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The Book of Mormon as Translation English

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Abstract: This article is a response to the argument that the Book of Mormon is an "imitation of biblical dictation." Sperry demonstrates that the Book of Mormon is an inspired translation, not simply an anthology of quotations, thoughts, or sayings of Joseph Smith, by examining various Isaianic passages in the Book of Mormon and comparing them with the Isaiah of the Septuagint, the Authorized Version, and the Hebrew text.

The BOOK OF MORMON AS

SOME years ago one of my teachers, a very brilliant and able man, wrote a challenging book on the problems of the New Testament. That book contains the following statement: "The imitation of biblical dictation is one of the commonest of literary phenomena. Most old-fashioned prayers were of that description. Many English hymns exhibit the same quality. Much alleged undergraduate humor takes that form. The chief modern example is the Book of Mormon, which none of us I suppose acknowledges as a translation at all. The biblical style of John Bunyan cited by Moulton (Grammar, II, 8) is a happier illustration. And generally speaking it is the people who are least acquainted with Semitic languages who are most fascinated with composing in this half-Semitic English."

The above statement ought to rouse from complacency every Latter-day Saint who is interested in the fundamental and peculiar beliefs of the Church. In so far as the limited space permits, I shall present evidence to show that the Book of Mormon *is* a translation. *In fact, the nature of the English of the Book of Mormon warrants the statement that it is translation English.*

Let us examine for a moment what the Book of Mormon says about certain linguistic matters that concern itself. Nephi, the first writer in the book, and who, according to the record, must have left Jerusalem about 600 B. C., states: "I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians." (I Nephi 1:2.) Nearly a thousand years later, when the Nephite nation had been destroyed, a survivor, Moroni, writes: "And now, behold, 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. And if our plates had been suffi-
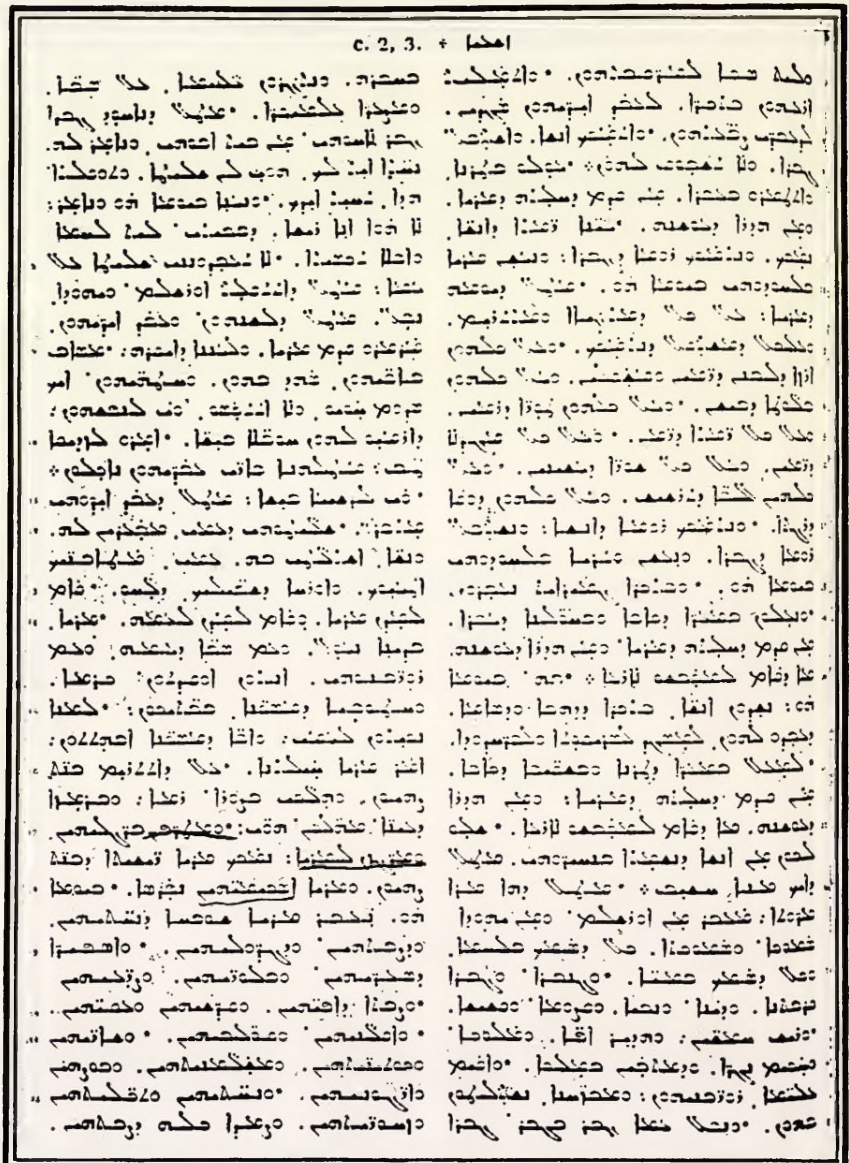
A PAGE FROM THE 3RD CHAPTER OF ISAIAH IN THE SYRIAC BIBLE. VERSE 9 BEARS OUT IN PART THE BOOK OF MORMON RENDERING

ciently large, we should have written in Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also; and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record. But the Lord knoweth the things which we have written, and also that none other people knoweth our lan-

guage." (Mormon 9:32-34.) Assuming that the migrations mentioned in the sacred record actually took place, most philologists would probably acknowledge on the face of the matter that the statements relative to language are fair and quite plausible. Another important observation:—when the Nephites left Jerusalem they may have had an active speaking knowledge of Egyptian and so far as their

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knowledge of Hebrew was concerned, it was that of Palestinian natives. But a thousand years later their descendants, Mormon and Moroni, can scarcely be expected to have had an active speaking knowledge of Egyptian. Their knowledge of Egyptian would probably be limited to a passive reading knowledge of the same. Assuming they could write a species of Egyptian, it would be heavily Hebraized because Hebrew was their native language. In my opinion a few generations following the days of Nephi and Lehi a knowledge of Egyptian was limited to comparatively few of their descendants—mainly scribes and men of good education. It would seem highly probable that "reformed" Egyptian was a species of shorthand, and was made directly from Egyptian in much the same manner as demotic developed from hieratic, or by combining certain features of both the Egyptian and Hebrew alphabets. Others to the contrary, I see few resemblances to either ancient Egyptian or ancient Hebrew characters in the few lines of hieroglyphics copied from the plates and left us by the Prophet Joseph Smith. "None other people knoweth our language." Hence, the need for an inspired translator.

The problem of the Book of Mormon is fundamentally a literary one. If biologists, geologists and scientists generally speaking, who examine certain phases of the Book of Mormon record would keep this fact in mind, much t r o u b l e and misapprehension would be averted. The geological, biological, and other phases of the Book of Mormon study are purely secondary to the literary one, viz., Did Joseph Smith translate?

NOW let us proceed to the evidence of translation in the Book of Mormon. First of all let us examine some text of Isaiah quoted in the record. The Nephites brought with them from Jerusalem the Hebrew scriptures of 600 B. C.

including the prophecies of Isaiah, the son of Amoz. The sacred record recognizes no Second or Trito-Isaiah. The Nephites delighted in Isaiah and quoted extensively from him. When Joseph Smith came to these quotations he very wisely followed the authorized version except in points where the record before him differed sufficiently, whereupon he made the appropriate changes to conform to the ancient version. The fact that he made changes is in itself quite remarkable. There is no real evidence that he had at that time been expertly taught about textual criticism, and the history of the Bible text. My own experience has been that very few intelligent people in the Church even today recognize fully the implications that follow from the presence of Isaiah texts in the Book of Mormon. Any Bible scholar knows the text followed by the Authorized version contained corruptions. The text of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon ought. presumably, to reveal a practically uncorrupted text, dating back to at least 600 B. C., in which case we can scientifically check it, at least

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As is indicated in his article, he has a number of graduate students at work upon the book.

