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Bible Quotations in the Book of Mormon and the Reasonableness of Nephi's Prophecies

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Abstract: This article discusses the close similarities between the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 and in 3 Nephi 12-14, and suggests that Joseph Smith used the available language of the New Testament to ease the burden of translating.

BIBLE QUOTATIONS IN THE BOOK OF MOR- MON; AND REASONABLENESS OF NEPHI'S PROPHECIES.

LETTERS OF INQUIRY FROM AN INVESTIGATOR, AND A
REPLY THERETO BY B. H. ROBERTS.

[In view of a recent newspaper discussion on how the Prophet Nephi (writing in the dim past when he could not have known the story of Jesus, and his disciples, except through the spirit of prophecy) might have used expressions and ideas which justified his translator, Joseph Smith, in giving those ideas in phraseology found in the New Testament and other books written many years after his prophecies were uttered, the following correspondence, bearing directly on this point, will prove of special interest to missionaries, students and investigators. The letters explain primarily, how almost literal quotations from the King James' translation of the Bible might reasonably be found in the Book of Mormon, although the Prophet Joseph Smith is by many accredited with having mechanically translated directly through the Urim and Thummim the records composing that sacred book.

Members of the M. I. A. who are just now studying the subject will receive valuable supplemental information from these pages, confirming the position taken in the Manual; viz., that the translation was not mechanical, but was performed by aid of the Urim and Thummim, through the inspiration of God to the Prophet Joseph Smith who expressed himself in words that he could understand, and of which he was the master.

The inquirer is an attorney-at-law whose home is in Iowa. His letters are specially interesting, as they convey the thoughts of an intelligent investigator on the subject. Neither they nor the reply thereto need any further comment. It remains only to be remarked that here we have the difficulty put in its strongest light by an intelligent inquirer; an explanation following; and then a letter showing the effect of such a

reasonable explanation on an unbiased mind, and how it appeals to him. Attention is particularly called to the fact that such an explanation does not detract in any manner from the Book of Mormon as an inspired work acknowledged of God as correct, nor make more improbable the manner of its introduction.—*Editors.*]

SPENCER, IOWA, October 22, 1903.

*President Joseph F. Smith,
Salt Lake City, Utah.*

HONORED SIR:—I take the liberty of addressing you on a matter that has been of unusual interest to me, thinking that if your time is too much occupied to warrant you in giving it attention you could kindly refer it to some competent party who would be willing to do so.

Some four or five years ago, through the influence of some elders who often made their home with us while working in this section of our state, my wife united with your Church; and has since that time enjoyed her religion as well as one could, when so far removed from all Church associations, and this has, as a matter of course, caused me to investigate the matter as far as my opportunities would admit, and it has been with an honest purpose and view of learning the truth, and accepting the same when I was in possession of sufficient evidence to enable me to say that the real truth had been found. I have found no difficulty in arriving at the point where I can honestly say that if the original Gospel of Jesus Christ is possessed and practiced by any church on the earth today, it is with your Church; but the obstacle that I have run up squarely against, and cannot harmonize, is the Book of Mormon. I have read it a great deal, and I have no quarrel with the way it was found, or the manner in which it was brought into existence; for God in so doing made use only of natural laws, and human instruments to do it, but I do find this difficulty with the book itself, and I have consulted several elders on the proposition, and they have all told me that it was new to them, and they could not and would not attempt to answer it, but referred me to some one higher in authority, so I have come directly to the head of the Church, there being no higher authority to whom I can apply.

