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Our Work: Review of the New Manual

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Abstract: A review of the new (1905-06) Book of Mormon manual. Expounds on B. H. Roberts's views of the importance of the Book of Mormon. External and internal evidence supports Book of Mormon's claim to truth. The manual refutes objections to the Book of Mormon, such as the Spaulding and Rigdon theories.

OUR WORK.

REVIEW OF THE NEW MANUAL.

At one of the officers' meetings of the June conference there were ten two-minute talks on Manual Difficulties. The talks doubled before the time was up, and there were others to hear from. Elder B. H. Roberts made a very satisfactory response, however, and we believe the officers present were convinced that the lack of serious application and devotion to study on the part of the members was about the greatest difficulty. While Elder Roberts was before the congregation, he gave a very entertaining preview of the new Manual, a synopsis of which, from the notes of the stenographer, F. W. Otterstrom, of the L. D. S. University, is here presented, a careful perusal of which it is believed will interest the reader and make him an enthusiastic student of this season's Manual which, in the opinion of many, is the most fascinating of the Book of Mormon series.

Elder Roberts dwelt especially upon the importance of the study of the Book of Mormon, and said that there is one thought which he specially desired to dwell upon, in the preview of the 1905-6 Manual, and that is, the importance of this subject—the Book of Mormon. I grant you that, like the previous Manuals dealing with that subject, the text is somewhat difficult. But the question is, are not the merits of the subject, and its importance, so great that it should stimulate the youth to master it. I confess that the Book of Mormon is but a mere incident in the great work of the Lord, in these last days, but even if it is counted but a mere incident, it is still an incident so important that the stability and the endurance of "Mormonism" is wrapped up with that incident. What would be the status of "Mormonism" if it could be proved, beyond question, that what Joseph Smith said of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon was not true? Suppose that he himself, and all associated with him, were deceived, as some urge they were; suppose that the truth of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon could be overthrown, and it could be proved to be other than the Prophet Joseph declared it to be,

what would be our status as a church? I do not care how excellent our system may be; I do not care how successful we have been, if the Book of Mormon is a fraud, "Mormonism" could look no higher than human wisdom for its origin. In other words, it will stand or fall as the Book of Mormon is demonstrated true or false. Therefore, on this rests mighty consequences; and I want to express a conviction I have, that at no point are we so vulnerable to attack as upon that same Book of Mormon. Now, understand me, so far as the work of God is concerned, so far as its stability is concerned, so far as the assurance of its success in the earth is concerned, I do not believe there is a man in Israel who can be more positive than I am, in his conviction of the truth and final triumph of this work. I do not believe the Book of Mormon can be assailed and overcome. But, while all this is true, I still repeat that it marks our most vulnerable point, and that the faith of more of the youth of Zion could be overthrown by a persistent attack upon the Book of Mormon, as it appeared in its first edition, than on any other point whatsoever. I believe, moreover, that the elders of the Church of Christ are least prepared to meet the attacks of our enemy at that point, and that more unbelief rests upon attacks that have been made upon it, than upon any other cause. Hence, I say that the importance of this subject of the Book of Mormon, and establishing the faith of our young people in it, is the question, the subject of all subjects, that is of most importance to us.

Now, then, if this be true, it is sufficient to make us discard all difficulties, and go into the heart of the book, until we shall master it. Then, again, if we shall succeed in establishing the faith of our young people in this record, then in what position are we placed? On the safest and surest ground upon which we can stand. Establish the truth of the Book of Mormon, in the hearts of the youth of Zion; let them get that into their hearts once, until they know it as they know they live, and they will not be shaken, so far as consideration of doctrine is concerned.

The next Manual contains two chapters of Bible Evidences of the truth of the Book of Mormon. These evidences are derived from the Bible in support of the Book of Mormon. This part of the subject is touched lightly, for the reason that there are others who have occupied the field. We have the excellent works of Elders Orson Pratt and Parley P. Pratt, and also Elder Charles Thompson, who wrote in 1841, so that subject is pretty well in the minds of the people.

The last chapter on External Evidences is an arrangement of the evidences that the Church bears to the truth of the Book of Mormon.

We consider what has come of the book, what has grown out of it. Has what it has produced been commensurate with the work that has been started by the Book of Mormon? I reach this conclusion, that the Church of Christ, all its organizations, its doctrines, and its history, bear overwhelming evidence to the truth of the Book of Mormon; hence, the evidence that the Church bears to the truth of the Book of Mormon.

