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Internal Evidences—The Spirit of the Book

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CHAPTER XLIII.

INTERNAL EVIDENCES.—THE SPIRIT OF THE BOOK.

“I can no more remember the books I have read than the meals I have eaten,” said Emerson, “but they have made me.” In this way the American philosopher recognizes the simple truth that the reading of books has something to do with the making of a man—that they affect the mind. A book has a spirit as distinctly as a painting or of a piece of sculpture has “feeling”—of course I mean a real work of art into which something from the soul of the artist has passed. The best thing about a painting or piece of sculpture is said to be that which cannot be described; so also the best part of a book is the spirit of it, which may not always be describable. And that elusive, mysterious quality we call its spirit may arise from something quite apart from its rhetoric, or logic or diction. It may be even as the voice of God: not in the strong wind, that rends the mountains and breaks in pieces the rocks before the Lord; not in the earthquake nor in the fire; but in the still, small voice which follows the wind and earthquake and fire.^a So with a book: its spirit may owe its existence to its simple truth—to the spirit of truth in them that made it.

“Do you ever think,” said a writer in one of our popular magazines—“Do you ever think what is the effect of a book on your mind? * * * * Is your mind purer for it, or clearer? Has it filled your mind with good or bad images? Has it raised your standard or lowered it? * * * * Every book you read and understand affects you for bet-

^aSee I. Kings xix.

ter or worse. It has some effect upon you, and if you are sane you are bound to find out what that is."

In common with all books the Book of Mormon has its spirit, produces its effects upon the minds of men; and as it claims to be a work originally written and also translated through the inspiration of God, and deals primarily with sacred things, it is to be expected that the spirit of this book will have not only a good, but even a divine influence; that it will be of a faith-promoting, doubt-dispersing, comfort-bringing character. Its effects upon the minds of men, therefore, may be another test of its claims to a divine origin; and to that test I now submit it.

In his work entitled "My First Mission," the late President George Q. Cannon makes the following statement respecting the influence exerted over his spirit by reading the Book of Mormon under the trying conditions in which he was placed while serving as a missionary in the Hawaiian Islands:

Some of my readers may be placed in circumstances similar to those which surrounded me a part of the time on the Sandwich Islands, and it may be profitable to tell them how I kept from losing courage and becoming home-sick. My love for home is naturally very strong. For the first year after I left home I could scarcely think about it without my feelings getting the better of me. But here I was in a distant land, among a people whose language and habits were strange to me. Their very food was foreign to me, and unlike anything I had ever before seen or tasted. I was much of the time separated from my companions, the Elders. Until I mastered the language and commenced preaching and baptizing the people, I was indeed a stranger among them.

Before I commenced holding regular meetings I had plenty of time for meditation and to review all the events of my short life, and to think of the beloved home from which I was so far separated. It was then I found the value of the Book of Mor-

mon. It was a book which I always loved. If I felt inclined to be lonely, to be low spirited, or home-sick, I had only to turn to its sacred pages to receive consolation, new strength and a rich outpouring of the Spirit. Scarcely a page that did not contain encouragement for such as I was. The salvation of man was the great theme upon which its writers dwelt and for this they were willing to undergo every privation and make every sacrifice.

What were my petty difficulties compared with those afflictions which they had to endure? If I expected to share the glory for which they contended, I could see that I must labor in the same Spirit. If the sons of King Mosiah could relinquish their high estate, and go forth among the degraded Lamanites to labor as they did, should not I labor with patience and devoted zeal for the salvation of these poor red men, heirs of the same promise?

Let me recommend this book, therefore, to young and old, if they need comfort and encouragement. Especially can I recommend it to those who are away from home on missions. No man can read it, partake of its spirit and obey its teachings, without being filled with a deep love for the souls of men and a burning zeal to do all in his power to save them.