I find that Christ in quoting to the people on this side of the

water, the third and fourth chapters of Malachi, quotes, according to the Book of Mormon, in the identical text of King James' version, not missing a word. I find chapters of Isaiah quoted practically in the same way. I find that in many instances, in his talks with the people, and to his disciples here, he used the identical language of King James' version, not even omitting the words supplied by the translators. Now, I know that no two parties will take the same manuscript and make translations of a matter contained therein, and the language of the two translators be alike; indeed, the language employed by the two parties will widely differ. These translations are from different manuscripts, and from different languages, and still it appears in the Book of Mormon as King James' translation. I can conceive of no other way in which such a coincidence could have occurred, within the range of human experience, except where one writing is copied from another, and then it takes the utmost care to get them exactly alike, word for word, and letter for letter as this is. The foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints rests, it seems to me, on the honesty and authenticity of the Book of Mormon, and if that is not just what it claims to be, and was not obtained just as Joseph claims it to be given to him, then you are the same as other churches, a mixture of truth and error—still practicing more truth than they, but without authority. Now, what I want to know is, how do you as a Church account for these things appearing in the Book of Mormon in the identical language of King James' version, when we know his version is faulty, and the same translators could not have made it twice alike themselves? Did Joseph copy it from the Bible, or did the Lord adopt this identical language in revealing to Joseph?

These things may seem very insignificant to you, but they stand absolutely in the way of my getting any nearer the truth, or being able to say that I believe enough to enable me to follow my wife into the Church that she has accepted. Some of the elders have told me that I am too practical in my make-up, but things that are not practical are of no use to me, and I have never been able to discover anything in the religion of Christ that is not practical, little as I know of it. I am frank to say that I have found in the members of your Church the most honesty and sincerity that I

have ever found anywhere. Begging your pardon for trespassing so far on your valuable time, I am,

Very respectfully yours,

H. CHAMBERLAIN.

SALT LAKE CITY, November 7, 1903.

H.. Chamberlain, Esq.,

Spencer, Iowa.

DEAR SIR:—Your letter of October 22nd, addressed to President Joseph F. Smith, making inquiry concerning the Book of Mormon, and asking the explanation of the sameness between some passages in it with passages that correspond in our English translation of the Jewish Scriptures, etc., etc., has been referred to me, with a request that I write you on the subject. The difficulty which you point out has, of course, been recognized by believers in the Book of Mormon, but I do not know that I can say that the Church as yet has settled upon any explanation which could be regarded as an authoritative view on the subject. Each one has been left to settle the matter upon the lines which seem most reasonable to him; as a matter of fact, though our opponents have frequently called attention to the difficulty in question, it has not occasioned any particular anxiety in the minds of our own people. Accepting the overwhelming evidences that exist for the truth of the Book of Mormon, we have regarded that difficulty, with some others, as of minor importance which would in time be satisfactorily settled. Still, I realize the reasonableness of the objection that may be urged against the Book of Mormon from the point of view from which you present it, and realize that it constitutes a real difficulty, and one, too, in which we have no word from the Prophet, Joseph Smith, or those who were immediately associated with him in bringing forth the Nephite record, to aid us in a solution of the matter. We are left, therefore, very largely to conjecture, based on the facts in the case, which facts are most tersely put in your esteemed communication; viz.:

First. It is a fact that a number of passages in the Book of Mormon, verses and whole chapters, run closely parallel in matter and phraseology with passages in Isaiah, Malachi and some parts of the New Testament.

Second. It is a fact that no two persons will take the same manuscript and make translations from one language into another, and the language of the two translations be alike.

Third. It is a fact that the translations of the words of Isaiah, of Malachi, and the words of the Savior, in the Book of Mormon, are generally supposed to be independent translations from different manuscripts or records and from different languages.

Then, of course, comes your point, how can the strange fact be accounted for, viz., that the translation in the Book of Mormon corresponding to Isaiah, Malachi and the words of the Savior, are in the language of King James' translation?

