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Notes on the Book of Mormon IV

Author(s): J. M. Sjodahl

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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 fourth part covers Joseph Smith's translation of the plates.

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF MORMON

BY J. M. SJODAHL

IV

How the Prophet was prepared for the Work of Translation. Just how the translation of the plates was effected is not known, except that it was done by the "gift and power of God."* But this we know, that when Joseph Smith received the volume, Sept. 22, 1827, he was well prepared for the—from a mere human point of view—extraordinarily difficult task entrusted to him.

His special training commenced on Sept. 21, 1823, when the Angel Moroni first visited him. The heavenly messenger told Joseph of the existence of the book, and also explained its contents.† He said it was an account of the former inhabitants of this continent. From a letter by Oliver Cowdery‡ we learn that the angel "gave a general account of the promises made to the fathers, and also gave a history of the aborigines of this country, and said they were literal descendants of Abraham. He represented them as once being an enlightened and intelligent people, possessing a correct knowledge of the gospel, and the plan of restoration and redemption." From this it appears that the angel gave Joseph quite a detailed account of the historical contents of the Book.

But the information imparted by the angel was not limited to Book-of-Mormon history; Moroni explained to Joseph the everlasting gospel, as delivered by our Lord to the ancient inhabitants of America. He explained the use of the Urim and Thummim. He quoted the Old Testament on the coming of the Lord, the restoration of the Priesthood, and salvation for the dead, as implied in the prophecy of Malachi. He spoke of the gathering of the "remnant," and of the Millennium, as predicted by Isaiah (chap. 11); of the pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh, as foretold by Joel (2:28-32), and of the second advent, as preached by Peter (Acts 3:19-23). Three times during the night did the angel appear, and again the following morning, and each time he repeated his message as first delivered, each time adding some new item of instruction. He spoke of great judgments that were to come upon the earth, and of the temptations the prophet would have to overcome, warning him not to yield to selfishness. In other words, the angel outlined to him the entire plan of salvation. For four years, on each 22nd of September, the interviews

*Testimony of the Three Witnesses.

†Pearl of Great Price, p. 51, v. 34, new ed.

‡Mess. and Adv., vol. 1, p. 80.

were repeated at the hill Cumorah. After such preparations Joseph began the translation, guided by the divine Spirit.*

Martin Harris Writes. Martin Harris wrote the first 116 pages, as the Prophet Joseph dictated them. These, however, were lost, through the almost criminal negligence of the scribe. The Lord, then, provided another amanuensis.

It may be that the hand of the Lord was manifested in this incident for good, although that may not at first have been apparent. It is quite probable that Harris did not possess the necessary education to wield the pen in the production of this great literary work.

Oliver Cowdery as Scribe. On April 5, 1829, Oliver Cowdery arrived in the home of the Prophet Joseph, at Harmony, Pa., having undertaken that journey for the purpose of obtaining information concerning the book, after having heard the marvelous story of its coming forth, as related by members of the family. Two days after his arrival in Harmony the translation was resumed from the beginning, with Oliver Cowdery as scribe.†

Translation Completed at the Home of the Whitmers. At the beginning of the month of June, 1829, the Prophet Joseph received an invitation from the Whitmers, who lived at Fayette, Seneca Co., N. Y., to come and stay with them until the translation should be finished. The invitation was gratefully received. At the Whitmer farm the work proceeded rapidly. The translation was completed

*About the time the angel delivered the plates to the Prophet Joseph, some of those who afterwards joined the Church had a remarkable vision. President Heber C. Kimball, in a sermon in Salt Lake City, Nov. 26, 1854, related the manifestation as follows:

"President Young, myself, Phineas Young, and many others saw it. We saw an army start from the east and go to the south, and there were twelve men in a column, and one column came right after the other, so that when the first stepped, the next stepped in their track, and they had swords, guns, knapsacks, caps, and feathers, and we could see them march with a uniform step from one side of heaven to the other. This we saw with our natural eyes and looked upon it for hours. It was the very night that the angel delivered the plates to Joseph Smith. This army marched to the southwest, and they marched as if there was a battle to take place; and we could hear the clashing of their swords and guns, and the measured tread of their march, just as plain as I ever heard the movements of troops on the earth."—*Jour of Dis.*, Vol. 2, p. 161.

Heber C. Kimball was twenty-six years old when he had this remarkable vision. Four years later he joined the Church by baptism, April 15, 1832. Brigham Young was baptized a year later, April 14, 1833.

†It was while thus engaged, on May 15, 1829, that the Aaronic Priesthood was conferred upon them by John the Baptist, who also instructed them to baptize and ordain each other to that Priesthood. On the same occasion they were promised the Melchizedek Priesthood, which promise was fulfilled under the hands of Peter, James and John in the wilderness between Harmony, Susquehanna Co., and Colesville, Brown County, on the banks of the Susquehanna river, some time between May 15 and the end of June, 1829.—*History of the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 40-1.

on July 1, 1829,* and the first edition, three thousand copies, was printed at Palmyra by Mr. F. B. Gradin. It was ready for distribution early in the year 1830.

