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## The Unfair Fairness of Rev. Spalding

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**Abstract:** This article explains why Reverent Spaulding's testing of the Book of Mormon by examining the authenticity of the book of Abraham as an ancient Egyptian text is unfair. Latter-day Saints do not value the Bible less than the Book of Mormon. The belief of the Church is that both were divinely inspired of God and are placed on the same plane, though it is recognized that the Bible may have copyists' errors.

# "Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator"

## The Unfair Fairness of Rev. Spalding\*

BY BISHOP OSBORN J. P. WIDTSOE S. B., A. M.

The Latter-day Saints are by this time undoubtedly well aware of the fact that the Rt. Rev. F. S. Spalding, bishop of Utah, has put forth a pamphlet entitled, "Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator," in which the bishop has tried to prove that the Prophet Joseph Smith failed as a translator of ancient languages, and, therefore, failed also as a prophet of God. Many of the Latter-day Saints have had the privilege of reading the bishop's pamphlet, itself. Those who have not read the pamphlet have at least read the notices of it, and the replies made by thoughtful, scholarly men. And perhaps most of us think that the bishop has already received a sufficient answer. What came to the younger men and women of Zion as a shock, has passed harmlessly by. The source of strength has been sapped—the bishop's battery is wrecked, the force of his cunningly wrought argument is broken. Really, there remains little to be done except to clean away the wreckage of another unsuccessful attack upon the stronghold of "Mormon" faith, and to proceed triumphantly on our way. Yet, while the case is really won, I beg leave to present the following thoughts, that it may be, perhaps, the more securely clinched in the minds and hearts of the youth of Zion.

### THE BISHOP'S APPARENT FAIRNESS.

Bishop Spalding's present attack on "Mormonism" seems to differ from all other attacks in the frankness and the fairness of its approach. Those who have replied to the bishop's pamphlet have all commented on this apparent

attitude of openness and candor. And it is one of the most notable things in the bishop's inquiry. The pamphlet is dedicated thus:

"To my (his?) many Mormon friends—who are as honest searchers after the truth as he hopes he is himself—this book is dedicated by

"THE AUTHOR."

It is not always that we are credited with being as honest searchers after the truth as a bishop of the Episcopal church.

In the body of the work, again, the bishop deals with his subject—apparently—with the utmost candor and fairness. He quotes Orson Pratt and B. H. Roberts and pays them high tributes for their ability and for their fair play. He admits that "it is inexcusable that the book (of Mormon) has never had the serious examination which its importance demands." He acknowledges that in the controversies between the Latter-day Saints and their defamers "the Latter-day Saints set an example of dignity and courtesy which their opponents rarely followed." He asserts that, since there was no scholar living in the early days of the Church who could read Egyptian, the Saints did the right thing to get the testimonies of witnesses. "This was the logical method of procedure, because there was no scholar living whose opinion would have been of real value, even had all the plates been submitted for his inspection." He affirms that, while the questions he propounds are most critical, "yet, if the thoughtful Latter-day Saints of today are like those of the past, they will welcome them, because they have always invited investiga-

\* From the Deseret News, Feb. 15, 1913.

tion." And he is very careful to form in the reader's mind the impression that now, at last, is there conducted an inquiry into the claims of the Prophet Joseph Smith, with the utmost candor, frankness, and fairness.

What is to be said against the bishop's method? Only this: His fairness is but surface deep; the actual method of his investigation and the real spirit of his inquiry are as unfair as he would have the reader believe them fair. The difference, then, between Bishop Spalding's "inquiry" and other anti-"Mormon" literature is only apparent.

Can this be shown? Easily. And when it is shown, what then? Surely, it destroys the argument so deftly wrought in cunningness. Fairness, we are told, implies, negatively, the absence of injustice or fraud; positively, the putting of all things on an equitable footing without undue advantage to any. If the bishop has violated this definition of fairness, he has not been fair in his inquiry, and his inquiry is unvalidated by so much. Let us conduct an inquiry into his inquiry. The points to which I shall call your attention are not specially arranged, but are treated in the order in which they appear in the bishop's pamphlet.