We next come to the Internal Evidences of the truth of the Book of Mormon, and here we are on new ground again, and officers will have some difficulty with the boys, because they have not had much experience in the matter of literary criticism. Passing over some of the points quickly, we have, as a general division of the first chapter, the statement that the Book of Mormon, in style and language, is consistent with the theory of its construction, both in unity and also in the diversity of its style. The circumstances under which the Book of Mormon came forth require in some respects a unity of style, and again a diversity. Let me illustrate: The first 156 pages of the book are made up of the writings of nine men, nine authors, the first four hundred years of Nephite existence. They tell their story at first hand; that is, it is a translation of the original documents written by these nine men. The rest of the Book of Mormon is an abridgement of the larger Nephite records made by Moroni and Mormon, and also of the Jaredite records. Suppose, under the circumstances, you do not find a diversity of style; well, then you have a serious difficulty on your hands. But I am happy to say that you find the differences that you require; that is, in the translation from the small plates of Nephi, the writings of each man, whose name is given, is stated in the first person, and tells its story right out as one man speaking for himself; on the other hand, when you go to the abridged part, you find there the marks of the abridger, and the story is told in the third person. Therefore, I hold that the Book of Mormon is consistent with the theory of its construction. It has also other characteristics of an abridgment.

It has also an originality in the matter of names. Let us pause here long enough to point out what I mean by that. To produce names is the most difficult thing in the world. They are not created. You do not create a name, and then go round hunting for something to stick it on, but something comes before you, and you give it a name—it is a matter of growth. Now, there is no question but the Prophet Joseph has given to the world several hundred names, and they are original; and if men do not accept the story that he tells, that he obtained them from the plates of the ancient Nephites, then they must regard him as

a genius who has given to the world more names than any other who has ever lived in it.

If you wish to know how difficult it is to create names, give us a few really original names that are not derived. Joseph gives us the names not of one nation, but two. Must there not be a marked distinction between the names of the Jaredites and the Nephites, because there was only a slight connection between these two peoples? The Jaredites occupied this country sixteen hundred years, and disappeared, as you know, through wars, about the time the Nephites arrived here. You will find that the Book of Mormon rises to the occasion, and there is a marked distinction between the names we have of the Jaredites and the Nephites. The names of the Jaredites, out of the forty-one or forty two we have, with the single exception of two names, end in consonants; while more than half of the Nephite names end in vowels. Then again, in this matter of names, the very ancient people should naturally have the root-words, and the people who lived later, the derivative names, compound names. Well, what says the Book of Mormon, with reference to this technicality, which is so important, and could never have been thought out by Joseph Smith? Why, it meets that demand exactly! If these things have the same effect on you as they have on me, they are overwhelming as testimony of this work.

Again, the Book of Mormon forms of government are consistent with the circumstances under which they were established. We have monarchies spoken of, and the ecclesiastical form of government. Now suppose that in these ancient monarchies, and in that ancient Nephite republic, you should find modern ideas of government, of which the ancients knew nothing, what would you think of it? It would be difficult to explain, would it not? On examination, you will find there is not a modern idea, but they are in strict harmony with the ancient ideas. The Nephite republic has no conception of the representative idea in it. There is no such thing as confederacy, but only the republican form of government, known to the world at that time. If Joseph Smith had worked into this book the forms of modern civilization, the world could certainly have claimed it a serious defect.

Again, the events of the Book of Mormon are in harmony with the characters of the writers. Many people have wondered why a book which, according to its own claims, was intended merely to bring forth a testimony in regard to God's existence, and that the gospel was the power of salvation, should contain so much matter describing wars and personal encounters. Why is that so? For the simple reason that Mormon and Moroni, who wrote the chief part of the Book of Mormon,

were warriors themselves, and they could no more refrain from telling that story than some good old resident of Kirtland could refrain from telling incidents connected with the life of the Prophet Joseph and the early history of the Church. All these things speak loudly of the consistency of the Book of Mormon, and point to its truth.

In the 40th chapter you will encounter your chief difficulties, and I commend it to your consideration. I hope that you officers will master it. Here you come not to the difficulty of names; here you come not to the length of lessons as your difficulty; but you come to grapple with ideas. Men have complained about the Book of Mormon not containing any new revelation from God, or anything new beyond the Bible. When you come to chapter 40 of your next Manual, and you master it, if you find no new revelation, you will indeed be dull. The book here lays hold of the deep things of God, and gives you not only the truths of the Jewish scriptures, but it adds others, and goes beyond the philosophy of man, in its greatness; yet it is expressed in terms that will appeal to you, and to the members of your Mutual Improvement Associations. You will here meet the problems that have confounded philosophers from the beginning, and these grand truths are expressed in the most beautiful terms. For instance, speaking of the fall of Adam, and man's existence: "Adam fell that man might be, and men are that they might have joy." Why, I could stand on any platform, in this whole world, and challenge from the literature, sacred or profane, any generalization that is so grand as that. It is not written in the language of man. Look through your Bible, and you shall nowhere find a statement of the reason why Adam fell. We have just this much of the curtain lifted by Paul, who says, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in transgression."