This article ought to be of interest to Latter-day Saints and to all others who have a curiosity about the strangest book ever produced upon the American continent, if not in the entire world.

in part, by means of the ancient manuscript versions. Incidentally we ought to discover earmarks of real translation on the part of the Prophet.

Let us examine two texts in II Nephi 8 with which compare Isaiah 51. Verse 15 of the Nephite record reads: "But I am the Lord thy God, whose waves roared; the Lord of Hosts is my name." On comparing this rendition with that of the Authorized version, it will be noticed that it omits a whole clause, "that divided the sea" and that it has "my name" for "his name." Why should the Prophet omit a whole clause? Simply because he had a version before him that differed from our present Hebrew, Septuagint (Greek) and Authorized versions. And again, when the Prophet writes "my name" for "his name" he flys in the face of the Hebrew and Authorized versions. but the context and the Septuagint version agree with him. Textual criticism easily explains why the Hebrew reads as it does because of two letters easily confused. The Book of Mormon here hews an independent path as one would expect a really ancient and genuine version to do.

The second text we shall examine in this chapter is Verse 21. It is an especially interesting one. The Book of Mormon reads: "Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, and not with wine." The Authorized version reads similarly with the exception of the last clause where it reads "but" for "and." I personally feel that the Authorized version has the better rendering in question but what is of great interest is that the Prophet has *translated too literally* the equivalent of our present Hebrew text. The Hebrew literally reads: "And not from (or with) wine."

Now to examine a few texts of Isaiah in other chapters. In II Nephi 12:16 (compare Isaiah 2: 16) the Prophet prefixes a whole

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phrase not contained in the Authorized version or Hebrew version. The phrase in question is "and upon all the ships of the sea." With this phrase the Septuagint agrees and it is perfectly easy to explain on the basis of the Book of Mormon reading's being the original why our present Hebrew text has but two phrases. According to the Book of Mormon the original had three phrases all beginning with the same words, "and upon all." But a perfectly natural error some scribe's eye inadvertently hit upon the second "and upon all," and the first phrase was omitted. It is interesting to note that the Septuagint version has preserved the first phrase of this verse correctly, has omitted one phrase and has corrupted another. The Hebrew has preserved the last two phrases correctly, but the Book of Mormon has preserved all three.

II Nephi 13:9 (compare Isaiah 3:9). In this rather remarkable illustration we shall deal only with the first sentence. The Authorized version reads, "The shew of their countenance doth witness against them; and they declare their sin as Sodom they hide it not." Contrast this with the Book of Mormon which reads, "The show of their countenance doth witness against them, and doth declare their sin to be even as Sodom, and they cannot hide it." The Nephite version has a change in meaning. The ancient Syriac version agrees exactly with the rendering of the clause, "and they cannot hide it" of the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, in our present Hebrew text, it is possible by shifting the last letter of the second verb before the following word, to get precisely the reading of the Nephite scripture for the part of the verse in question. It is possible, too, that a letter of the Hebrew text has dropped out as some scholars may insist. At any rate who can deny the strong evidence of translation at this point in the Nephite text? Few will be likely to deny that the Nephite version has an attractive reading.

Compare II Nephi 13:12 with Isaiah 3:12. Here the Authorized version has a reading, "As for my

people" as against the Book of Mormon, "And my people." If the last letter of the Hebrew text of verse 11 is placed in front of the first word in verse 12 we have precisely the Book of Mormon reading, as in the previous case. Here is another sample of wrong word division which the Prophet Joseph Smith corrected and only a translator could reasonably do this. If it be argued that by moving the last letter of the Hebrew of verse 11 we thereby leave a mutilated text we simply point out that the Book of Mormon makes clear that the verse is corrupt. So also verse 10. Let the scholar compare the Nephite renderings of these verses and compare them with the present Hebrew texts or the Authorized version. The comparison is not likely to make us blush for the Book of Mormon.