Of course, you will remember that according to the Book of Mormon, the Nephite colony carried with them to America so much of the Old Testament as was in existence at the time of their departure from Jerusalem (600 years B. C). The prophecy of Malachi (chapters 3 and 4) quoted in the Book of Mormon was supplied by the Savior, and that the Nephites engraved portions of these scriptures in their records, and this both in the Hebrew, and what the Nephites called the reformed Egyptian. I simply mention this in passing, that you may remember afresh how these passages came to be in the Nephite record, and that you may remember that the Nephites had the Jewish scriptures in much the same form as they were to be found in Judea. When the Savior came to the western world and appeared to the Nephites, he had the same message to present to them that he had presented in Palestine; the same ordinances of the gospel to establish, a similar church organization to found, and the same ethical principles to teach. The manner of the Savior's teaching would doubtless lead him to present these great truths in the same forms of expression he had used in teaching the Jews, so that in substance what he had taught as his doctrines in Judea he would repeat in America. This is mentioned also, by the way, that it may appear reasonable to you that in a general manner the Savior must have taught the people in the western hemisphere substantially the same things that he taught the people in Palestine. With this remembered, I think we find a solution of the difficulty you present in the following way: When Joseph Smith saw that the Nephite record was quoting the prophecies of Isaiah, of Malachi, or the words of the Savior, he too

English Bible and compared those passages as far as they paralleled each other, and finding that in substance, in thought, they were alike, he adopted our English translation; and hence, we have the sameness to which you refer.

It should be understood also, in this connection, that while Joseph Smith obtained the facts and ideas from the Nephite characters through the inspiration of God, he was left to express those facts and ideas, in the main, in such language as he could command; and when he found that parts in the Nephite record closely paralleled passages in the Bible, and being conscious that the language of our English Bible was superior to his own, he adopted it, except for those differences indicated in the Nephite original which here and there make the Book of Mormon version of passages superior in sense and clearness. Of course, I recognize the fact that this is but a conjecture; but I believe it to be a reasonable one; and indeed the only one which satisfactorily disposes of the difficulty you point out.

There exists, however, another difficulty; and that is, while the foregoing explanation may account for the *sameness* in phraseology between these Book of Mormon passages and King James' translation, there remains to be accounted for the *differences* that exist between these Book of Mormon passages and those which parallel them in King James' translation. I am led to believe that you have been so absorbed, perhaps, in tracing out the sameness in the expressions that you have failed to note the differences to which I allude, for you make the claim of strict identity between the Book of Mormon and King James' translation too strong when you say that there is used "the identical language of King James' version, not even omitting the words supplied by the translators." Throughout the parallel passages, there are here and there differences (with the single exception, perhaps, in the chapters from Malachi, and even in these there is a slight difference), and a close comparison of these differences will show that in the matter of supplied words by King James' translators, there are very frequent changes, and in all the changes that appear, the Book of Mormon passages are far superior in sense and clearness. I quote you a few passages in illustration:

BOOK OF MORMON.

Thou hast multiplied the nation and increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoils!—II Nephi xxix, 3.

BIBLE.

Thou hast multiplied the nation *and not* increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil!—Isaiah ix, 3.

Here you will find the Book of Mormon passage more in harmony with the facts in the case. How inconsistent the passage is in Isaiah, "Thou hast multiplied the nation and not increased the joy!" And yet that statement is followed by this one—"They joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil!" But in the Book of Mormon it is perfectly consistent, for there it says "Thou hast multiplied the nation, *and increased the joy.*" The following passages also indicate the superiority of the Book of Mormon version:

BOOK OF MORMON.

And when they shall say unto you, seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and mutter; should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to hear from the dead?—II Nephi xviii: 19.

BIBLE.

And when they shall say unto you, seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and mutter; should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead.—Isaiah viii: 19.

As an illustration of my statement that the Book of Mormon version of passages is sometimes markedly different from our common English version in the matter of supplied words,* I quote you the following passages:

BOOK OF MORMON.

Say unto the righteous, that it is well with them; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.

Woe unto the wicked! for they shall perish; for the reward of their hands shall be upon them—II Nephi xiii: 10, 11.

BIBLE.

Say unto the righteous that *it shall* be well *with him*; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.

Woe unto the wicked! *it shall be ill with him*; for the reward of his hands shall be given him—Isaiah iii: 10, 11.

If you will carefully compare the passages in the Book of Mormon, and some of the chapters in Matthew, say the 12th chapter of III Nephi, with Matthew v; the 13th chapter of III Nephi, with Matt.

