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

Author(s): Thomas A. Shreeve

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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.

Hyde Park alone covers over four hundred acres. It has its lawns, walks, boulevards, woods, etc. It also has a fine drive which, during an afternoon in the Summer season, presents a very fine appearance where it is to be seen all the fashion of London out for exercise. Here is also the Serpentine, an artificial river covering about fifty acres, which is kept in good order. In the early morning during the Summer months it is much frequented by bathers, twelve thousand of whom have been known to indulge in the luxury of a bath in one day.

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A SACRED HISTORY.

External Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon.

BY THOMAS A. SHREEVE.

Chapter XII.

THE religious history of the peoples who inhabited this continent, according to the Book of Mormon, presents several phases. Both races of people who came under divine guidance to this land from the Old World were believers in the true and living God. But long before the day of Christ's coming many portions of these peoples had fallen into idolatry. Then came Christianity, and it was the dominating faith during many years.

With the extinction of the distinct Nephite race came the reign of idolatry, wherein was preserved old forms and ideas from all the beliefs and legends entertained by the people since they first came to America.

It shall now be my purpose to show that research into religious antiquities of these lands proves not only the origin of the people, as described in the book of Mormon, but proves their various beliefs to have been as stated in the sacred history.

It will be well for us to bear in mind certain facts conceded by historians and philosophers concerning either the growth or the abandonment of religious ideas. To show that what I have asserted concerning the survival of the old forms and legends is correct, I quote from Bancroft's *Native Races*, Vol. III, the following paragraph, which is worthy of study as substantiating my position, and also because of its careful presentation of the results of his study:

As there never was yet found a people without a language, so every nation has its mythology, some popular and attractive form for preserving historical tradition and presenting ethical maxims; and as by the range of their vocabularies we may follow men through all the stages of their progress in government, domestic affairs and mechanical arts, so, by beliefs expressed, we may determine at any given epoch in the history of a race their ideal and intellectual condition. Without the substance there can be no shadow, without the object there can be no name for it; therefore when we find a language without a word to denote property or chastity, we may be sure that the wealth and women of the tribe are held in common; and when in a system of mythology certain important metaphysical or æsthetic ideas and attributes are wanting, it is evident that the intellect of its composers has not yet reached beyond a certain low point of conception. Moreover, as in things evil may be found a spirit of good, so in fable we find an element of truth. It is now a recognized principle of philosophy, that no religious belief, however crude, nor any historical tradition, however absurd, can be held by the majority of a people for any considerable time as true, without having in the beginning some foundation in fact. More especially is the truth of this principle apparent when we consider that in all the multitudinous beliefs of all ages, held by peoples savage

and civilized, there exist a concurrence of ideas and a coincidence of opinion. Human conceptions of supernatural affairs spring from like intuitions. As human nature is essentially the same throughout the world and throughout time, so the religious instincts which form a part of that universal humanity generate and develop in like manner under like conditions. The desire to penetrate hidden surroundings and the method of attempting it are to a certain extent common to all. All wonder at the mysterious; all attempt the solution of mysteries; all primarily possess equal facilities for arriving at correct conclusions. The genesis of belief is uniform, and the results under like conditions analogous. We may conclude that the purposes for which these fictitious narratives were so carefully preserved and handed down to posterity were two-fold—to keep alive certain facts and to inculcate certain doctrines. Something there must have been in every legend, in every tradition, in every belief which has ever been entertained by the majority of a people, to recommend it to the minds of men in the first instance. Error absolute cannot exist; false doctrine without an amalgam of verity speedily crumbles, and the more monstrous the falsity the more rapid its decomposition. Myths were the oracles of our savage ancestors; their creed, the rule of their life, prized by them as men now prize their faith; and by whatever savage philosophy these strange conceits were eliminated, their effect upon the popular mind was vital. Anaxagoras, Socrates, Protagoras, and Epicurus well knew and boldly proclaimed that the gods of the Grecians were disreputable characters, not the kind of deities to make or govern worlds; yet so deep-rooted in the hearts of the people were the maxims of the past, that for these expressions one heretic was cast into prison, another expelled from Athens, and another forced to drink the hemlock. And the less a fable presents the appearance of probability, the more grotesque and extravagant it is, the less the likelihood of its having originated in pure invention; for no extravagantly absurd invention without a particle of truth could by any possibility have been palmed off upon a people, and by them accepted, revered, recited, preserved as a veritable incident or solution of mystery, and handed down to those most dear to them, to be in like manner held as sacred. Therefore we may be sure that there never was a myth without a meaning; that mythology is not a bundle of ridiculous fancies invented for vulgar amusement; that there is not one of these stories, no matter how silly or absurd, which was not founded on fact, which did not once hold a significance. "And though I have well weighed and considered all this," concluded Lord Bacon, nearly three hundred years ago, "and thoroughly seen into the levity which the mind indulges for allegories and illusions, yet I cannot but retain a high value for the ancient mythology." Indeed, to ancient myths has been attributed the preservation of shattered fragments of lost sciences, even as some have alleged that we are indebted to the writings of Democritus and Aristotle for modern geographical discoveries.

Donnelly in writing of the people who inhabit Central America, says:

The essence of religion is conservatism; little is invented; nothing perishes; change comes from without; and even when one religion is supplanted by another, its gods live in the demons of the new faith, or they pass into the folk lore and fairy stories of the people.

