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A Sacred History: External Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon, Chapter I

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Abstract: Uses historical, linguistic, and archaeological evidence to prove the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Basing his facts on research done by noted linguists and archaeologists of the time, the author writes concerning the god Quetzalcoatl, religious customs and ruins of advanced civilizations, comparisons between the Hebrew and Mayan languages, and the Egyptian hieroglyphic writings. Shreeve also tells of similarities in biblical beliefs between early people of both the western and eastern hemispheres and explains why Joseph Smith was incapable of writing the Book of Mormon without divine aid.

A SACRED HISTORY.

External Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon.

BY THOMAS A. SHREEVE.

Chapter I.

THE internal evidences of the truth of the Book of Mormon are so many as to carry conviction to any honest and inquiring mind. It is my belief that the external evidences now in course of discovery are quite as numerous and convincing. Archaeological and scientific discoveries within the past fifty years have been so numerous and have borne so directly upon this point as to be almost miraculous; and as to furnish a complete and incontestible proof from external sources that the Book of Mormon as a history is true.

The opponents of the work who have been active in their attempt to cast ridicule upon it are now driven to their last entrenchment. A single instance will suffice to show how inconsistent has been their course, and to what desperate straits they have been driven. Until a very recent time sectarian ministers and writers, who had felt it a matter of self protection to decry this sacred work and to bring it into disrepute, had universally taken this position: The possibility that the Book of Mormon might have come from some sacred source was by them put out of the domain of argument. There then remained but the question, "Who was its author—since it was but the production of man?" Joseph Smith, they all asserted, was an unlearned youth, incapable of producing a work of such magnitude and character; therefore he must have stolen the book; and for years the declaration was made and received by all sectarians and by all their companions in this cause, that the Spaulding Story was the original source from which the Book of Mormon was taken. In fact, they laid even unnecessary stress upon what they deemed the ignorance of Joseph Smith and his inability to originate a work of this nature; and cited the fact that he claimed to be an instrument in the hands of God for its production, as a proof that he was a shameless and audacious impostor. However much they might wish to ridicule the work as it now appears, their desire to ridicule him was greater; and for fifty years the Latter-day Saints have been constantly met with the assertion that Joseph Smith was entirely too ignorant and indolent a person to be the author of the Book of Mormon. Since the production by Oberlin College of the original manuscript of the Spaulding Story; since its publication and general circulation throughout the country under circumstances which make a doubt of its authenticity impossible, the opponents of the work have suddenly changed their mode of attack. Still keeping out of the question the possibility that Joseph Smith had divine aid in bringing the work to light, they maintain that *the work itself is of such a character that an ignorant person like Joseph Smith must have been its author*, and that he alone produced it without any help. Their course is a strong reminder of that taken by a prominent Republican who held an important office in President Arthur's administration two or three years ago. He was extremely anxious to retain his position, as he was dependent upon it for his livelihood; and when the discovery was made that a Democratic President had been elected to succeed Arthur, one of his friends came to him and expressed much sympathy. The office-holder declined to

receive the pity, saying that he proposed to keep his place and did not need sympathy. His friend asked:

"Aren't you aware that the politics of the administration have changed?"

The office-holder replied:

"It is a mighty lively administration that can change its politics faster than I can change mine. I am in. I propose to stay in. Political belief is a matter of secondary consideration with me."

Further comment is unnecessary, beyond the statement that a careful examination of most of the arguments brought against the work will show that they are of the same texture. A little study by the young people of this Church, aided by the Holy Spirit, will at any time enable them to dissolve the most ambitious arguments against the Book of Mormon, from however learned a source in a worldly sense they may come.

In determining the external evidences which exist of the authenticity of this book, and its origin, as claimed by the instrument who brought it forth, the first inquiry should be directed to the character and circumstances of the man who was the means of giving it to the world. Joseph Smith was all that his opponents claim, in one sense; for he was utterly unable to originate the Book of Mormon. He was a farmer's son, born in the opening of this century in a rural district of one of the quiet New England States. His early boyhood was spent in toil; and he had not only no considerable education, but he had not access to books or newspapers. We can easily understand how far removed he must have been from all centers of information when we recall the slow travel and the imperfect state of postal affairs; the few publications of newspapers and the entire obscurity in which the inhabitants of rural districts dwelt in that day. His parents were poor and it was necessary that he should toil constantly in order to carry his part of the family burden. He was but 14 years of age when he received and announced his first divine visitation, which came to bless him and the age in which he lived. From this hour on he pursued undeviatingly a plan outlined for him by sacred influence; and the Book of Mormon was the result of that definite conduct. To believe now that Joseph Smith was himself the author of the Book of Mormon would be to believe that a boy 14 years of age, trained in a rural region, surrounded by all the healthy influences of New England farm life at the opening of this century; could have evolved from his inner consciousness a mysterious work full of profound thought, full of historical and occult truths, and containing a system of theology before which the worldly masters of that science must stand abashed. This fact alone, taken independent of every other evidence, is proof that Joseph Smith could not have been the author of the work; and since our opponents have already vacated their position that he was aided by someone else, our inquiry need not extend to an examination of that point.

Joseph Smith claims that the record of the Book of Mormon was contained in a book of gold plates which was given him by the hand of an angel on the Hill of Cumorah, in the State of New York, on the 22nd day of September, 1827.