In the experience and sentiments expressed in the foregoing passage, Elder Cannon but voices the experience and sentiments of very many Latter-day Saints, including thousands of missionaries who have felt all that he has described with reference to the effects of the Book of Mormon upon his spirit. The experiences of this host of believers may be properly appealed to as evidence for the effect of the book upon their minds; and I cannot believe but that it is also an evidence of its truth. Men have gone to the Book of Mormon in dispondency, and have come away cheered; they have gone to it in sorrow, and have come away comforted; they have gone to it at times when overwhelmed for the moment by the mists which the speculations of men sometimes throw over truth, and have come away from it

enlightened—with faith and hope and charity renewed. It created for them a firmer faith in God. In the presence of its spirit doubt took wings. Its moral and spiritual standards they find to be the highest and noblest. Indeed so perfect is its morality that no one has yet been able to bring a complaint against it on the ground of moral defect; and it was doubtless a consciousness of its moral excellence that led the Prophet Joseph Smith himself to declare on one occasion, when in council with the Twelve Apostles, that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and that a man could get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by following any other book whatsoever.^b If in its historical parts believers find it dealing with events that exhibit selfishness, unholy ambitions, and all the follies and crimes common to all times and all nations and races of men, they never find its treatment of such things of the kind that blazons evil deeds, or consecrates crime, much less of the kind that cannonizes the vicious. In its pages they see things in their true light. There is no shuffling, but evil deeds receive their proper condemnation in the simple, straightforward language of its inspired men. For believers the Book of Mormon differs from the books of men, as the works of nature differ from the works of men. And with what relief men of deep spiritual natures turn from the works of men to the works of nature! From artistic parks, to nature's jumbled wilderness; from well kept gardens, to even desert plains or wild valleys; from grass-lined, men-made lakelets to some huge waterbody, mountain rimmed, of unknown depths and wonderous coloring; from crowded cities with their din and strife to mountain tops, or lonely ocean's shore, where the freed soul in solitude can hold communion with

^bThe Prophet's Journal, November 28, 1841.

his God—where deep may call to deep, and inspiration gather for life's battles!

All this and more believers find in the pages of the Book of Mormon, and the book that breathes such a spirit must surely have somewhat of divinity in it; and the existence of the divine spirit in the book must be somewhat of evidence that its claims are honest, and its contents true. This, or else we must believe that men gather grapes of thorns, and figs of thistles; that impure fountains send forth pure streams!

I shall be told, however, that the class of witnesses here appealed to, viz., those believers in the Book of Mormon who receive from its pages this spiritual comfort, are for the most part simple folk, who bring little or nothing in the way of scholarship to the examination of the book; and few of them ever stop to consider it in a thoroughly analytical manner at all. I shall not deny the charge, in truth, I rather rejoice in the fact; and I think I am justified in such rejoicing since I must needs think it takes on some of the coloring of that joy which Jesus expressed when he said, on the occasion of some of his simple minded disciples exulting in the possession of certain spiritual graces—"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight."^c The fact that this spiritual grace and comfort from the volume of American scripture is enjoyed chiefly by people of humble spirit, is an evidence to me that a certain truth expressed by ancient apostles is universal in its nature—good in all ages and among all people, viz,

^cLuke x: 21.

“God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”^d

When men speak of pride, their hearers have in mind, chiefly, the “purse-proud”—the pride of the rich made haughty by the power which wealth gives; or else they think of “birth-pride”—the distinction that comes from the accident of birth; or of “political-pride,” that comes from civic position; or perhaps the “pride of the brave and strong,” gratified by recognition in high martial stations. But there is another pride more offensive to God perhaps, than pride in any one of the forms mentioned. I mean “intellectual pride,” the pride of knowledge, of opinion, the pride which so often attends upon the worldly learned man who has not as yet progressed so far in learning as to bring to the mind that humility of spirit which rightly belongs to, and will at last be found with, profound learning. For my own part I can think of nothing that could be a greater offense against the majesty of God than for a man with his limited intellectual power presuming to pass judgment upon and reject the things of God, because, forsooth, these things do not conform to his opinion of what the things of God should be like; or because the way in which they are revealed does not conform to the manner in which he thinks God should impart his truths. Such pride always has and always will separate men from receiving knowledge by divine communication. While the meek and humble of spirit, borne down with the sense of their own limitations, find grace and spiritual enlightenment and comfort in the things which God reveals; and often arrive at hidden treasures of knowledge, and even of wisdom, unknown to the intellectually proud whom God resisteth.

In this connection, too, it should be remembered the

^dJames iv: 6. Peter v: 5.

class of people for whom the Book of Mormon was especially prepared. While a revelation to all the world, and containing profound truths the depths of which man by human wisdom has not yet sounded, it is primarily designed for the benighted, native American races, fallen from the high station their forefathers once held in God's favor; and its simple plainness and faith-promoting power will yet constitute it a mighty instrumentality in bringing those races to a knowledge of God, and a true understanding of their relationship to him. Hence I say, it is pre-eminently fitting that this book should be of such character as to appeal to the understanding of the simple, and those who are willing and happy to be taught of God. And then, in any event, religion is and ought to be a "simple business," since among even highly civilized nations there are many unlearned people who can understand only that which is simple, and religion concerns alike the ignorant and the learned, the poor and the rich. But plain to the point of being simple as the Book of Mormon is, when men are made aware of its power to rest the mind, to cheer the heart, to uplift the soul, they go to its pages for help as the lame and blind and sick were wont to go to old Bethsaida's pool, to whose waters an angel's touch had imparted healing virtues.

The spirit of the Book of Mormon, then, its beneficent influence upon men's minds, are among the strongest evidences of its truth. This will appear all the more if the reader will call to mind the fact that this influence does not arise from the cleverness of its construction; for its structure, as men view books, is complex, confusing and clumsy. Its spirit and influence do not arise from its strictly logical treatment of historical events, much less from its philosophical treatment of them; compared in these particulars with the works of Hume, Macaulay, Gibbon, Hallan or George

Bancroft, it could be esteemed contemptible. Nor do the beneficent effects of the book upon the minds of men arise from its rhetoric, its beauty of diction, or the pleasing correctness of its language; in all these particulars it is admitted to be faulty; it has few or none of these merely human excellencies for which it may be desired. Whatever power it possesses to cheer, comfort and encourage men; whatever power to build up hope, create faith or promote charity, exists not by virtue of its human excellencies, but in spite of their absence; therefore such influence for good as it possesses must be attributed to the Spirit of God in which it was written, and by which it is permeated; and by reason of the presence of that spirit in it, the book itself must be accorded a divine origin.

The Poetry the Book of Mormon has Inspired.

As might be expected, the Book of Mormon has inspired considerable poetry among those who have accepted it as a revelation from God; and as some idea of its influence upon minds of poetic temperament may be revealed by these effusions, I present some of them.

I first quote Parley P. Pratt, one of the earliest poets of the New Dispensation, and one of its most zealous Apostles. In his *Key to Theology*, one of the most luminous works yet published by the Church, when treating of the "Rise, Progress and Decline of the Science of Theology in the Western Hemisphere"—he opens that chapter with the following:

The spirit world is moved, the silence broken,
The ancient Seers from out the ground have spoken.
The appointed years on time's fleet wings have fled,

And voices whisper from the ancient dead.
 Volumes of truth the sacred archives yield,
 The past, the glorious future, stand revealed.

It was the revelation of the Book of Mormon and the historical truths which it reveals respecting the blessings of the Lord upon Israel that inspired the following hymn:

“The morning breaks, the shadows flee;
 Lo! Zion’s standard is unfurled!
 The dawning of a brighter day
 Majestic rises on the world.

The clouds of error disappear
 Before the rays of truth divine;
 The glory, bursting from afar,
 Wide o’er the nations soon will shine.

The Gentile fulness now comes in,
 And Israel’s blessings are at hand;
 Lo! Judah’s remnant, cleansed from sin,
 Shall in their promised Canaan stand.

Jehovah speaks! let earth give ear,
 And Gentile nations turn and live;
 His mighty arm is making bare,
 His cov’nant people to receive.

Angels from heaven and truth from earth
 Have met, and both have record borne;
 Thus Zion’s light is bursting forth,
 To cheer her children’s glad return.

The following hymn was also inspired by the Book of Mormon:

An angel from on high,
The long, long silence broke,
Descending from the sky,
These gracious words he spoke:
Lo! in Cumorah's lonely hill,
A sacred record lies concealed.

Sealed by Moroni's hand,
It has for ages lain,
To wait the Lord's command,
From dust to speak again.
It shall again to light come forth,
To usher in Christ's reign on earth.

It speaks of Joseph's seed,
And makes the remnant known
Of nations long since dead,
Who once had dwelt alone.
The fulness of the gospel, too,
Its pages will reveal to view.

The time is now fulfilled,
The long expected day;
Let earth obedient yield,
And darkness flee away;
Open the seals, be wide unfurled
Its light and glory to the world.

Lo, Israel filled with joy,
Shall now be gathered home,
Their wealth and means employ
To build Jerusalem;

While Zion shall arise and shine,
And fill the earth with truth divine.

Also the following on the destruction of the Nephites
and the glory that is yet to come to their posterity.

O, who that has seen o'er the wide spreading plain,
And read o'er the last scenes of woe?
Four-and-twenty with Mormon were left to behold
Their nation lie mould'ring below.

The Nephites destroyed, the Lamanites dwelt
For ages in sorrow unknown,
Generations have passed till the Gentiles at last,
Have divided their lands as their own.

O, who that has seen o'er the wide spreading plain,
The Lamanites wander forlorn,
While the Gentiles in pride and oppression divide
The land they could once call their own;

And who that believes does not long for the hour
When sin and oppression shall cease,
And truth, like the rainbow, display through the shower,
That bright written promise of peace?

O, thou sore afflicted and sorrowful race,
The days of thy sorrow shall end!
The Lord has pronounced you a remnant of His,
Descended from Abra'm His friend.

Thy stones with fair colors most glorious shall stand,
And sapphires all shining around,
Thy windows of agates, in this glorious land,
And thy gates with carbuncles abound.

With songs of rejoicing to Zion return,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee,
The powers of heaven among you come down,
And Christ in the centre will be.

And then all the watchmen shall see eye to eye,
When the Lord shall bring Zion again,
The wolf and the kid down together shall lie,
And the lion shall dwell with the lamb.

The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God,
And nothing shall hurt nor destroy,
And these are the tidings we have to proclaim,
Glad tidings abounding with joy.

After Elder Pratt the most prolific of the early poets in the Church, and one who perhaps caught most truly the genius of the work and reduced it to poetic expression, was W. W. Phelps. He contributes the following inspired by the Book of Mormon.

O, stop and tell me, Red Man,
Who are you, why you roam,
And how you get your living;
Have you no God, no home?

With stature straight and portly,
And decked in native pride,
With feathers, paints and brooches,
He willingly replied:

“I once was pleasant Ephraim,
When Jacob for me prayed,
But O, how blessings vanish,
When man from God has strayed!

Before your nation knew us,
Some thousand moons ago,
Our fathers fell in darkness,
And wandered to and fro.

And long they've lived by hunting
Instead of work and arts,
And so our race has dwindled
To idle Indian hearts.

Yet hope within us lingers,
As if the Spirit spoke,
He'll come for your redemption,
And break your Gentile yoke,

And all your captive brothers,
From every clime shall come,
And quit their savage customs,
To live with God at home.

Then joy will fill our bosoms,
And blessings crown our days,
To live in pure religion,
And sing our Maker's praise."

Of our later poets Elder Orson F. Whitney, of the Council of the Twelve, has most celebrated the Nephite volume of scripture in his great poem "Elias." One canto (VI) is wholly devoted to the Book of Mormon under the caption "From Out the Dust." In this Canto Elder Whitney treats the whole theme of America as a land of promise—

The Old World, not the New,—this soil misnamed;
Cradle of man and grave of nations vast,

Whose glory, wealth, and wisdom had outfamed
 The mightiest of known empires, present, past;
 The land where Adam dwelt, where Eden cast
 Forth from her flaming gate the fateful pair
 Who fell that man might be; a fall still chaste,
 Albeit they sinned, descending death's dread stair
 To fling life's ladder down, Love's work and way prepare.

Of the decrees of God respecting the land, he writes.

The God of freedom, God of justice, swore
 No tyrant should this chosen land defile;
 And nations here, that for a season bore
 The palm of power, must righteous be the while,
 Or ruin's avalanche ruin on ruin pile.

* * * * *

Race upon race has perished in its pride,
 And nations lustrous as the lights of heaven
 Have sinned and sunk, in reckless suicide,
 Upon this soil, since that dread word was given.
 Realms battle-rent and regions tempest-riven;
 The wrath-swept land for ages desolate;
 A wretched remnant blasted, crust, and driven
 Forth by the furies of revengeful fate;
 Till wonder asks in vain, What of their former state?

Wouldst know the cause, the upas-tree that bore
 The blight of desolation? 'Tis a theme
 To melt Earth's heart, and move all Heaven to pour
 With sorrow's heaving flood, as when supreme
 O'er fallen Lucifer, the generous stream
 Of grief half quenched the joy of victory.

Mark how the annals of the ages teem
 With repetition? Time, eternity,
 The same have taught; but, few, alas! the moral see.

There is a sin called self, which binds the world
 In fetters fell, than all save truth more strong;
 A sin most serpentine, round all men curled,
 And in its fatal fold earth writhes full long;
 Crime's great first cause, the primal root of wrong,
 Parent of pride and tree of tyranny.
 To lay the axe doth unto thee belong.
 Strike, that the world may know of liberty,
 And Zion's land indeed a land of Zion be!

The poet treats successively the Jaredite and Nephite occupancy of the western world in the same noble strain of poetry. He closes the Jaredite period with these verses, celebrating the last acts of the two survivors of the Jaredite nation, Ether the Prophet, and Coriantumr the last of the Jaredite kings.

Usurping treason seized the civic helm,
 Wrong trampled right, and justice, judgment, fled.
 Then strife, division, hosts to battle led;
 The prophets, mocked, lift warning voice in vain;
 A blood-soaked continent, a sea, of dead,
 And of that mighty nation, fallen, self-slain.
 A prophet and a king, a solitary twain.

That prophet saw the coming of the Lord
 Unto the Old, the New, Jerusalem;
 Saw Israel returning at His word
 From wheresoever His will had scattered them;
 The realm's wide ruin saw, and strove to stem.

That king, sole scion of a slaughtered race,
 Casting his blood-stained sword and diadem,
 Lived but to see another nation place
 Firm foot upon the soil, then vanished from its face.

The advent of the Nephite colony is told in the following manner.

Again athwart the wilderness of waves,
 Surging old East and older West between,
 Where the lone sea the flowery Southland laves,
 And crowns o'er many climes the Chilean queen,
 Braving the swell, a storm-tossed bark is seen.
 From doomed Jerusalem, to Jacob dear,
 Albeit a leper, groping, blind, unclean,
 Goes forth Manasseh's prophet pioneer,
 Predestined to unveil the hidden hemisphere.

His lot to reap and plant on this far shore
 The promise of his fathers. Joseph's bough,
 From Jacob's well, the billowy wall runs o'er.
 Abides in strength the archer-stricken bow,
 Unto the utmost bound prevailing now,
 Of Hesper's heaven-inviting hills. Bend sheaves
 Of Israel, as branches bend with snow,
 Unto his sheaf as mightiest; and as leaves
 For multitude, the son the great sire's glory weaves.

The cataclysms which took place in this western world during the crucifixion and entombment of Messiah and His subsequent advent in the western world, His teaching the gospel here, and the establishment of His Church is told by our poet in the following strains.