* When the translators of our English Bible found it necessary to supply words to make clear the meaning in English, they printed those words in *Italics*, and it is to these words that reference is made in the above.

6th chapter; 14th chapter of III Nephi, with Matt. 7th chapter, you will also find throughout that there are differences between the two, as much so as between the Catholic Bible (generally called the Douay Bible) and King James' translation, which, of course, are independent translations by different scholars. I give the following passages by way of illustration:—

KING JAMES' BIBLE.	BOOK OF MORMON.	DOUAY BIBLE.
Matt. ch. v: verse 3.	III Nephi ch. xii: verse 3.	Matt. v: verse 3.
Blessed <i>are</i> the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.	Yea, blessed are the poor in spirit who come unto me, for their's is the kingdom of heaven.	Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.
Verse 4.	Verse 4.	Verse 5.*
Blessed <i>are</i> they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.	And again, blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.	Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
Verse 6.	Verse 6.	Verse 6.
Blessed <i>are</i> they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.	And blessed are all they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost.	Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.
Verse 7.	Verse 7.	Verse 7.
Blessed <i>are</i> the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.	And blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.	Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
Verse 10.	Verse 10.	Verse 10.
Blessed <i>are</i> they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.	And blessed are all they who are persecuted for my name's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Verse 12.	Verse 12.	Verse 12.
Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great <i>is</i> your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.	For ye shall have great joy and be exceeding glad, for great shall be your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets who were before you.	Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven; for so they persecuted they the prophets that were before you.

* Verses four and five in the Douay translation are transposed.

KING JAMES' BIBLE.

Verse 13.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Verse 14.

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

Verse 15.

Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Verse 17.

Think not that I am came to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

Verse 18.

For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

BOOK OF MORMON.

Verse 13.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the salt of the earth; but if the salt shall lose its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? The salt shall be thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

Verse 14.*

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the light of this people. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

Verse 15.

Behold do men light a candle and put it under a bushel? Nay, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light to all that are in the house.

Verse 17.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil.

Verse 18.

For verily I say unto you, one jot nor one tittle hath not passed away from the law, but in me it hath all been fulfilled.

DOUAY BIBLE.

Verse 13.

You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt lose its savor, wherewith shall it be salted: It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out and to be trodden on by men.

Verse 14.

You are the light of the world. A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid.

Verse 15.

Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house.

Verse 17.

Do not think that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil.

Verse 18.

For amen I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot, or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled.

* The Savior at this point, (also at verses 15 and 16) in his Book of Mormon discourse, seems to address these particular passages to the Twelve Apostles.

KING JAMES' BIBLE.

Verse 19.

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach *them*, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 20.

For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the *righteousness* of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Verses 23, 24.

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

BOOK OF MORMON.

Verse 19.

And behold I have given unto you the law and the commandments of my Father, and ye shall believe in me, and that ye shall repent of your sins, and come unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Behold, ye have the commandments before you and the law is fulfilled.

Verse 20.

Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Verses 23, 24.

Therefore, if ye shall come unto me, or shall desire to come unto me, and rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, go thy way unto thy brother, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come unto me with full purpose of heart, and I will receive you.

DOUAY BIBLE

Verse 19.

He therefore that shall break one of these least commandments, and shall so teach men, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but he that shall do and teach, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 20.

For I tell you, that unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Verses 23, 24.

If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee: leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother: and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift.

Observe, in passing, that the remaining passages quoted from the Book of Mormon are addressed directly to the Twelve Apostles, to whom they especially apply, not to the multitude; and may it not be that when Jesus gave the same instruction in Judea he made a like distinction?

KING JAMES' BIBLE.

Chapter vi: verse 25.

Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

BOOK OF MORMON.

Chapter xiii: verse 25.

And now it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words, he looked upon the twelve whom he had chosen, and said unto them. Remember the words which I have spoken. For behold, ye are they whom I have chosen to minister unto this people. Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?

DOUAY BIBLE.