The second inquiry in this investigation is: Did Joseph Smith ever have in his possession such plates as he described? Upon this point there is now no question. At one time the opponents of the work declared that such plates had never been held by him; but now they are willing to admit that he must have been possessed of *some* plates covered with engravings of an ancient language. That these plates were all that

was claimed for them by Joseph Smith, it is now my purpose to prove. We have first the evidence of eleven witnesses, besides Joseph himself, who saw and examined the plates.

Upon any other point than this, the testimony of any one of these men would have been deemed conclusive by all his neighbors and acquaintances, or even in a court of law. Aside from this we have the fact, which must be recognized, that unless Joseph Smith obtained the plates in the way described by him he never possessed them; for with his poverty it would have been impossible for him to obtain any such treasure. And further than this, at the hour that this record was first exhibited to him he probably had no idea that such a thing existed as engraving upon metal plates. A youth to whom printed books were a great rarity could scarcely be expected to know much of ancient and hidden modes of writing. Again, we have proof from the conduct and words of his early persecutors that he did possess a treasure of this kind—a treasure so valuable that all the avarice and hatred of whole communities were directed against him in order that men might obtain the valuables for their own sordid use. The history of his early persecution because he possessed the gold plates which bore the record now appearing as the Book of Mormon, shows that some of his wicked neighbors had knowledge which to them was convincing that he had in possession what he claimed. It will be remembered that when Joseph journeyed into Pennsylvania for the purpose of obtaining a peaceful retreat, where he could engage in the work of translation, his avaricious persecutors near Manchester, New York, fearing to see the treasure depart from their neighborhood, even went so far as to engage the law in their behalf, and search warrants were issued and served upon him by people who intended to wrest from him the treasure entrusted to his care. To this day in the region of Manchester the well-authenticated tradition exists of many of these things; and every old settler who is well acquainted knows, by general repute at least, if not by better evidence, that Joseph Smith was in possession of engraved plates.

A VISIT TO DAVID WHITMER.

BY E. STEVENSON.

I RECENTLY had great pleasure in visiting and conversing with David Whitmer, the only surviving witness of the three whose names are prefixed to the Book of Mormon, testifying that an angel came down from heaven and laid the plates before their eyes, and they were commanded to bear witness of the truth of what they saw and knew to be correct. Though now very aged, his testimony is still undimmed, and his countenance always brightens in speaking of this most memorable event in his history. Already I had visited this witness on two previous occasions, and in neither of my visits did I find his demeanor, belief or assertions changed concerning this important matter.

On the 2nd day of this year I left Kansas City, Mo., and rode forty-two miles on the cars to Lexington Junction, where I unfortunately failed to make train connection to go five miles further to Richmond, Ray Co., the home of him I sought. But, determined not to be baffled, I decided to walk the distance, though the cold was intense, the thermometer going to 17° below zero. I subsequently felt repaid for my pains in the pleasant reception and agreeable conversation with Mr. Whitmer.

He wore a black suit of clothes and dark close-fitting cap on his head. He appeared very noble to me, and his face seemed to beam with intelligence.

He told me that in the beginning of June, 1829, he received a letter from the Prophet asking him to come to Palmyra and convey him to his father's house, that he might there be able to work on the translation of the Book of Mormon. The journey required about three days each way, and it was necessary to put up at inns on the way. David having forgotten the names of the inns and their proprietors, Joseph looked through the seer stone and told him them. Oliver Cowdery made a note of these, and by inquiry on the journey found that the Prophet had stated correctly.

Soon after arriving at his father's, David was baptized in Seneca Lake. This was about the middle of June, and shortly thereafter he was ordained an Elder, he being the third in the Church, as he claims, to receive this ordination.

While on the return journey from Palmyra, David noticed a somewhat aged-looking man who approached them on the road. He had a very pleasant face, about which, however, there seemed something peculiar, and he carried a knapsack on his back fastened with straps which crossed his breast. David asked him to take a ride, but he declined, saying: "I am going over to Cumorah," and then disappeared very suddenly, though there was no chance for him to secrete himself in the open country through which the party was then passing. All felt very strange concerning this personage and the Prophet was besought to inquire of the Lord concerning him. Shortly afterwards, David relates, the Prophet looked very white but with a heavenly appearance and said their visitor was one of the three Nephites to whom the Savior gave the promise of life on earth until He should come in power. After arriving home, David again saw this personage, and Mother Whitmer, who was very kind to Joseph Smith, is said to have seen not only this Nephite, but to have also been shown by him the sealed and unsealed portions of the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated.

THE KIND OF BOY SHELLEY WAS.—The poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley was a remarkable genius, but as a man he was by no means an example to be imitated—nor as a boy, either.

Shelley, as a small boy, was an eccentric little being. He used to dress his four sisters to represent fiends, and filling a fire stove full of inflammable fluid, and setting it afire, he would marshal the diabolical procession to the back door. His great delight was to teach his infant brother school-boy words, and his first attempt at his knowledge of the devil was an innocent "debbie." As a boy at Eton, he would watch the livelong night for ghosts and consulted his books in order to find out how to raise one. His diet in after years was meagre enough to bring him weird fancies. Bread became his chief sustenance, and his pockets were well stored with it. A circle upon the carpet, clearly defined by an ample verge of crumbs, often marked the place where he had long sat at his studies, his face nearly in contact with his book, devouring bread at intervals amid his profound abstractions. Sometimes he ate raisins with it, and his sweet tooth was immense. Occasionally when walking in London he would suddenly dash into a baker's shop and emerge with a supply of bread, which he would break and offer a half to his companion, and very much surprised he would be when anybody refused the delicacy.