



Type: Magazine Article

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## Mulek of Zarahemla, Chapter I

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (January 1948)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 22–24, 48, 53

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**Abstract:** This series is a novel based on the fictional character Mulek, an inhabitant of the city of Zarahemla during the war between Amalickiah and Moroni. The first part consists of chapter I.



#### EDITORIAL NOTE

J. N. WASHBURN, the author of the serial *Mulek*, which commences in this issue of the ERA, has long been interested in the Book of Mormon. With his father, J. A. Washburn, he wrote *An Approach to the Study of Book of Mormon Geography* in 1939, proving himself to be an astute student of this work. In the novel *Mulek*, the author has gone into the flora and fauna of the country where Mulek lived, as well as the characteristics of men and women who made the action of the story assume a vigorous truthness to life. J. N. Washburn has been a teacher and knows what will interest people, and has proceeded from this knowledge to weave a fascinating story of Book of Mormon days.

#### CHAPTER I

**T**HE day was hot, with the copper sun beating down, and only a slight breeze stirring the air to give an illusion of coolness. Small clouds that floated occasionally between sun and earth gave a few moments of welcome relief.

Within the jungle, however, there was a delightful freshness where the age-old earth had hoarded its damp-

ness under a bed of dead leaves and branches, deposited there lavishly from year to year, century after century.

On a narrow trail that seemed a stranger to the jungle fastnesses, so infrequent were openings of any kind, two men were moving, one just behind the other. From their manner of walking it was clear that they were either hunting or being hunted, for they went slowly, carefully, looking always about them.

The one behind was large and loose-limbed, a powerful fellow nearing middle age. He carried an ax, an indispensable implement since it was often necessary to cut a way through the undergrowth. The other, Mulek, the Zarahemlaite, was young.

Both were dressed in soft leather garments that protected them from the clutching fingers and greedy teeth of the forest. Their feet were shod in heavy sandals that kept them from the dampness of the ground. On their heads they wore brightly colored turbans, in strange and agreeable contrast with the somberness of the other parts of their costumes.

The young man carried in his hand a short, powerful bow to the

# MULEK

string of which he had an arrow ready. It was plainly a hunting weapon for small game, suitable for use with a minimum of time and space. From his left hip hung a small sword of exquisite quality, workmanship, and design.

He moved so slowly that he seemed to go almost with the regularity and rhythm of a dance. The man was looking closely into the dense brush that hid the ground. He was hunting with an intentness that was almost tense.

"There is no longer blood upon the trail," the other said suddenly.

"So I had noticed, Omer. Our game has taken to the cover of the underbrush. I fear we shall lose him, for it grows dark already within the shadows."

**H**ARDLY had he spoken when there came an outburst that was neither a squeal nor a grunt though it had much of both. It shattered the





# of Sarahemla

By J. N. WASHBURN

silence. Although the men had been awaiting just such a cry, they were startled, it was so near and so wild. Mulek whirled as if without his own effort. For an instant the older man was rooted in his tracks.

From a clump of bushes at the foot of a large tree shot a living catapult.

It was a wild boar, not large, but ferocious beyond belief. His eyes were bloodshot; his mouth and jaws were brutally torn; his tusks, ugly and stained, were like the dull points of rusty weapons. From his thigh protruded the shaft of a broken arrow.

The servant swung with his ax as the animal charged, but missed, so sudden and terrifying was the attack. The beast, mad with pain, struck Mulek on the leg, slashing open the legging and making an ugly gash in the flesh. Both man and brute lost balance and reeled. The boar plowed head foremost into

the rich dirt but came up instantly, his jaws black with earth.

Omer dared not use the ax again for fear of striking his master. The young man could not recover his equilibrium in time to make effective use of bow and arrow. Dropping them, he snatched expertly at the thin blade at his side. It seemed almost to anticipate his wish, it came away so quickly. The hunter met the oncoming beast with a deadly thrust. The sword passed entirely through the boar's body from side to side, from shoulder to ribs. So fast was the animal coming, so powerfully did he strike the earth that his body sprang along the shining sword until his snapping tusks flipped bloody foam on the man's arm.

Mulek put out his hand against a tree to steady himself for a moment because of the strain on mind and body, the shock to nerve and flesh.

"You are wounded!" Omer

rushed to his side. The youth smiled ruefully and regarded his ruined hunting suit and his bleeding leg.

