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Notes on the Book of Mormon II

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Abstract: This series discusses the gold plates, the burial of the plates at the Hill Cumorah, the Urim and Thummim, the characters on the plates, Joseph Smith's preparation for translation, the scribes, and manuscripts. The second part covers the Hill Cumorah, the burial of the plates, and the Urim and Thummim.

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF MORMON

BY J. M. SJODAHL

II.

Cumorah. The plates had been deposited in a pit excavated for that purpose on the west side of the hill Cumorah. A stone slab, the upper surface of which was perfectly smooth, formed the floor of the pit. Around this stone four other slabs had been set on edge in some kind of cement. Another flat stone formed the lid. The tablets rested on stones or pillars of cement. With the plates had been deposited also a sacred instrument known as the Urim and Thummim, two transparent stones set in silver bows and fastened to a breastplate.

Indians buried treasures. It appears that it was not uncommon among Indians anciently to bury valuables in pits somewhat similar to this. All over the Pacific slope of the province of Chiriqui, Panama, there are ancient cemeteries in which objects of stone, clay and metal are found. The graves are either oval or quadrangular in form, ranging from a few feet to eighteen feet in depth. The flat stones which cover the cyst are often ten or fifteen feet below the surface, and are in some cases very heavy, weighing three hundred pounds or more. One may judge the value of the deposits in these pits in Central America from the statement that from one cemetery alone, covering an area of twelve acres, objects worth \$50,000 were collected by the discoverers. Many of these objects were made of gold more or less alloyed with copper.*

Orson Pratt on Cumorah. "The hill Cumorah is situated in Western New York, between the villages of Palmyra and Canandaigua, about four miles from the former. It is celebrated as the ancient depository of the sacred gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. Cumorah was the name by which the hill was designated in the days of the Prophet Moroni, who deposited the plates about 420 years after the birth of Christ. The Prophet Mormon, the father of Moroni, had been entrusted with all the sacred records of his forefathers, engraved on metallic plates. New plates were made by Mormon on which he wrote, from the more ancient books, an abridged history of the nation, incorporating therewith many revelations, prophecies, the gospel, etc. These new plates were given to Moroni, to finish the history, and all the ancient plates Mormon deposited in Cumorah, about 384 years after Christ. When Moroni, about 36 years after, made the deposit of the book entrusted to him, he was, without doubt, inspired to select a department of the hill

*Dr. Wm. H. Holmes, *Ancient Inhabitants of Chiriqui*, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 1887, pp. 6 and 7.



MONUMENT TO THE THREE WITNESSES OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

Located on the Temple grounds, Salt Lake City, Utah. Unveiled Saturday morning, April 2, 1927, by Miss Josephine Smith, great-granddaughter of Patriarch Hyrum Smith, granddaughter of President Joseph F. Smith, and daughter of Joseph Fielding Smith. The dedicatory prayer was offered by President Heber J. Grant. The oval, bronze plaques of the witnesses are by Avard Fairbanks, a young Utah sculptor. The monument is ten feet, six inches in height. Under the reliefs of Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris, the Witnesses, is a full text of their testimony, in bronze. On the east side, opposite, is a large bronze relief of St. John the divine, with quotation John 14:6, 7. The Presidency of the Church and several thousand conference visitors were present at the unveiling. Speeches were made by Presidents Heber J. Grant, A. W. Ivins and Chas. W. Nibley. The choir, Anthony C. Lund, director, sang "An angel from on high."

separate from the great, sacred depository of the numerous volumes hid up by his father. The particular place in the hill, where Moroni secreted the book was revealed by the angel to the Prophet Joseph Smith, to whom the volume was delivered in September, 1827. But the grand depository of all the numerous records of the ancient nations of the western continent was located in another department of the hill, and its contents under the charge of holy angels, until the day should come for them to be transferred to the sacred temple of Zion.

"The hill Cumorah, with the surrounding vicinity, is distinguished as the great battle field on which two powerful nations were concentrated with all their forces, men, women, and children, and fought till hundreds of thousands on both sides were hewn down and left to moulder upon the ground. Both armies were Israelites; both had become awfully corrupt, having apostatized from God. The Nephites, as a nation, became extinct; the Lamanites alone were left. This happened, according to their faithful records, near the close of the Christian era. The American Indians are the remnants of the once powerful nation of Lamanites.

"The hill Cumorah is remarkable also as being the hill on which and around which a still more ancient nation perished, called Jaredites. This unparalleled destruction is recorded in the Book of Ether, and happened about six centuries before Christ. The Jaredites colonized America from the Tower of Babel. After about sixteen centuries, during which they became exceedingly numerous, through their terrible wars they destroyed themselves. The hill Cumorah, by them, was called Ramah. Millions fought against millions, until the hill Ramah and the land round was soaked with blood, and their carcasses were left in countless numbers to moulder back to Mother Earth."— *Millennial Star*, vol. 28, p. 417.

The Breastplate. Oliver Cowdery has conveyed the idea that the breastplate was a warrior's shield,** but the Prophet Joseph tells us that the Urim and Thummim was fastened to it, and was part of it; it could, therefore, hardly have been a portion of a soldier's military equipment.

A detailed description of the breastplate of the High Priest of the Hebrew congregation is found in Ex. 28:15-30. It was a bag, or pocket, made of fine linen and ornamented with embroidery in gold, blue, purple, and scarlet. It was set with twelve precious stones, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel, and was worn on the breast, fastened to the ephod with gold chains. In this pocket the High Priest carried the Urim and Thummim, when that sacred instrument was not in use.

Urim and Thummim. From the Old Testament we can not gather detailed information concerning this instrument. The words are supposed to mean "lights and perfections." Aaron carried it whenever he appeared before the Lord in behalf of the people. (Ex. 28:30; Levi 8:8.) From the blessing Moses pronounced upon Levi (Deut. 33:9-11), it is evident that it was part of the equipment of one whose special office it was to teach the people "the judgments" and "the

***History of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 12.

law." In the days of Saul, the Urim and Thummim was still in existence, Samuel had, evidently, received revelations from the Lord by means of it, but after the death of that prophet, the Lord refused to answer the questions of the king. (Sam. 28:3-6.) Among the captives who returned from Babylon with Ezra there were several hundred who had lost their genealogical records and were unable to prove their claim to a standing among the people. They were permitted to dwell with the rest but not to enjoy the privileges of the priesthood, "till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim," who, we may suppose, could declare the will of the Lord concerning them. (Ezra 2:59-63; Neh. 7:65.) From which it appears that the instrument at this time was lost, but that the prophets of the Lord expected that it would be restored, sometime.

In the Book of Mormon the Urim and Thummim is called the "interpreters." The Lord gave the two stones to the brother of Jared and commanded him to seal them up with his writings. (Ether 3:21-28.) Mosiah had such an instrument. (Omni 20; Mosiah 8:13, 19.) He handed it to Alma (Mos. 28:20), and Alma to Helaman. (Alma 37:20-25.) Finally, Moroni sealed it up with his writings. (Ether 4:5.) From Doc. and Cov. 17:1, we learn that the Urim and Thummim which came into the possession of the Prophet Joseph was the very instrument which God had given to the Brother of Jared upon the mount.

Happiness

'Tis not for gold or fame I long;
The simple things my soul will bless;
My life's a joyous, lilting, song;
I drink the wine of happiness.

A little cottage by the road;
A flick'ring fire light at eve;
The peace and joy in our abode
On earth the fairest, I believe.

The halls of fame may claim the few;
Let me a mother be, and wife;
My husband, girlhood's dreams, come true,
The pal, the comrade of my life.

My baby close against my breast;
A dimpled hand against my face,
The richest jewel by us possessed,
No mine of gold could take his place!

In some far-future day he'll be
A man, fine as his father's fine;
A prince of men, he seems to me.
Oh, joy, that both of them are mine!

Scipio, Utah

NONA H. BROWN