While not conceding all that Donnelly says, because it may be taken as precluding the idea of revelation, I regard it as a fact demonstrated through all the centuries, that a belief is almost undying. It preserves its form or its spirit in some fashion or another until its very origin is lost in the mists of the past.

In a former chapter I have shown the belief which existed here upon the continent among the ancient inhabitants, in the deluge, as described in Genesis. It may be a good point from which to resume a consideration of the religious faith of this land and its people in the olden time.

Ignatius Donnelly goes so far as to say that there is scarcely a prominent fact in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis which cannot be duplicated from the legends of the Ameri-

can nations; and there is scarcely a custom known to the Jews that does not find its counterpart among the people of the New World.

An estimate of some of these points of similarity comes properly within the chapters devoted to religion, although some few of the customs may appear more social than religious in their nature.

I am indebted to Donnelly for a comparison of the religious legends of this hemisphere with Genesis; and I quote his ideas freely in the succeeding paragraphs.

The Bible tells us (*Gen. i, 2*) that in the beginning the earth was without form and void, and covered with water. In the Quiche Legends we are told—"At first all was sea, no man, no animal, no bird, or green herb, there was nothing to be seen but the sea and the heavens."

The Bible tells us (*Gen. i, 2*) "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The Quiche Legend says, "The Creator—the Former, the Dominator—the feathered serpent—those that gave life, moved upon the waters like a glowing light."

The Bible says (*Gen. i, 9*), "And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so." The Quiche Legend says, "The creative spirits cried out 'Earth!' and in an instant it was formed, and rose like a vapor-cloud; immediately the plains and the mountains arose, and the cypress and the pine appeared."

The Bible tells us, "and God saw that it was good." The Quiche legend says, "Then Gucumatz was filled with joy, and cried out, 'Blessed be thy coming, O Heart of Heaven, Huraken, thunderbolt.'"

The order in which the vegetables, animals and man were formed is the same in both records.

In Genesis (*Chap. ii, 7*) we are told, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground." The Quiche legend says, "The first man was made of clay; but he had no intelligence, and was consumed in the water."

In Genesis the first man is represented as naked. The Aztec legend says, "The sun was much nearer the earth then than now, and his grateful warmth rendered clothing unnecessary."

(To be Continued.)

WHICH IS BETTER?

BY JOCK.

IF there is one thing more than another that we would impress upon the boys and young men of our community it is the necessity of learning a trade by which the hand may become skilled in some useful branch of industry. The training of the mind is of the greatest importance and should receive the most careful attention, but no young man's education is complete without the possession of some trade whereby he can earn a livelihood if other sources of income fail.

It was the honorable boast of the noted Horace Greely while editing the *New York Tribune*, that he was not alone dependent upon his abilities as a writer for his subsistence. He said:

"It is a great source of consolation to us, that when the public shall be tired of us as an editor, we can make a satisfactory livelihood at setting type or farming; so that while our strength lasts ten thousand blockheads taking offense at some article they do not understand could not drive us into the poor-house."

The tendency of the present age and the inclination of young men seem to be towards the various professions, or some light, easy work. In fact cases are not rare in our community where sneering remarks are made about young men who take the course to which reference has been made, and shun the store and counting room for the more difficult though equally honorable labor at the work-bench. But only shallow-minded persons look with disfavor upon the artisan, while the intelligent man views this class as the one that gives stability and strength to the government.

One cannot but admire the course taken by the wealthy philanthropist, Stephen Girard, who abounded in useful and curious expedients to teach those around him practical lessons upon various points. A clerk, who had faithfully served the merchant from boyhood, went to his master on his twenty-first birthday and told him his time was up. He naturally expected to be promoted, but Girard said to him:

"Very well. Now go and learn a trade."

"What trade, sir?"

"Good barrels and butts must be in demand while you live. Go and learn the cooper's trade, and when you have made a perfect barrel bring it to me."

The young man followed the excellent advice given, and after a time brought to his old master a splendid barrel of his own manufacture.

Girard carefully examined it, and then gave the maker two thousand dollars for it, saying at the same time:

"Now, sir, I want you in my counting-room; henceforth you will not be dependent upon the whim of Stephen Girard. Let what will come, you have a good trade always in reserve."

It seems to be the idea of too many young men that because they possess some considerable means or perchance have acquired a collegiate education that it would be time wasted to learn a trade, and say, as did a certain fast young man, when his father suggested that it was time he was beginning to think of supporting himself:

"I will not learn a trade."

In less than five years thereafter that same young man was acquiring skill in harness making at one of the eastern penitentiaries.

Another young man who thought himself above "common labor" has yet several years to serve in the Missouri prison on a sentence for crime. His parents left him at their death fifty thousand dollars; and "this is where," remarked one who visited the wayward youth, "his parents made a fatal mistake. Had they left the young man simply a jack-plane or a wood-saw, with printed instructions how to use them, the chances are that instead of being in the penitentiary, he would to-day have been gradually but surely working his way up to a handsome competency and an honorable old age."

In every large city of the country men can be found seeking work even at moderate salaries who a few years ago were successful merchants, brilliant students or worked at a profession, but very few indeed are the cases where a master mechanic, and everyone who commences at a trade should become its master, is under the necessity of seeking employment out of his line. Good, skilled workmen in every branch of industry are always in demand, and such are the ones who build up and beautify a country and give prestige to a community.

We cannot keep our bodies long here: they are corruptible bodies, and will tumble into dust and we will part with them for a while; and if ever we expect and desire a happy meeting again, we must use them with modesty and reverence now.