"It is nothing," he replied as he looked down at the carcass that still quivered and kicked at his feet. "Anyhow, it was worth it." In a gesture of genuine admiration he touched the boar with his toe. "He was a fighter, with more courage in his heart than is to be found in many a man."

The servant tore a strip from his undergarment and bound up the wound. It was, as the other had said, nothing, but it would cause considerable inconvenience and discomfort before it could heal.

"That is the best we can do now," the attendant observed when he had finished. "Later we shall require a physician."

"Thank you, Omer. Gather up my things, and we shall be on our way. The day grows late."

OMER withdrew the sword from the boar's body, wiped it on the leaves and then on his own hunting suit, and handed it to his master. He picked up the ax, the bow and arrow, and the body of the boar, and prepared to set out for the city.

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## MULEK OF ZARAHEMLA

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Mulek adjusted his clothing, tried a careful step or two on his injured leg, and moved off toward the edge of the wilderness to the east.

And what a wilderness it was! There were trees of every kind and size, of every age and color, some with slick boles and others with bark like a landscape, some with branches and leaves delicate as lacework, trees that stood proudly by themselves, trees that huddled together in a frightened fashion. Branches and vines and serpentine creepers ran confidently here and there or felt experimentally about. Flowers, long unused to sunshine, seemed not to miss it, for their hues were bright and even gay.

Birds and animals were everywhere, covert and hidden in the presence of the master, man, or screeching and barking and chattering noisily and angrily at his invasion of their habitat. Birds with crooked feet, with big bills or fantastically small ones, with gorgeous plumage or dull as earth, with songs that thrilled the hearer, or noises that disgusted him, large birds and squabby birds, ugly or graceful—birds, birds, birds! They were there in incredible numbers and forms.

What a wilderness it was!

Through it, without interest, without fear, without haste, Mulek of Zarahemla made his way toward his home.

It had been said of Mulek, the young hunter, in delight and in despair, in pride and in anger, that there was no one else like him. He was at once the best liked, the most misunderstood, and the most thoroughly disliked, the most popular, and the most shunned among the legion of those who knew him. Seeing him for the first time casually, one would have been sure he was just passing from youth to manhood, and that impression might have persisted had not one noticed the deep and searching quality of his eyes, eyes that knew too much and had seen too much for one who was still very young in years. Having seen more of him, no one could have doubted that he was more than a youth in experience.

His one passion in the world was the pursuit of pleasure. He lived for the enjoyment of each minute of every hour in the livelong day. What-

ever whim came to him he would gratify if it pleased him to do so, whether it came to challenging a man, on any pretext whatever, or no pretext at all, or giving away princely gifts. He was wholly selfish, not in the sense that he injured or oppressed others, but that whether he gave or took, it was for the satisfaction he derived from the act. He denied himself nothing that promised or gave any thrill or profit of any degree or kind.

Moreover, he was in a position to feed his desires. Mulek, thanks to the wisdom and position of his late father, was immensely wealthy, with properties in many parts of the land. He commanded one of the greatest fortunes in all the country of the Nephites.

More than that, he was a direct descendant of those first Mulekites, of that line of kings fathered by Zedekiah of Jerusalem. He could trace his lineage straight back to the first Mulek, son of Zedekiah, who had come from the doomed Jewish capital.

BUT for an accident of history, the change from kings to judges, he might even then have been the ruler of his nation. His dislike of responsibility and work, his natural laziness, and his absorption in the quest for gratification kept him from becoming more prominent than he was.

Something of all this went through Mulek's mind as he made his way, painfully and slowly, homeward from his hunting, choosing for his passage, as always, the most popular thoroughfares, for he loved to be seen.

As he approached the city of Zarahemla from the west, he could not keep his thoughts upon his injury nor even upon himself. Something about the city he loved always gave him a sense of pride, of power. It was the noblest city in all the world of which he knew anything.

Zarahemla, capital of the land of that name, was a princely place set upon the broad sloping side of a mountain's foothills. It was like a rare gem in a priceless setting, brilliant in its beauty, looking eastward to the sea. Near its walls flowed the silver Sidon on the east, a rapidly widening stream late from the wilderness to the south.

Mulek brought himself up short, jerked rudely, as it were, from his contemplation of the city. His leg was getting worse; it was becoming stiff and exceedingly painful. Suppose it laid him up for a few days at home!

Perish the thought! What would he, Mulek of Zarahemla, do, confined to his house for days on end? He found it hard enough as a general thing to remain still or in one place for even a few hours.

