaulding's "Manuscript Found." But at the outset it must be recollected that the translation was accomplished by no ordinary means. It was done by divine aid. There were no delays over obscure passages, no difficulties over the choice of words, no stoppages from the ignorance of the translator; no time was wasted in investigation or argument over the value, intent or meaning of certain characters, and there were no references to authorities. These difficulties to human work were removed. All was as simple as when a clerk writes from dictation. The translation of the characters appeared on the Urim and Thummim, sentence by sentence, and as soon as one was correctly transcribed the next would appear. So the enquiry narrows down to the consideration of this simple question, how much could Oliver Cowdery write in a day? How many of the printed pages of the Book of Mormon could an ordinary clerk transcribe from dictation in a day? When that is determined, divide the total number of pages in the Book of Mormon by that number and you have the answer in days.

It now becomes important to discover when the translation was commenced and when it was finished. This cannot be determined to a day, but enough is known for our purpose.

When Oliver first visited Joseph some little had been translated, exactly how much is not known. The next question is. When did that visit occur? We will let Oliver answer. He writes (Times and Seasons Vol. I., page 201): "Near the time of the setting of the sun, Sabbath evening,

April 5, 1829, my natural eyes for the first time, beheld this brother. He then lived in Harmony, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. On Monday, the 6th, I assisted him in arranging some business of a temporal nature, and on Tuesday, the 7th, commenced to write the Book of Mormon."

In the History of Joseph Smith, we read: "During the month of April I continued to translate and he (Oliver) to write with little cessation, during which time we received several revelations." And again: "We still continued the work of translation, when, in the ensuing month (May 1829) we, on a certain day went into the woods to pray." Oliver also states: "These were days never to be forgotten—to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated with the Urim and Thummim, or, as the Nephites would have said, 'Interpreters,' the history or record called the Book of Mormon."

Thus we see these two young men bent the whole energy of their souls towards the accomplishment of this most important work. They united their youthful zeal "day after day, uninterrupted" and "with little cessation" to the labor of translation. It requires very little imagination to understand how diligently and earnestly they toiled, how they permitted nothing to interfere with their labor of love, how they devoted every hour, until fatigue overcame them, to the divinely imposed task (and young and vigorous as they were it was not a little that would tire them out) while curiosity and other far worthier feelings would give zest and inspiration to their labors; as they progressed we can well imagine how their interest in the narrative increased until they could scarcely tear themselves away from their inspired labors even when their minds and bodies called for food and rest. The enthusiasm with which Oliver speaks of those days shows

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plainly that this was the case, and we cannot reasonably think that Joseph was any less interested than he.

Now let us examine when these two brethren commenced their marvelous work. Two series of dates have been given. Oliver's given above, and another in the history of Joseph Smith, which gives the dates as the 15th and 17th of April, or ten days later. Oliver's has this evidence of its correctness, that, as he states, the 5th, 6th, and 7th of April, 1829, fell on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, which, of course, those ten days later would not. Again the event being of more importance in his life than in Joseph's, he was more likely to recollect the details, besides, being a better scholar and penman, it is more probable that if any record of the circumstance was made at that time he made it. But really there is no discrepancy. The dates 15th and 17th in the Pearl of Great Price, in Joseph's history, etc., are unfortunate typographical errors, or mistakes in printing. In the original manuscript in the Historian's Office the dates are the same as those of Oliver Cowdery—the 5th and 7th. But the mistake having once been printed it has been copied out of one journal or book into another until nearly all our works have perpetuated the blunder. Of course it is impossible to tell now whether the mistake was made by a copyist in the Historian's Office or by a compositor at the printer's.

From Joseph's and Oliver's narrative we learn how far they had progressed in the work of translation at the time of the visit of the angel, John the Baptist, and their baptism. This took place on May 15th of the same year. It was because they found in the teachings of the risen Redeemer to the Nephites certain instructions regarding baptism that they were led to inquire of the Lord regarding this ordinance, and their inquiry led to the angel's visit. Where are these teachings found? In the third book of Nephi; some, probably the very ones

that so deeply impressed the minds of these young men, on page five hundred and three of the Book of Mormon (latest edition). Then it is evident that between April 7th and May 15th they had translated as much as makes five hundred and three pages of the printed Book of Mormon. How much is this a day? Between these two dates, including April 7th but not May 15th, there are thirty-eight days, which would make about thirteen pages a day, if we allow nothing for what was previously transcribed. A swift writer copying from dictation could write four such pages in an hour, as we have demonstrated experimentally, an ordinary writer about three. But allowing that Oliver Cowdery was a very slow writer, and that he only copied at the rate of a page in half an hour, even then they would only have had to work six and one half hours each day to accomplish the task; and if they rested entirely on Sundays about one hour more. So we see, making no allowance for the work already done, allowing Oliver to have been a slow penman for his profession—a schoolmaster—and admitting that they ceased from their labors on the Sabbath, still it was only necessary for them to do a short day's work, especially for two young men in the prime and vigor of life; and yet allow ample time for the reception of revelations (which were given through the Urim and Thummim) and the performance of other duties that possibly occasionally called for their attention.

To show how easy such an effort would be we will state that President George Q. Cannon has informed us that when he translated the Book of Mormon into the language of the Sandwich Islanders, he frequently translated as many as eight or ten pages a day. This was far heavier work to do alone, and without the assistance of the Urim and Thummim, than it was for Joseph and Oliver together to translate from twelve to fifteen pages with the all-important assist-

ance of the "Interpreters."

After the date of their baptism, the brethren appear to have worked more leisurely. Early in June they moved to Mr. Peter Whitmer's, at Fayette, Seneca County, New York, who had kindly offered them a house. Here the work was continued, John Whitmer, one of the sons, assisting them very much by writing. Joseph states: "Meanwhile our translation was drawing to a close, we went to Palmyra, Wayne County, New York, secured the copyright and agreed with Mr. Egbert Grandin to print five thousand copies for the sum of three thousand dollars." The copyright was secured

on June 11th, so it appears that between May 15th and the last-named date, or twenty-six days, they had not quite translated one hundred and twenty pages—not five pages a day—or they would have finished their work. The exact date the translation was entirely completed is not known, at least we have not been able to find it out.

Thus we see between the dates given, Joseph and Oliver had ample time to do the work claimed by and for them, the objection falls to the ground, and the truth is again vindicated.—*Juvenile Instructor*.

UTAH NEWS.

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November 30th was observed in Utah as a day of thanksgiving.

J. H. Haverly, the celebrated American manager, has leased the Salt Lake Theatre.

The members of the Utah Commission, having finished their labors for the season, have gone to their homes in the east.

F. M. Pomeroy, one of the "Mormon" Pioneers, died at Mesa City, Arizona, October 29th, of heart disease, aged nearly 61 years.

At last accounts, 40,000 head of cattle had been shipped from Utah this year. The exportation is not so heavy as last season's.

Dr. Mattie Paul Hughes has been appointed resident surgeon of the Deseret Hospital, in place of Dr. Ellen B. Ferguson, who has resigned.

Some rather violent wind storms were experienced north and south of Salt Lake City on the 16th ult. In some places houses and barns were unroofed, fences and telegraph poles blown down, and other mischief perpetrated. No loss of life is reported.

The Utah Commissioners and their assistants having finished the counting of the ballots cast on the 7th of November, and finding that Hon. J. T. Caine had received the vast majority of the votes polled, issued to him the certificate of election as delegate to Congress for Utah Territory. Judge Van Zile, his political opponent, through his attorney, made a feeble attempt at protest, but all to no purpose.

Mr. Henry Grosjean, French Commissioner of Agriculture to the United States, was in Salt Lake City about the middle of November. He was under instructions from his government, to investigate the Utah system of irrigation. He also investigated "Mormon" Church government, discipline, etc., and remarked that the system of organization was the most complete of any yet brought to his notice.

On the afternoon of Friday, November 17th, Mrs. Annie Gallifant, refusing to answer certain questions before the Grand Jury, was ordered by Chief Justice Hunter to be confined in the Penitentiary until she should answer the questions. The lady was in an extremely delicate condition, and it was feared the punishment might inflict serious injury. The act is generally considered as a cruel outrage.