PERHAPS enough examples of probable translation in the text of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon have been cited. We may say in passing that the Nephite text has unmistakable likenesses in many instances to either the ancient Greek or Syriac or Latin versions where it differs from the Hebrew. This is a curious fact but one easily explained on the basis of our contention that Joseph Smith was translating an ancient text of Isaiah. In a forthcoming Master's thesis being worked out under my direction, Principal H. Grant Vest of the Vernal Seminary, will make a rather full presentation of the facts pertaining to the text of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon.

Now we turn to parts of the Book of Mormon that cannot be checked by the ancient versions for evidence of translation. When I say the English of the Book of Mormon is translation English, I simply mean it is not English freely

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composed but is rather that type of English that would be produced by a translator who frequently follows the original too closely, the syntax of which is thus made plain in the English dress. In other words I hold the English of the Book of Mormon often betrays a too literal adherence to an apparent Hebrew original. Let us call it Hebrew-English. Hebrew idioms in the Book of Mormon have been noted by others, notably Thomas Brookbank, but apparently the full significance of them has been missed.

Jacob 5:2. "Hearken, O ye house of Israel, and hear the words of me, a Prophet of the Lord."

The second clause is apparently a too-literal translation of a Hebrew noun in the plural with a possessive suffix. Translate "and hear my words." The Prophet Joseph Smith had the correct idea but was unaccustomed to translation, coupled with which was lack of formal training in English.

The Book of Mormon follows generally the Hebrew custom of stringing out numerals. "And it came to pass that two hundred and thirty and eight years had passed away," Jarom 13; "and it came to pass that two hundred and seventy and six years had passed away," Omni 3; "and it came to pass that two hundred and forty and four years had passed away," 4 Nephi 40. Consult Genesis 5 where the same constructions can be noticed.

The construct state as described in Hebrew grammars seems apparent in Book of Mormon syntax.

"The construct relation corresponds most nearly to the relations expressed by of in English, in all its many senses: e. g., the palace of the king, the son of the father, a ring of gold. . . . This relation though usually, is not invariably expressed by of: The point is that the . . . words together make up one idea." Davidson-McFadyen, Hebrew Grammar, pp. 58, 59.

Book of Mormon examples: I Nephi 4:24, "the plates of brass" rather than "the brass plates." Mosiah 21:27, "plates of ore;" Alma 37:2, "plates of Nephi." In Mosiah 20:15 we have "the daughters of my people."

The expression "daughters of my people" occurs in the Old Testament but this is not exactly as the Book of Mormon has it. In Mosiah 12:33 we have "the mount

of Sinai" where we should expect "Mount Sinai" if the Prophet were following the Authorized version. The Prophet puts the expression in the construct state (and correctly enough) whereas the Authorized version never does. 2 Nephi 4:32, 33 "the gates of thy righteousness," "the robe of thy righteousness." It is true that many expressions in the construct state in the Book of Mormon are found exactly the same in the Bible or nearly so. This of course in no way vitiates my general argument. The latter is bound to be cumulative throughout for no one exhibition of Hebrew usage in the Book of Mormon proves my case. But when many cases of exact Hebrew grammatical constructions are exhibited it begins to be evident that the Book of Mormon is something other than "prayer book" or "half-Semitic" Nephi 17:51 we have the too-literal rendition "how is it that he cannot instruct me, that I should build a ship?" Translate "How is it that he cannot instruct me to build a ship?" Other example, I Nephi 1:11; 2:2; 3:24; 8:8, 13; 14:28; 17:36; 3 Nephi 19:16; Alma 11:2, etc.

We conclude this article by pointing out several expressions noted by Thomas Brookbank that seem typical of Hebrew usage in the Book of Mormon.

I Nephi 18:6—"And it came to pass that on the morrow, after we had prepared all things, much fruits and meat from the wilderness," etc. Here "all things" must mean "sufficient" as in Genesis 33:11 where the Authorized version reads, "and because I have enough." The Hebrew reads literally, "and because I have all (things)." See also II Nephi 6:3; Mosiah 26:38; Helaman 8:24.