Every creed written by the hand of man has covered our great progenitor with ridicule and contempt. They have accused him of being the author of all our woe and our sin; intimated that he was cowardly, that he tried to shift the responsibility onto the shoulders of Eve. Every creed arraigns him, and no creed tells why he acted as he did. The Book of Mormon tells you why. The fall of man was as essential, in the accomplishment of the purposes of God, as the redemption of man. If there had been no fall, there could have been no redemption. The fall of man was not a surprise, but it was part of God's purpose. It was known and designed that he should fall, and Adam consented to go through the ordeal, in order that existence might be given to man, and that under such circumstances he could be added upon, and be made to progress. That is why Adam fell. God's purposes were carried out by our

father Adam, and, instead of being cowardly, he gave the highest assurance of his splendid courage and his unwavering love. Our first parents received a joint commandment that they should multiply and replenish the earth. The woman was deceived and fell, and under the penalty of the law, knowing that if she were separated from him, the law could not be fulfilled, Adam went with eyes open and carried out the purposes that had been designed in the councils of heaven, and transgressed with her.

The Book of Mormon explains these things, and in it how beautifully they are expressed! "Men are that they might have joy." Not the pleasures of life, as some people view it. The old Epicurean doctrine was that pleasure is the chief end of life. Note the difference between the terms pleasure and joy. According to the doctrine referred to, pleasure rose no higher than the gratification of brute passions, and the mastery of man over man; but the Book of Mormon takes a higher and more enlightened view of this. It does not mean mere pleasure, in a physical sense; but, on the contrary, such joy as comes to us from pain—even as a mother's joy comes at the birth of her child,—notwithstanding all the distress, there is nevertheless joy in her heart that she has brought forth a son. There is the joy of the father, which comes from the pain and weariness of toil; and so, you observe there is a distinction between joy and pleasure. This joy of the Book of Mormon does not come from the joy of mere innocence, because the Book of Mormon itself says, that had our first parents remained in their state of innocence, they could have known no joy, knowing no sorrow, and so on. Joy, as defined, comes from something besides mere innocence, of which one is always, more or less, suspicious, because it has never been tried; but the joy contemplated in the Book of Mormon is that joy which comes from conquering, the joy which comes from resisting evil—knowing it, resisting it, and overcoming it, standing triumphant over all difficulties.

The Book of Mormon also gives a definition of truth. When Jesus stood before Pilate, the governor asked him: "What is truth?" All the world deplors the fact that before receiving his divine answer, the Roman procurator went out to allay the mob, and so we are without the answer of Christ to this important question. It remains for the Book of Mormon to give us that splendid answer: "Truth is knowledge of that which is, of that which has been, of that which is to be." That is truth. It is the sum of existence. It is knowledge of things as they have been, as they are, as they will be; and, mark you, there is this which is peculiar to this definition: it gives the

idea of movement in truth. Truth is not a stagnant reservoir, but a fountain sending forth living streams. Truth is not standing still; there is a movement in it; and it is the Book of Mormon that gives the idea of that grand theory of movement in truth. Things are going forward. There is a constant movement in the sum of existence.

Then, there is the doctrine of opposite existence, the philosophy of the existence of evil, a necessary background to truth, without the existence of which, truth cannot be conceived; and Lehi, in his inspired treatment of it, proves that this eternal antithesis, this existence of the opposites, is of primary importance.

Division four deals with the objections to the Book of Mormon, and there we have the Spaulding, Rigdon and other theories. Then we have, in chapter 45, the errors of style; and, moreover, the objections based upon the existence of passages which follow King James' translation of the Bible. We consider the questions that have been urged against the geography of the Book of Mormon. We have the difficulties supposed to attend the migration of the Nephites, the existence of the horse in America, and the objections urged against the Book of Mormon on this account; then the pro-Christian era knowledge of the gospel; the establishing of the priesthood with others than the tribe of Nephi; as also the difficulty of the three days darkness, the birth of Jesus, the settlement of modern controversies; and the charge is answered about the book having nothing new in it; the idea of modern astronomy in the Book of Mormon is considered, and many other divisions.

I hope this faint and imperfect outline will give encouragement to you, and, above all, I trust that you are impressed with the importance of this subject, which is so great that it will fully justify us in struggling with whatsoever of difficulties we have in our way.

THE FALL CONVENTIONS.

Elder George H. Brimhall, of the General Board, dwelt upon a topic at the June conference, which is very timely now. Let every stake and ward officer read this, and act at once. Circulars of program and instruction, will follow soon.

A convention generally indicates a convening of officers or representatives. It has in it the elements of conference, because we confer. We confer mainly officially. You know there are a great many kinds of conferences, but a convention is an official conference. It is one