Two Manuscripts. Two identical manuscripts were made. One, written almost in its entirety by Oliver Cowdery, was the copy used by the printer.† This, finally, came into the custody of David Whitmer, who prized it so highly that he refused to part with it on any condition. The other, the Prophet Joseph kept. It was deposited in one of the cornerstones of the Nauvoo House, Oct. 2, 1841. Portions of it, unfortunately somewhat damaged by dampness, were carefully preserved by the late President Joseph F. Smith, after the exodus from Nauvoo.

Foreign Versions. The Book of Mormon is a message to "Jew and Gentile,"‡ to "all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people."§ Consequently, as soon as missionary work was undertaken outside the English-speaking world, translations of the marvelous record were made.

The first foreign version published was the Danish. The translation was made by Elder P. O. Hansen. This was carefully revised by Elder Erastus Snow, the Apostle, in 1851, and two thousand copies were printed in Copenhagen. In 1852 a French version was published in Paris by Elder John Taylor, and an Italian in London, by Elder Lorenzo Snow, both members of the Apostles' Council; also a German version in Hamburg, by Elders John Taylor and G. Parker Dykes; and a Welsh, by Elder John Davis, at Myrthyr Tydfil. A Hawaiian translation was published in San Francisco, by Elder George Q. Cannon, in 1855. A Swedish version was published in Copenhagen, 1878, by Elder August W. Carlson; a Spanish, under direction of Elder Moses Thatcher, in Salt Lake City, 1886; a Maori, in Auckland, N. Z., 1889; a Dutch, by J. W. F. Volker, in Amsterdam, 1890; a Samoan, in Salt Lake City, 1903; a Tahitian, at Papeete, Tahiti, Society Islands, 1904; a Turkish, translated under the direction of Elder F. F. Hintze, in New York, 1906; and a Japanese, in Tokyo, 1909. A translation into Hebrew was completed in 1922, by Brother Henry Miller, in Salt Lake City. This has not yet been published.

In Royal Palaces. On January 19, 1841, the word of the Lord came to the Saints, instructing them to make the gospel known to kings, to the president-elect,|| and to all nations.** This revelation

*David Whitmer, *Mill. Star*, vol. 43, p. 421.

†*History of the Church*, vol. 1, p. 75.

‡See Title Page, Book of Mormon.

§Testimony of the Witnesses

||Wm. H. Harrison, the ninth president of the United States, who was inaugurated March 4, 1841. The Prophet said of him: "We voted for General Harrison because we loved him. He was a gallant officer and a true friend."—Nauvoo, Ill., Dec. 29, 1841; *Times and Seasons*, vol. 3, p. 651.

**D. and C., Sec. 124:1-14.

was read to the Saints at the general conference in Nauvoo, April 7, 1841.

In London. In 1842 the Book of Mormon was sent to the royal palace in London. Concerning this, the following brief account appears in the biography of Lorenzo Snow, by Eliza R. Snow, p. 63:

"Before leaving London, Elder Lorenzo Snow presented to Her Majesty Queen Victoria and His Royal Highness Prince Albert, through the politeness of Sir Henry Wheatly, two neatly bound copies of the Book of Mormon, which had been donated by President Brigham Young and left in the care of Elder Snow for that purpose."

The date of the presentation is not given, but the event inspired a beautiful poem by the gifted sister of Elder Snow.

In Copenhagen. The appearance of the Danish version of the Book of Mormon in Copenhagen seems to have been the cause of considerable excitement among the people, which resulted in an agitation for government action against the elders, notwithstanding the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom. Elder Erastus Snow, therefore, sent a deputation to the king, Frederik VII, and presented him with a copy of the Book and a newly printed tract. This was in 1851. The Book of Mormon, it seems, fell into the hands of the Queen Dowager, and, according to rumors that later leaked out from the palace, she became so affected by reading it that her attendants felt quite alarmed. However, the government declined to interfere with the labors of the elders.*

In Berlin. Some time during the year 1852, King Frederic Wilhelm IV., of Prussia, instructed his minister in Washington to make inquiries concerning "Mormonism." At that time Mr. Bernhisel was Utah's delegate to Congress in Washington, and he, undoubtedly, gave the Prussian ambassador the desired information. In addition, some literature was forwarded to the king from the Church office in Liverpool.

At the general conference in Salt Lake City, Sept. 1, 1852, a deputation, consisting of Elders Orson Spencer and Jacob Houtz, was appointed to go to Berlin, and, if an audience were granted, answer all questions concerning the Church, that might be asked. The two elders arrived in Berlin, and on Jan. 29, 1853, they addressed a respectful communication to His Excellency von Raumer, the state minister of ecclesiastical affairs, asking him to procure an audience for them. Shortly afterwards they received a summons from the prefect of police to appear before him on Feb. 1, and that was the only reply von Raumer condescended to give.