#### SCIENCE NEED NOT BE REVISED.

In the first chapter of "Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator," Bishop Spalding declares that "if the Book of Mormon is true, it is, next to the Bible, the most important book in the world." Then he points out that the Book of Mormon would be of great value to students of the life and teachings of Jesus; that it would shed a flood of light upon the whole question of church origins; and that it would be of great value to the archaeologist—if it is true. All this may be granted without further question. But, then, in the midst of this fair statement of the case, occurs the following surprising paragraph:

"The Book of Mormon, were it shown to be true, would give important information to scientists. The account of the convulsions of nature, which occurred in America at the time of Christ's coming, would compel the geol-

ogist to re-examine his theories as to the formation of land and sea, and the astronomer to adjust his laws of the heavens to the wonderful three days' darkness. The botanist and zoologist would have to rewrite the account of the flora and fauna of America."

The implication of this general statement is manifestly unfair. To one who knows the Book of Mormon but slightly, and to one who knows it not at all, it would appear that there are, in the Book of Mormon, descriptions of convulsions and cataclysms of nature radically opposed to natural law, and that the animals and plants of the book are really foreign to American soil. As a matter of fact, there is nothing in the Book of Mormon to compel any scientist to re-examine his theories, or to adjust his laws, or to rewrite his science. True, we do not know the details of the natural phenomena described. We cannot tell in just what way the convulsions came about. But Central and South America have been centers of geological activity for ages. Such things as are described in the Book of Mormon, can be accounted for in many natural ways. Moreover, phenomena as wonderful as those of the Book of Mormon have happened almost within our own memories—but we have not found it necessary therefore to revise the sciences.

In the scholarly treatise on "Physiography," by Prof. Rollin D. Salisbury, the following interesting description occurs: "One of the most violent and destructive volcanic explosions of which there is historical record was that of 1883, in Krakatoa, a volcanic island in the Strait of Sunda, between Sumatra and Java.

"Previous to the great eruption, the island had been shaken by earthquakes and minor explosions for some years. On the morning of the 27th of August there was a series of terrible explosions, the sound of which was heard in southern Australia, 2,200 miles away. About two-thirds of the island was blown away, and the sea is now 1,000 feet deep where the center of the mountain formerly stood. Enormous sea-waves were formed which traveled half-way around the earth. On the shores of the neighboring islands the water rose



50 feet, causing great destruction. More than 36,000 persons perished, mostly by drowning, and 295 villages were wholly or partially destroyed. The sky over the island and the bordering coasts became black as night from the clouds of dust. It was estimated that steam and dust were shot up into the air 17 to 23 miles. The explosion produced great air-waves which traveled three and more times around the earth."

This account of the volcanic explosion of Krakatoa is as wonderful as any account of a convulsion of nature described in the Book of Mormon. Shall we therefore re-examine our theories of the formation of land and sea and of the cause of darkness? Surely, the bishop will not require it. And yet, instances of this kind might be cited almost without number. If space would permit we might describe such disasters as that of San Francisco, in 1906, when there occurred a fault of from eight to twenty feet, traceable for 300 miles; and that of Charleston, in 1886, when numerous fissures were formed in the earth from which were forced streams of water, mud and sand; and that of a part of the delta of the Indus river in 1819, when "an area of some 2,000 miles in extent subsided so as to be covered by the sea, while a neighboring belt, 50 miles long and 16 miles wide, rose about 10 feet," and many other convulsions in which cities and villages were destroyed, and the land was submerged in the sea, and thousands of persons were killed. Yet, it does not become necessary to revise our known laws of science. And in like manner, did space permit, we might make an exhaustive study of the flora and fauna of the Americas, only to find that the botanist and the zoologist may leave their accounts of American life-forms as they have written them, for all that the Book of Mormon teaches to the contrary.

Why, then, did the Bishop make so unfair an implication concerning the contents of the Book of Mormon? Was it because he was playing absolutely fair? Since we have been able to show that the implication is unfair, how are we to know—applying the Bishop's own logic—that he is not unfair elsewhere in his inquiry? And if his argument is

thus built up on unfair, and even false, implications, of what value is it either to "Mormon" or to non-"Mormon?"

#### THE EIGHTH ARTICLE OF FAITH.

In writing of the relative positions of the Bible and the Book of Mormon in the "Mormon" Church, Bishop Spalding says:

"The eighth article of faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints distinguishes between the correctness of the translation of the Bible and of the Book of Mormon. While the Bible is accepted as the word of God, 'so far as it is correctly translated,' there is no such caution with reference to the Book of Mormon, but the statement, 'We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the Word of God,' is without qualification.