Dispensing pardon and dispelling fear,
 Drawing the righteous nearer and more near.
 Anon He lifts the curtain of the sky!
 The midday sun no more their minister;
 Greater hath arisen; and glories multiply
 As angels in their gaze earthward and heavenward fly.

He greets them as a shepherd greets his flock;
 Shows them His wounded side, His hands, His feet;
 Then builds His Church upon the stricken Rock,
 Where flow life's healing waters, limpid, sweet,
 As infant innocence, that joys to meet
 Its great Original. With holy hand
 He ministers, bids death and hell retreat,
 And singles twelve from out the sainted band
 To sow with gospel light the furrowed, tear-worn land.

Then follows the story of the Nephite golden age, and this by a period of apostasy from God and the final overthrow of the people, concluding with the coming of the Gentile races to the promised land and the advent of the Seer, Joseph Smith, who shall make known through the Book of Mormon the otherwise unknown history of the western world.

The Gentile comes, as destiny decrees,
 To Joseph's land of wonders held in store.
 Freedom his watchword, sons of Freedom these,
 Like to the favored bands that long before
 A refuge found upon this sheltering shore.
 But champions of right oft wrong the right;
 Oppressed become oppressors in an hour;
 And now, as day that pushes back the night,
 The strong the weak assail, enslave, and put to flight.

Nor yet can fate forsake them. Japheth's hand
 'Gainst Jacob's wrath-doomed remnant still prevails.
 Tyrants oppress him from the motherland;
 The Lord of hosts a champion arms and mails,
 To match whose might no human power avails;
 Nor grander cause or chieftain e'er came forth.
 Him as its sire a new-born nation hails,
 And fain would crown him, spite his will, his birth,
 Did Heaven vouchsafe such king to shame most kings
 of earth—

Real though oft recreant sons of Deity,
 Builders, o'erthrowers, of imperial thrones,
 In wrongful act of rightful agency
 Drenching with blood, paving with human bones
 The path to power, gruesome with tears and groans.
 Their lives a failure? God a failure? Nay;
 What'er betide, the soul that sins atones;
 And He who casts the parts all mortals play,
 Succeeds He ever, His the night, and His the day.

Thine antecedents, thy forerunners, these,
 Prophet of Ephraim, Joseph's namesake seer!
 More than those ancient bridgers of the seas,
 Unveiler of the long-hid hemisphere,
 Whose secret 'tis lies booked and buried here.
 Bring forth that word of Joseph, now to join
 With Judah's word, Messiah's throne to rear;
 That high may rise and holily may shine
 God's house, the pure-in-heart, kingdom of King divine.

The whole Canto, and indeed the whole poem, should be read in order to get the full beauty and power of the

poet's theme, in which the Book of Mormon is so large a factor of inspiration.

Summary of Internal Evidences.

This is all I intend to say directly on the subject of the Internal Evidences of the truth of the Book of Mormon; what else remains that could properly fall under this division of the subject will be said in connection with the answers to objections to the claims of the book. Before leaving the subject, however, I ask the reader to recall in one view the various internal evidences considered up to this time, that it may be remembered how numerous they are, and how strong and conclusive they are when massed.

The Internal Evidences of the Book of Mormon consist in the following facts:

The book in style and language is consistent with the theory of its construction;

It responds to the demands both of unity and diversity in its style, under the theory of its structure;

It has all the characteristics of an abridgment;

It meets all the requirements of the circumstances in the matter of names, originality in names, differences between Jaredite and Nephite names, and the custom of Hebrew peoples with reference to names;

Its governments are in harmony with the political principles of the age in which those governments are said to have existed;

The events to which importance is given are such as would be expected from the character of its writers;

The complexity of its structure is in harmony with the theory of its origin;

It meets the requirements in originality of structure, manner of coming forth, theory of peopling America, the nativity of its peoples, accounting for Christian truths in America, and in its doctrines;

Its prophecies, so many and important, so far as the wheels of time have brought them due, are fulfilled, and others are in course of fulfillment;

It deals with subjects worthy of God to reveal, and important for man to know;

It has an atmosphere about it, a spirit, that bears witness of its truth.