The Hebrew "A man of words" equals "eloquent man." See Exodus 4:10 (Hebrew text). Compare Mosiah 27:8 "And he was a man of many words, and did speak much flattery to the people." Translate "and he was an eloquent man," etc. See Helaman 2:4.

In Hebrew "Steal the heart of" equals "deceive," "dupe" or "win over" in the intellectual sense. See Genesis 31:20 (Hebrew text); 2 Samuel 15:6.

Compare Mosiah 27:9—"And he became a great hinderment to the prosperity of the church of God; stealing away the hearts of the people." Translate "Deceiving the people," etc. See also Alma 39:4—"yea, she did steal way the hearts of many."

In presenting the case for the Book of Mormon as translation English we have presented but a few of the high points in its favor. From these, however, it is apparent that a far stronger case can be made out for the Book of Mormon as translation English than can be made for the Four Gospels as translation Greek as seen in the work of certain scholars such as C. C. Tor-rey of Yale University. It is my hope that non-Mormon scholars will attack the problem without undue prejudice and help or stimulate Latter-day Saints to greater efforts in the study of the Nephite record. A critical commentary on the Book of Mormon is sadly needed. Perhaps the Department of Religion of the Brigham Young University can some day supply one. But much study and research will be necessary before this can be done.

Marigolds Love The Sun

And longer ago—when Gordon had been Babs' special boy friend—his talk of far places and big new jobs had sounded exciting and fine. Reina had felt immensely flattered when all his attention had switched to her. The other men she knew had sunk to insignificance with their puny routine of selling or figuring.

Perhaps she should have run away from him then, left him to Babs. Babs might have enjoyed this high, thin isolation. Certainly she would have made a different place of the cabin, peopling the walls and furniture with creatures of her own bright designing, and gathering everyone from dour Mr. Sampson to silent Bill Crawford about her lamplit table for fierce and delighted quarreling. But oh, at that far time, how it would have torn Reina's heart to shreds if Gordon had loved plain little Babs in preference to her golden self!

THE sky had been darkening steadily. Now a swift patter of rain called Reina back to herself and the need to turn toward home. Five minutes later the downpour came, drenching her head and shoulders. But the rain brought no cooling relief. Moisture steamed up about her head, suffocatingly. Then a sharp chill shook her very bones and sent the car careening under uncertain fingers. Contours about her were dim and fluid; a shadowy cloud was just behind her, reaching. It required the most painful concentration to maintain steady going, for she kept wanting to turn off the engine and close her eyes for just a minute or two. Getting home seemed remote, impossible, not worth trying for.

In retrospect that ride seemed longer to Reina than the days and weeks that followed. The road tugged backward at the wheels and the more she increased her speed the less progress she seemd to make. The last half mile was an eternity of effort, with each tree and stone a separate goal to be strained after.

There was no fire in the stove, of course. Nothing hot to drink. No place to thaw her chilled and aching feet. Reina dropped heavily into a chair, feeling again the steamy waves surging from her wet body.

Mechanically she noted a small bundle just inside the door. She kicked at it, then began to laugh uncontrollably. It was Mrs. Crawford's marigold plants! "I wonder," she gasped, "if she'll leave cucumbers this summer, and expect me to make all her twenty-seven salads."

Almost immediately things began to clarify in her head. She could reason now with lightning ease. She must go at once to San Francisco. She had no more chance here than those marigolds would have back under the pine tree. She would simply fade and die, and it wasn't any use.

There was a southbound evening train out of Weston. Reina was on it, looking very flushed and bright-eyed, but otherwise composed. Inwardly, too, she felt serene and right. Gordon would be glad she had come away in time, while she could still fall back on the old ways with the same glad abandon—not huddle back shrinking and broken to confess her failure, and his. And he would not miss her seriously. Gordon was too engrossed in his work to care greatly about any woman—he had