"In thus placing the inspiration of the Book of Mormon on a higher plane than that of the Bible, the Latter-day Saints are logical. The Book of Mormon was translated by one man, and he was accepted by them as an inspired prophet of God—using the Urim and Thummim."

Here again we are confronted by a manifestly unfair implication. The Bishop begins by discussing the fact that the Latter-day Saints distinguish between the correctness of the translation of the Bible and of the Book of Mormon. And the Latter-day Saints do make a distinction. But then the Bishop very subtly changes from the idea of the translation to the idea of the inspiration, and declares that the Latter-day Saints are logical in placing the inspiration of the Book of Mormon upon a higher plane than that of the Bible. To the non-"Mormon" this can mean only one thing: The Latter-day Saints assert without qualification the divine inspiration of the men who wrote the books of the Book of Mormon, but they deny in part at least the divine inspiration of the men who wrote the books of the Bible. That is, the impression is very cunningly given out that the Latter-day Saints place not only the translation but also the original inspiration of the Book of Mormon upon a higher plane than that of the Bible. If this be really true, it is no wonder that other Christians refuse to affiliate with the "Mormons," and that they denounce them for putting forth another Bible.

But the implication, I repeat, is unfair. The eighth article of faith asserts really the divine inspiration of the sacred books of both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. As far as the divine inspiration of these two sacred records is concerned, it may be asserted that the Latter-day Saints place them both upon the same plane. But the Latter-day Saints recognize also this fact, that, while the Book of Mormon was translated from the original plates through the gift and power of God, the Bible was translated by uninspired men, not from the original manuscripts, but from copies made from other copies. Into the copies crept undoubtedly many copyists' errors, and into the translation have crept many translators' errors. Surely, it is both logical and right to hold to the reservation provided in the eighth article of faith. So, again, therefore, the Bishop's argument is based on a false impression, on a false premise. There is not here a total absence of injustice, nor is there a putting of all things on an equitable footing, without undue advantage to any. The bishop's argument is really not fair, and consequently it is of little force.

#### THE PROPHET'S CLAIM TO LEADERSHIP.

The real crux of Bishop Spalding's inquiry is this: "Did Joseph Smith, Jr., translate the plates correctly?" "Was the Book of Mormon translated correctly?" The bishop accepts for argument's sake, the story of the finding of the plates of the Book of Mormon. The real question with him is, "Is the translation of the Book of Mormon correct?" He proposes to test Joseph Smith as a prophet of God, therefore, by his ability to translate ancient languages correctly. And if it can be shown that Joseph Smith made mistakes in translation, then the bishop would have all men repudiate the Book of Mormon "and the whole body of belief, which has been built upon it and upon the reputation its publication gave to its author."

Writing further of this troublesome question, Bishop Spalding says: "It is

surely clear to the reader that the correctness of the translation of the Book of Mormon is a most important question. It was the conviction that he had been selected by the Almighty to give to mankind this book which won for Joseph Smith, Jr., the attention of earnest men and gave him leadership over them. If the translation of the plates is inaccurate he did not deserve that leadership. However sincere he may have been in believing in his mission, if the translation he gave to mankind is false, he is shown to have been selfdeceived."

Now, there are altogether too many irrefragable evidences of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon, and of the divine inspiration of the translation, for Latterday Saints to begin to think of repudiating it. At the same time, Bishop Spalding places undue emphasis upon the importance of the Book of Mormon, and upon Joseph Smith's powers as a translator. Indeed, we are confronted again by an unfair implication. While the crux of "Mormonism" may be, to Bishop Spalding, Did Joseph Smith translate the plates correctly? and while the question is admittedly important, it is not true that Joseph Smith gained his leadership because of his powers as a translator, nor that the "Mormon" system of belief is built upon the Book of Mormon.

It will be impossible in the brief space of this review to consider in detail the real source of divine leadership in the life-work of the Prophet Joseph Smith. The most that can be done is to point out, in passing, a few of the things that made Joseph Smith a prophet of God—even without the Book of Mormon—and thus to correct the subtle impression given out in the bishop's pamphlet. First, in this day when there are many contending creeds and claims, Joseph Smith received divine authority from on high to officiate in God's stead. