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External Evidences—The Evidence of the Church

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

EXTERNAL EVIDENCES.—THE EVIDENCE OF THE CHURCH.

The evidence of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to the Book of Mormon grows out of the relation of the book to the Church. That is to say, the Church is a sequence of the coming forth of the book. Not that a description of the Church organization as we know it is found in the book, or that its officers or their functions are named in it, much less that the extent and limitations of their authority are pointed out in it. All that pertains to the Church organization, and largely to the development of its doctrines, all that pertains to the Church, in fact, comes of a series of direct revelations to Joseph Smith subsequent to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. These revelations were given for the specific purpose of bringing into existence the Church as it now exists, the depository of the divine authority, in the new dispensation, and the instrumentality for proclaiming the truth to the world, and perfecting the lives of those who receive it. The Church, in other words, is the after-work of the inspired Prophet who translated the Nephite record into the English language. Bringing into existence the Church and developing its doctrines was the continuation of the work that began with the first vision of Joseph Smith, the visitation of the angel Moroni, and the translation and publication of the Nephite record. Does this continuation of the work as seen in the organization of the Church and the development of its doctrines justify the expectations awakened by the Book of Mormon, and the manner of its coming forth? Has anything worth while come because of the revelation of the Book of

Mormon? The principle, "By their fruits ye shall know them" may have a wider application than making it a mere test of ethical systems or of religious teachers. It may be applied as a test to anything claiming to be a truth. So that what has resulted from the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, is a question of importance. The answer to that question may do much either for the book's vindication or its condemnation; may establish its truth or prove it to be utterly unworthy of its claim to divine origin. I hold it to be a self-evident truth that a revelation from God must not only contain matter within itself that concerns men to know and that is worthy of God to reveal, but it must lead to results worthy of revelation and worthy of God. It is here therefore that the Church becomes a witness to the truth of the Book of Mormon; for while neither the Church organization nor all its doctrines come immediately from a description of either of these in the book's pages, yet the Church is an outgrowth of that movement of which the Book of Mormon may be said to be an important factor. The Book of Mormon cannot be true and the Church of Christ fail to come into existence as an accompanying fact. Indeed, several predictions in the Book of Mormon clearly indicate the establishment of the Church as a sequence to the coming forth of that record, as witness the following:

And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall commence his work among all nations, kindred, tongues and people, to bring about the restoration of his people upon the earth.^a

The Savior, also, in predicting the accomplishment of his work in the last days, when the Nephite record should

^aII. Nephi xxx: 8.

come forth, in speaking of the Gentiles among whom it should be brought forth, says :

If they will repent, and hearken unto my words, I will establish my church among them, and they shall come in unto the covenant, and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land for their inheritance.^b

To the first Nephi, also, it was given to behold the establishment of the church of Christ in the last days, for he said :

I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few. * * * * nevertheless, I beheld that the church of the Lamb, who were the Saints of God, were also upon all the face of the earth; and their dominions were small, because of the wickedness of the great whore whom I saw.^c

Moreover, side by side with the unfolding of the successive facts which brought the Book of Mormon into existence, there was a series of revelations given predicting and making for the establishment of a Church organization. In evidence of which statement I refer to the first visions of Joseph Smith as described by the Prophet himself in the first volume of the Church History,^d and especially as related by him in the letter written to Mr. John Wentworth in 1842; also the Prophet's account of the several visits of Moroni to him, and the prophecies of that angel concerning the coming forth of the work of the Lord, "and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days;"^e also the eighteen sections of the Doctrine and Covenants from the 2nd section to the 20th, inclusive, being those revelations

^bIII. Nephi xxi: 22.

^cI. Nephi xiv: 12.

^dChapter i.

^eHistory of the Church, Vol. I., ch. ii.

given between September, 1823, to the fore part of April, 1830—the period during which the Book of Mormon was being revealed and translated—and in which prophetic declarations concerning the coming forth of the Church are frequently made. The last revelation of the series—section twenty—is the one in which the first practical directions are given towards effecting the organization of the Church.

Who ever will look through these writings, to say nothing of frequent allusions to the same matter throughout the Book of Mormon itself, will be convinced that the coming forth of the book must result in bringing into existence the Church.

The Church so brought into existence, cannot be true and the Book of Mormon false. If the book be not true, Joseph Smith is an imposter, a false prophet, and an imposter and false prophet cannot found a true Church of Christ; therefore, if the Church be the true Church of Christ, it is evidence quite conclusive that the book so inseparably connected with it, so vitally related to it, is also true. Of course, the conception is possible that both the Church and the book may be false, but it is inconceivable that one could be true and the other false. It follows therefore that whatever facts exist in the organization and doctrines of the Church which tend to establish it as being of divine origin, tend also to establish the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

Here we have a field of evidence and argument well nigh inexhaustible; but much of it, I may say all of it with which I care to deal, has already been used in volume one of *New Witnesses*, as follows:

Chapter XIV: “Fitness in the Development of the New Dispensation.”

Chapter XV: "The Evidence of Scriptural and Perfect Doctrine."

Chapter XXIV: "The Church Founded by Joseph Smith, a Monument to His Inspiration."

Chapters XXV-XXVI: "Testimony of the Inspiration and Divine Calling of Joseph Smith, Derived from the Comprehensiveness of the Work He Introduced."

Chapter XXVII: "Evidence of Inspiration Derived from the Wisdom in the Plan Proposed for the Betterment of the Temporal Condition of Mankind."

Chapters XXVIII, XXIX, XXX: "Evidence of Divine Inspiration in Joseph Smith Derived from the Prophet's Doctrines in Regard to the Extent of the Universe, Man's Place in It, and His Doctrine Respecting God."

The evidences and the arguments in all these chapters, then, must be considered as appropriated here, and made part of my argument for the truth of the Book of Mormon, as well as for the divine origin of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After thus appropriating all this body of evidence and argument from these chapters in the first volume of *New Witnesses*, I feel justified in saying: It is the Church that bears witness to the truth of the Book of Mormon rather than the Book of Mormon which bears witness to the Church. Nor is this said in disparagement of the Book of Mormon. It is only saying that what comes of the book is greater than the book itself, that the stately oak is greater than the acorn from which it grew—a giant tree; that the whole is greater than a part; that the work in all its fullness is greater than one of the incidents in which that work had its origin.