Chapter vi: verse 25.

Therefore I say to you, be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat nor for your body what you shall put on. Is not the life more than the meat: and the body more than raiment?

Verse 26.

Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather in barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Verse 26.

Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

Verse 26.

Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor do they reap, nor gather into barns: and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than they?

Verse 27.

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

Verse 27.

Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

Verse 27.

And which of you by taking thought, can add to his stature one cubit?

Verses 28, 29.

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Verses 28, 29.

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lillies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.

Verses 28, 29.

And for raiment why are you solicitous? Consider the lillies of the field how they grow: they labor not, neither do they spin. But I say unto you, that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these.

KING JAMES' BIBLE.

Verse 30.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, *shall he* not much more *clothe* you, O ye of little faith?

Verses 31, 32, 33.

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or Wherewith shall we be clothed? for after all these things do the Gentiles seek: For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Verse 34.

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: For the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

BOOK OF MORMON.

Verse 30.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, even so will he clothe you, if you are not of little faith.

Verses 31, 32, 33.

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed? For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

Verse 34.

Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient is the day unto the evil thereof.

DOUAY BIBLE.

Verse 30.

And if the grass of the field, which is today, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, God doeth so clothe: how much more you, O ye of little faith?

Verses 31, 32, 33.

Be not solicitous therefore, saying: What shall we eat: or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the heathens seek. For your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and his justice: and all these things shall be added unto you.

Verse 34.

Be not therefore solicitous for tomorrow. For the morrow will be solicitous for itself; sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.

It is quite apart from the subject in hand, I know, to call attention to the fact that the matter from verse 25 of the 13th chapter of 3rd Nephi to the close of these quotations, is addressed to the Twelve, not to the multitude; but I cannot refrain from doing so, since it illustrates in a way the value of the Book of Mormon as an interpreter of the Bible. You will remember, perhaps, that this "take no thought" doctrine is a point in the Christian teaching that has always been assailed, with more or less success, by unbelievers in Christianity. The contention is that these doctrines of Messiah, if followed by the world, or if even generally practiced among

Christians, would destroy all industry, stop the wheels of progress, and throw the world back into barbarism. I think the Book of Mormon supplies the key for the right solution of this difficulty. That is, that these particular instructions were to apply only to this very body of men, the twelve apostles, called out of the Church to abandon the things of the world, and devote themselves exclusively to the work of the ministry; and God stands pledged to open the way for supplying their material necessities.

Well, as I say, to return to the matter more immediately in hand, the explanation I have suggested accounts for the *sameness* in phraseology between these parts of the Book of Mormon and King James' translation. But how are these *differences* to be accounted for? They unquestionably arise from the fact that the Prophet compared the King James' translation with the parallel passages in the Nephite records, and when he found the sense of the passage on the Nephite plates superior to that in the English version he made such changes as would give the superior sense and clearness. This view is sustained by the fact of uniform superiority of the Book of Mormon version wherever such differences occur. It is also a significant fact that these changes occur quite generally in the case of supplied words of the English translators, and which in order to indicate that they are supplied words, are printed in *Italics*. The verification of this matter, however, I must leave to you, as the limits of a letter already long will not admit of my pointing this out in detail.

I fancy to all this, however, another inquiry will rise in your mind, and that is, since Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon by means of the Urim and Thummim, why is it that he did not give throughout a translation direct from the Nephite plates, instead of following our English Bible, since translation by means of the Urim and Thummim must have been so simple and so easy? It is at this particular point where, in my opinion, a very great mistake is made, both by our own people, and our friends in the world. That is, translation by the Urim and Thummim is not so simple and easy a thing as it might at first glance appear. Many have supposed that the Prophet Joseph had merely to look into the Urim and Thummim, and there see, without any thought or effort on his part, both the Nephite characters and the translation in English.

