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

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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 IV.

WE now come to a consideration of Reformed Egyptian—which is not another language, but is merely a modification of the hieratic Egyptian which Nephi brought from Jerusalem.

Moroni said, "we have written this record according to our knowledge in the characters, which are called among us the Reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us according to our manner of speech." A thousand years elapsed between the time that Nephi wrote and the hour when Moroni engraved these words upon his record. Having distinctly shown, as I think, that Nephi wrote in the hieratic Egyptian now known to scholars, two inquiries naturally arise: is the assertion reasonable that the written language would be modified within the time stated? And, also, when and how did the modifications in the language occur, of which Moroni speaks?

Even within the present century some changes have occurred in our own written language, although we have books and newspapers without end. But of course no fair test could be made in the experience of one century—we must go to the earliest writings extant for an illustration. I have taken pains to examine the old English narrative of Beowulf. The only manuscript which has been preserved of this poem was written in the English of that day, at the close of the tenth century, about 900 years ago. It is kept in the British Museum, and is regarded as one of the most valuable of English records. It was the work of a monk, who wrote it from dictation. The best modern English scholars can read scarcely one word of it. The characters in which we write and print to-day bear some slight resemblance to the ancient writing of Beowulf; but so greatly modified has our written language been that, as I said, the best modern English scholar cannot read any of this early English poem without special study, as if he were investigating a foreign tongue.

I think, then, that the statement made by Moroni concerning the alteration or change of the written Egyptian characters is borne out by reason, and by human experience. In fact, from what we now know, if he had made any other statement he might reasonably have been open to question. Whether the changes or modifications made by the successive historians of the Nephite race tended to an improvement on their written priestly language, it is not now my purpose to discuss. Moroni says changes were made, and we cannot [reasoning from intrinsic proof or analogy] justly question his assertion. This, I think, is sufficient answer to the first inquiry.

According to the Book of Mormon, the Nephites began to scatter throughout the land about two centuries after their establishment in this hemisphere. From this hour until their final extinction there was contention with the Lamanites, except at brief intervals. Being engaged in wars, and being frequently dispersed from their gathering-places, it is natural to suppose that their habits and methods would change to suit their altered circumstances. It is not astonishing that some of the historians who followed two or three centuries after Nephi should have modified—either through lack of skill or

design—the characters of ancient Egyptian in which the first records were made. Once begun, the evolution of our own written language will show how far such modification can be carried within a thousand years. At this point I beg to remind the reader that the Book of Mormon, as we now have it, or as Joseph Smith received it on the plates of gold, does not betray the successive steps which were taken in this modification. The first portion of the Book of Mormon was written by the hand of Nephi in hieratic Egyptian. The remaining portion consists of an abridgment made by Mormon of all the records kept by his predecessors, and of the conclusion appended to the record by Mormon's son, Moroni. Mormon and Moroni wrote the language which they called Reformed Egyptian, which was the language of Nephi after it had passed through the transitions of a thousand years. I do not know of any data available to us at this time which gives with any certainty the times or manners of these changes, further than as I have stated.

Several copies alleged to be *fac similies* of Reformed Egyptian are now in existence. Upon careful examination traces of hieratic Egyptian—the ancient written language of the Priesthood among the Nephites—the one in which Nephi wrote, are easily discernible. And yet there does not seem to be any very considerable similarity. I do not know how authentic these *fac similies* may be. It is possible that they are exact; but, without committing myself to a matter not yet proven, I venture to suggest to my readers that in all probability the alleged *fac similies* are the result of engravings made from copies, which copies, in their turn, possibly may have been taken from other copies; and that, when we remember through whose hands these things passed originally, and through whose hands some of them have since passed, we can reasonably allow something for unskillful copying and awkward engraving; if not something for the evil design of apostates, who have recently been producing these things in manifold. As I said, I do not venture to commit myself to any positive acceptance or rejection of these copies which purport to be *fac similies* of Reformed Egyptian. I have not been able to find any copy which bears any authoritative endorsement to prove its authenticity. I await the possible production of such a copy. In the meantime, we can look with some degree of interest to archaeological discovery to aid us upon this point, as it has conclusively proven our position concerning the ancient Egyptian and the Hebrew languages.

Half a century since, when men were scoffing at the assertion made in the Book of Mormon in relation to Egyptian and Hebrew, a howl of derision would have followed the statement that in fifty years' time incontestible evidence would be forthcoming regarding them. And yet that evidence has been produced. For one, I am willing to wait a little time to see this final point elucidated.

A recent unprincipled opponent of this work declares that Reformed Egyptian never could have been known; because no traces of it have been found. Without waiting for the discoveries, which will no doubt finally settle this point as distinctly as the other points have been settled, there is nothing in his assertion to entitle it to respect. We have seen that after two or three centuries of great increase and prosperity, during which the Nephites built magnificent cities and temples, which they adorned with sculptures, they were forced to frequent migration. This of itself is sufficient to account for the lack of inscriptions which would prove a modification of the priestly language. And if the Book of Mormon had been carefully studied by its opponents, I venture to say that they

would not have quoted this point so triumphantly. However, researches are becoming year by year more careful and extensive; and somewhere, before many years, I doubt not that remains of sculptured Reformed Egyptian will be found among ruins possibly much less magnificent and some centuries less ancient than those which Le Plongeon has discovered, bearing characters identical with hieratic Egyptian.