Then a new worry came to him. He had an engagement on that very night with some acquaintances, a matter that promised some diversion of a kind he had never had before, and he rejected violently the thought that he would have to miss it, even while he began more and more to favor his throbbing ankle.

AMALICKIAH, a man of tremendous powers and winning manner, with some friends, was stirring up widespread interest in a reform of government. Mulek had no concern whatever with either government or reform, but he did look with anticipation upon the process of bringing about changes, if this process furnished him entertainment.

As he entered the city, limping noticeably, he came upon a gathering in the street, a large group of people who appeared to be intently interested in something. In a moment his practised eye had taken in enough details to enable him to identify the gathering. He smiled. This would be fully as good as one of Amalickiah's addresses upon the subject of the government. He knew at once what was happening, and he knew also what he was going to do about it. Here would be at least a few minutes' sport.

In the center of the circle of men and women stood a familiar figure, familiar even in the lowering dusk, familiar to almost everyone in all the land of Zarahemla. It was the priest, Shiblon, brother of Helaman, chief high priest over all the church.

It was a common affair, Mulek told himself, or would be unless he could redeem it from commonplaceness by injecting some life into it. He would do his best.

He wormed his way with little difficulty through the outer fringe of

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## CENTENNIAL YEAR IN ARGENTINA

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hemisphere, come the young and old alike to participate in the activities of the conferences that leave forever in the hearts of all the love of God and of man, which can only come through a knowledge of the true spirit of the purpose. Likewise in other cities such as Rosario, La Plata, and Pergamino preparations throughout the entire Mutual year have been centered around the centennial year and climaxed with their participation at the banquet, the variety programs, volleyball games for the girls, basketball tournaments for the fellows, the crowning of the queen at the Gold and Green Ball, and the other activities held at conference time. Talented directors, taking advantage of this unique spirit and cooperation, have prepared programs that would add dignity to the stage of any theater.

A RECENT tour was taken to the branches of Rio Cuarto, Cordoba, Santa Fe, Rosario, and Pergamino, its purpose being to give programs in the Mutuels. Combined with musical numbers, skits, and

readings, a puppet show was prepared by Joseph A. Fitzpatrick, depicting a story of early pioneer life in Utah. An estimated 1,800 people, most of whom were investigators, saw this program.

Another project took the missionary chorus along with other numbers, under the direction of Elder and Sister Lyman S. Shreeve of Tucson, Arizona, to three American schools, Collegio Ward, American Grammar and High School, and Lincoln School, where 1,400 grammar and high school students witnessed, as they remarked, one of the outstanding programs in the history of their schools, besides learning much about our missionary purpose and work. This same program was also presented to a capacity crowd of American Legionnaires who invited the missionary chorus to their annual banquet, since most of the elders are former servicemen.

One of the most recent successes of the year was on the evening of the 11th of November when the basketball team and the missionary chorus were invited as special guests to celebrate the anniversary

of the *Club Gimnasia y Esgrima de Buenos Aires*, (the largest club in South America covering a city block and extending nine stories high), and put on an exhibition basketball game against one of their first division teams, with the chorus singing three songs during the half, and Elder Leland Wakefield, one of the newest missionaries and a concert pianist, playing two numbers on the piano. *Los Mormones* came out winners in all, since the chorus and piano numbers were very well liked, and the basketball team won by four points. Approximately eight hundred persons were at the game and heard the program.

Programs of the same nature are scheduled soon for Mendoza, Tandil, and Bahia Blanca, including two fifteen-minute radio programs at the latter city. These programs not only animate the mutual activities of each branch, but also help our missionaries in their tracting work, and have left in the memories of all a most enjoyable and inspirational centennial year.

President and Sister W. Ernest Young and all the missionaries join with us in sending *saludos* from the Argentine to everyone.

## Mulek of Zarahemla

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the crowd and into the closer press near where the priest was standing. He was pleased, as he always was, with the public's reaction to his presence. Some people always greeted him warmly, or at least with smiles, proud of his acquaintance or friendship, or seeking his favor. Others frowned upon him, their disapproval as plain as the pleasure of the rest. Mulek did not much mind the nature of men's reception of him so long as they noticed him.

Shiblon was reading from the scripture and did not notice the interruption of Mulek's coming. Wholly intent upon his message, the universal conflict between good and evil, the law of opposites, the relation of cause to effect, he read earnestly on. He loved the scripture, and his joy in it was evident in the fervency of his voice and the expression of his face.

His voice was low and full of feeling.

"For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things—"

"Good evening, friend Shiblon. How is the missionary business these days?"

The priest looked up, startled. When he saw from whom the interruption came, he scowled with displeasure.

"Nay, Mulek," he replied sternly, "I want nothing to do with thee."

"How is this?" Mulek asked scornfully. "May a sinner no longer come to the church and hope to receive a welcome?"

"Thou art not a sinner only," Shiblon answered with warmth, "unworthy son of a worthy father. Thou seekest only to make light of that which is holy, and this for thine own amusement."

Mulek smiled. The situation was to his liking.

"This law of which you read," he questioned, "is it a law of Zarahemla?"

"Yea," the missionary answered earnestly, "and of all other nations. It is a law of God, given through his holy prophets."

"Prophets, say you? Are you a prophet?"

"No man can prophesy save God

put into his mouth the things he shall say. If God instruct him, then is he a prophet."

"Nay, Shiblon, you do not meet the issue. I have asked if you are a prophet. Can you foretell the future, that which is to come? Can you predict what I will do, or these men here?"

"It takes no prophet to tell what you will do," said one at his side.

"You are ungodly as well as unmannerly to interrupt a service in this manner, when you seek no good purpose," another said to Mulek.

"May not a man ask a question?"

"Nay, Omni, he is ever thus." Shiblon turned his thoughtful eyes full upon his tormentor. "Thou goest about with no thought but to please thyself, to stir up trouble. Thou spendest thy time and sustenance on wasters that take delight in ribaldry and jesting.

"Thou hast asked whether I am a prophet. I will tell thee. If it be God's will, thou shalt know this thing when thou goest without friends to applaud, without resources for wickedness, sick in body and

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the Uruguayan Mission. Frederick S. Williams of South Gate, California, a veteran missionary among the Spanish-speaking world, was selected as mission president. President Williams served his first mission in South America in 1927, less than two years after Elders Melvin J. Ballard, Rulon S. Wells, and Rey L. Pratt had dedicated that continent to the preaching of the gospel on Christmas Day 1925. President Williams returned to his home in 1929, being called again as president of the Argentine Mission in 1938, serving until 1942.

President and Sister Williams left New York for their field of labor on August 1. They were followed by ten elders in October. Already, with a missionary force that includes nineteen elders and the president and his wife, much has been accomplished. A mission home and office (the picture of which appears as an illustration for this article) has been obtained at *Calle Brito del Pino 1527*, in Montevideo. The mission home is just three blocks from the American Embassy, and is near a beautiful park named in honor of the allied nations of World War I. Here ten more elders will make their headquarters, arriving in the mission early in January.

There are now three missions in South America—Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, each fully staffed to spread the gospel message.

## Mulek of Zarahemla

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soul, humbled to the dust. I will speak with thee no further, to waste my time and mock God."

THE young prince smiled, shrugged his shoulders, beamed upon the gathering, turned and limped away in the direction of his home. If as he went, he noticed that no one else shared his levity, it worried him not at all.

He was proud of himself. He was proud of his place among the people, of his appearance that none failed to observe, proud of his nation, his wealth, his beautiful homes. He was proud of his city, its laws that he flouted, proud of the judges he laughed at, and the priests of whom he made light.

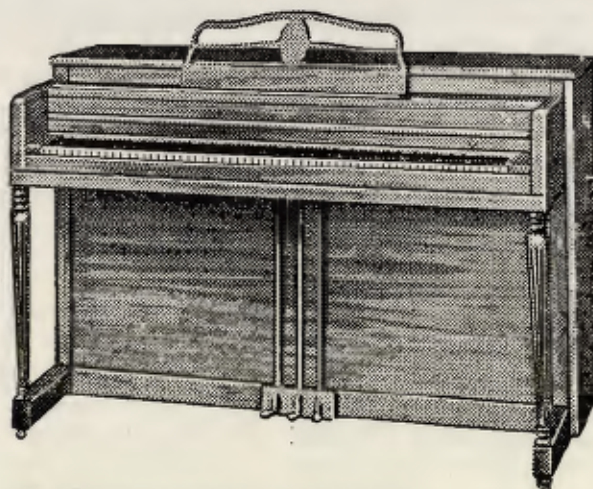
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