At police headquarters, the elders were examined concerning their doctrines and practices. Then they were ordered to leave Prussia the next day and never return.† A full report of the proceedings at police headquarters had undoubtedly been sent to the king.

*Letter from Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, dated Liverpool, July 10, 1851.

†Letter from Orson Spencer to Brigham Young, dated Liverpool, Feb. 8, 1853.

In Stockholm. In 1897, Oscar II., then king of both Sweden and Norway, celebrated, with his beloved consort, Queen Sophia, the Twenty-fifth anniversary of their accession to the thrones of the two kingdoms. That was a social event of which cognizance was taken throughout the civilized world, because of the popularity of that truly great Bernadotte. Scandinavians abroad and their descendants welcomed the occasion as one on which to express, by congratulations and more or less costly tokens of remembrance, their well-wishes for the royal house. In Utah a number of men and women of Swedish and Norwegian descent decided to send their majesties, with their congratulations, a copy of the Book of Mormon in elegant binding, as an appropriate and characteristic present. A box of Utah onyx, to which was attached a gold plate with a suitable inscription, was carved by Mr. Olof Nilson, of Salt Lake City. It was quite an artistic design. The Book, in its spotless, white, velvet covers, with a picture of the Temple in gold, was deposited in this beautiful receptacle, resting on a bed of silk made up of the Swedish and Norwegian colors.

When the unique present was ready for its long journey, the First Presidency of the Church decided to send a special messenger to Stockholm, to deliver it in person. That mission was entrusted to the writer.

On my arrival in Stockholm, through the courtesy of Count von Rosen and Count Von Essen, I obtained an audience with the king, in the palace, Sept. 22, 1897. The following paragraphs are from the official report of the Jubilee for that date:

"After the delegation* had retired, his Majesty admitted Mr. J. M. Sjudahl, from Utah, who, on behalf of Swedes and Norwegians there residing, presented his Majesty with a casket made of onyx and containing the Book of Mormon in de luxe binding. Mr. Sjudahl said:

"Your Majesty! I have come from Utah, one of the western states of the North American Union, to bring your Majesty, on behalf of Swedes and Norwegians there, homage and congratulations. We, too, in the far-away West, are praying the Almighty to grant to your Majesty long life, for the welfare of the brother-nations."

"His Majesty replied in part:

"Tell my countrymen, the Swedes and Norwegians in Utah, that I thank them sincerely for the beautiful present they have sent me. I wish them success in their far-away land'."†

From the letter of congratulation sent by the First Presidency, I make this extract:

"Elder Sjudahl has been selected by his fellow-countrymen, natives of Sweden and Norway, a large body of whom reside in and are citizens of the

*Refers to a delegation of Upsala students.

†*Redogorelse for Konung Oscar II:s 25-åriga Regeringsjubileum*, p. 231; also *Deseret News*, Oct. 12, 1897.

state of Utah, to proceed to the court of their Majesties, King Oscar II and Queen Sophia, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of their ascension to the throne, for the purpose of presenting in their name and behalf, to their Majesties a casket made of Utah onyx, containing a copy of the Book of Mormon, as an expression of the high esteem, affection and love which the Scandinavians of this Intermountain region entertain for their Majesties, with the hope and earnest desire that their Majesties will live to witness many happy returns of this most auspicious event.

"And we, ourselves, though not of the Scandinavian race, do most heartily join with our Scandinavian friends and fellow-citizens in desiring long life, peace, prosperity, and happiness for their Majesties, King OSCAR II and Queen SOPHIA, of Sweden and Norway.—*Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, Joseph F. Smith, First Presidency, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.*

"Salt Lake City, Utah, U. S. A., Aug. 20, 1897."*

I did not think of it at the time, but I discovered afterwards that the presentation to the king was made on the seventieth anniversary of the very day the original plates were delivered to the Prophet Joseph by Moroni.

*Redogorelse etc., p. 119. An elegant copy of this "Redogorelse," or official report, was sent to me the following year, by the direction of the king, accompanied by the following note: "Pa Nadigste befallning far Chefen for H. M. Konungens Hofforvaltning harmed aran ofverlemna ett exemplar af Redogorelsen for H. M. Konungens 25-ariga regerings jubileum. Stockholm den 17, September, 1898."

The Narrow Way

There is a road to peace and sweet content,
We know the narrow path the Saviour meant,
From its rugged tracks we view the other way—
Broad, smooth, and crowded night and day,
So many are deceived and walk therein,
Intent a world of gayety to win.

So much of selfishness, of hate and sin,
Is there, 'till sorrow's cups fill to the brim.
The little sacrifice, the quiet restraint,
Old fashioned ways and rules so quaint,
We could not bear, and so we turned unto the left,
Alas! We saved our life but now we are bereft.

We need not wait 'til God shall call us home,
Across the shining river with its thin white foam.
Eternal peace may here our glad hearts fill,
And Joy, like heaven's dew, upon our souls distill—
Who humbly steer their way, avoiding strife,
Along the narrow path that leadeth unto life.

KERSHAW N. WHITE