TOPICS OF THE TIMES.

BY THE EDITOR.

FOR some days it was a question whether the Edmunds-Tucker bill had become law or had died in the President's hands, through his not signing it. Subsequently it was apparent that the bill had become law by Constitutional limitation, without the President's signature. From what I can understand the non-"Mormons" were deeply agitated upon this subject. They were more excited concerning it than our people. The Latter-day Saints had committed their case to the Lord and were willing to abide the result, whatever it might be. Fervent prayers had gone up from every household and from every assemblage of the Saints to the God of heaven to defeat the measure that had been designed for the overthrow of His people. I have had much more faith in these prayers and in the devotion of the people to their religion, as shown in their attendance at fast day and other meetings, than I have had upon all the aid that we could get from outside sources; and the hopes of all the leading men have been greatly increased by witnessing the faithfulness of the people in attending to their duties.

But the bill, as I have said, has become law, and this fact had scarcely been made plain when the Brigham City election took place. Greatly to the disappointment of our enemies, the Latter-day Saints who could take the oath in that city, decided to do so. A close examination of the law satisfied them, as it did a great many others, that it could be taken without a sacrifice of principle. It had undoubtedly been prepared as a trap, into which, it was expected, the Latter-day Saints would walk.

Our enemies counted upon our integrity to principle. They had seen this exhibited so often that they appeared to have confidence the Saints would never do anything to violate their conscience. Notwithstanding the many lies they have told about us, they know they are lies, and they know that we are a people who are willing to suffer all things for the sake of those principles which we have espoused. They supposed this oath had been arranged in such a way that the Saints could not possibly take it without trenching upon their conscience.

It is, without doubt, a disgraceful thing to have an oath of this character on the statute book. But it does not say anything about belief, and this omission left it in a condition that men who are not living in the practice of plural marriage can take it without doing wrong to their faith. Our enemies seem now to have resigned themselves to the idea that their plot has failed and that they cannot wrest the control of the Territory from our people. They expect, however, to carry a few districts when the Territory shall be re-districted, and hope they will have a few members in the Legislature.

But the control of the Territory, which has been the chief object of their efforts, and for which they have been so long struggling, is not at the present time in their hands, and if our

people are true to themselves and take proper care, it is not likely to be. It will be an evil day for us when the control of this Territory goes into the hands of these malcontents. I sincerely hope that the faithfulness of our people in keeping the commandments of God and doing His will, will present any such a result coming upon us. Speaking of it naturally, as men speak of such matters, it would be most disastrous. It would be like turning a mob loose upon us. For not only would men living in plural marriage have to get up and leave, but such heavy burdens would be laid upon others of our faith that they would be almost, if not entirely, unbearable. We would become a subject class and occupy a position a kin to that occupied by the Chinese and the Indians. Once robbed of the franchise, history has proved that it is exceedingly difficult for a people ever to regain their station as free men. When a people are reduced to that condition, it takes a long period of time to bring about a revolution in their favor. Of course the Lord could soon restore it to us; but I feel that it is better, and easier for us to retain it by His help through our faith, than to regain it after it has been taken from us.

I earnestly hope and believe that the franchise will not be entirely taken from us. We may have a great many difficulties to meet, as we have had, but by pursuing the course which the Lord points out, we can contend with these difficulties and overcome them. It is a painful thing, in a land which has been so free as ours, for men to be compelled to take an oath of this kind in order to preserve their franchise. But how incomparably worse it would be to surrender our country into the hands of the villainous crew who are striving to get control! They hoped, by the enactment of this measure, to get us into that position, and were already rejoicing over the prospect of the great results they were going to accomplish in carrying out their schemes. The Lord, in His mercy, has disappointed them, and as Latter-day Saints we owe Him profound thanksgiving and gratitude for His goodness unto us.

PROMPTNESS IN DUTY.—"I have saved myself a great deal of trouble in my life," writes a practical man, "by always following this simple direction: When you have anything to do, do it." The trouble with the majority of people is that when they have something to do they don't do it, at least not at the right time. They wait and put off, especially if the duty is rather disagreeable, until fairly pressed into a corner and subjected to the greatest inconvenience for the want of it.

A young man in a large establishment in the city, received a commission one day to get out a vessel-load of cotton. It was his first commission of the sort, and he felt pleased to be trusted. He resolved to be especially prompt in the performance of it. So he engaged his carts and men over night, giving orders to have them on hand at an early hour. He attended to the business with so much energy and cheerfulness that he infused a like enthusiasm into his men. The business was finished with such dispatch that he had his bills all right and was at his customary post by ten o'clock, when his employer came in.

He looked at the young man a little severely, and asked if he did not request him to get out that load of cotton.

"I have, sir," was the reply, "and there are the bills."

Such promptness was not unrewarded. It was the young man's stepping stone to preferment and a large fortune. Don't take all day to do what might be finished in a few hours.