In other words, the instrument did everything and the Prophet nothing, except merely to look in the Urim and Thummim as one might look into a mirror, and then give out what he saw there. Such a view of the work of translation by Urim and Thummim, I believe to be altogether incorrect. I think it caused the Prophet the exercise of all his intellectual and spiritual forces to obtain the translation; that it was an exhausting work, which taxed even his great powers to their uttermost limit; and hence, when he could ease himself of those labors by adopting a reasonably good translation already existing, I think he was justified in doing so. In order that you may have a fuller consideration of this particular point, I send you, under separate cover, our Young Men's Manual for 1903-4, and in chapter seven, of the Book of Mormon treatise, you will find the manner of translating the Book of Mormon considered at length.

Permit me to say in conclusion that I am personally delighted with the spirit of your communication, and am pleased with this opportunity to assist you in your investigations, and I trust that the suggestions here offered, as an explanation of the difficulty you present, will have the effect of removing it out of your way; but whether they will be altogether satisfactory or not, this I would suggest to you: consider more especially the positive testimony that exists for the truth of the Book of Mormon, particularly following the injunction of Moroni, in chapter ten, verses four and five of his book, wherein he makes the promise that those who will ask God the eternal Father for a testimony of the truth of the Nephite record, shall receive such a testimony by the power of the Holy Ghost; "and by the power of the Holy Ghost," as Moroni teaches us, "we may know the truth of all things."

By the way, would you have any objection to my using your letter, though not necessarily using your name, as an introduction to an article on this subject, to appear in some of our Church publications, wherein I will give a more full and careful treatise upon it than in this communication, though along the same lines?

Trusting that your investigation will finally result in bringing you to the knowledge of the truth of the Book of Mormon, I am,

Most truly yours,

B. H. ROBERTS.

SPENCER, IOWA, November 13, 1903.

Hon. B. H. Roberts,

Salt Lake City, Utah:

MY DEAR SIR:—Your very kind and generous letter, answering my communication to President Smith, was received yesterday, together with the pamphlet, and I can assure you that I appreciate your efforts in my behalf, and that I am sure that they will greatly aid me in my search for the truth in religion, and the religious world. It has seemed like going into chaos after it, but after quite an acquaintance with several of your elders that have been in this country, among whom I may name J. F. Thomas, of Manassa, Col.,—a very bright man, I may say,—and a slight acquaintance with President Lyman, once president of the Northwestern Mission, I came to the conclusion that if it was to be found in these latter days on the earth, it was with your people. Of course, I realized that if the Book of Mormon was not just what it purported to be, the whole fabric must fall to the ground, so far as being an inspired religion, and would then only be worth what good one could get out of it as the best organized and controled religion on earth; and I have often been at a loss to know whether this phenomenal success of your people has not been due to this perfect system founded upon natural laws, which is only another name for God's laws—rather than from any special interference on his part.

Well, upon studying the Book of Mormon, I, of course, found these portions of King James' version of our Bible, and judging it by the applied law of human experience, as we lawyers learn to judge everything, I could account for it in no other way, than that Joseph Smith copied it therefrom, and I am free to say that your reasons for his so doing are not only probable, but the only solution that can be given. I know that your people, many of them, are of the impression that the actual language appeared to Joseph Smith upon the Urim and Thummim, in the identical language produced to us in the Book of Mormon, for some of the elders here told us that they so understood it; and it has always seemed to me that if that theory must be followed, no thinking man of even reasonable education could ever find faith enough to accept the book at all. I believe and think that your suggestion is the only

theory upon which it is possible to advocate its divine character. It seems to me that God, so far as I know, has never supplied man with what he already possessed, and Joseph Smith already had language with which to express his ideas, and all that was required in addition from God was, that he furnish him with the thought, and then let him express it in his own language. I never could for a moment believe that God is interested in placing his approval on King James' translators' style of translating, nor upon the composition of the English language therein adopted. I do not see wherein your theory detracts in any manner from the value of the Book of Mormon, as an inspired work acknowledged by God as authentic, nor makes more impracticable the manner of its introduction.

I am a little surprised that this particular feature of the book was not discovered, and the real fact learned, while the Prophet was still with us. I do not believe any of his associates were in a position to say positively just how it was done, for Joseph was in the dark, and the matter was visible only to him, and he evidently never thought of this matter occurring. I had also noticed the differences that you mention, or some of them, and many that you do not mention; and some of them I had attributed to a little carelessness in copying, but I had not recognized the fact before, that the changes, as a general thing, add to the plainness and good sense of the record. You are aware of the fact that we lawyers become very critical in regard to evidence, and when we come to things that are so far removed from the range of all human experience—standing as it does alone—as the introduction of the Book of Mormon into the world, there seems to be no evidence outside of a knowledge of the fact that can remove all doubt, and not leave the thought in the mind that someone is mistaken; and yet, in the present condition of the world, I am free to say that I can see no way that the chaos and uncertainty now existing can be cleared away except by new and continued revelation; but it was such a curious way to do it; and yet, who could suggest a better plan?

It is hard to go outside the pale of common experience, and I believe that the only way that any person can be fully satisfied in this matter, if at all, must be, as you suggest, by the gift of the

Holy Ghost. But there you have me again. That is as far outside of any experience within my knowledge as the other. I have always been taught to look upon the Holy Ghost as something that everybody had a right to expect in some intangible way, but never would ever have any real acquaintance with. That it once was a potent factor in religion, as a witness for the truth, but had, for some reason, gone out of the business, and that it was no use to look for it now,—in fact, I am nearly as bad as the parties that Paul found, who had “not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.”

Your elders claim to me that the signs still “follow those that believe” with you, and when that is proved to anyone to his entire satisfaction, it seems to me that there would not need to be any further evidence of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon, for they both came together, and cannot be separated; but I have no knowledge of that. I could see that if one could get in touch with the Holy Ghost, as you people advocate, all things would be clear, and I do not believe it can ever be made absolutely satisfactory in any other manner; but you see I am talking now about something with which I am an entire stranger. I have asked for light as earnestly as a man could, and have received no further testimony, than the fact that as I investigate, my desire grows stronger to know the truth, and I become more impressed that I am on the right track, and I have less faith in all other religions.

But I have digressed from the subject. There are other things that lead me to believe that the Prophet Joseph used his own language exclusively in the translation, one of them being the fact that he speaks of the coming of the Messiah, and the salvation that was to come through him to the Gentiles, with the same facility that one speaks of a past event, and shows a greater knowledge of those matters than the disciples did while here on earth with Christ; and as there is nothing to compare with it, in clearness, in the records that the Nephites took with them from Jerusalem, they could not have got those ideas out of the records; and I naturally come to the conclusion that Joseph, having a full knowledge of these facts, clothed the ideas caught from the record in much stronger language than it would really have warranted. Of course.

I may be entirely wrong in this surmise, but I am not able to account for it in any other way.

Another strange thing is, that a book that has come into the world in our day and age, and having attained so much notoriety, even before it came from the press, should be so hard to account for, if the origin attributed to it by its friends is false. In all other cases some one is always ready to come to the front and claim the authorship, as soon as any piece of literature becomes famous; but no one has ever claimed to be the father of this production; and, since the complete explosion of the Spaulding theory, so far as I know, no one of its enemies has advanced any theory as to how it did originate. Some, of course, are still holding on to the Spaulding theory, but they are back numbers, and they were in a recent article warned not to advance it any more.

Well, I have already made this letter far too long, and I must ask your pardon for trespassing so far on your valuable time. I intend to push my investigation until I am satisfied either that this matter is right or wrong, or beyond my reach. Every man should be interested that far in the truth.

Thanking you for the interest you have taken in this matter with an entire stranger, I will further say that anything that may be published in any of your literature (except the *Deseret News*, I take and thoroughly read that), I would appreciate, where it tends to throw real light upon this subject. I am willing that you should use my letters, or any part of them, wherever and whenever you think you can accomplish any good with them, for I am not ashamed of my investigation.

I am very respectfully yours,

H. CHAMBERLAIN.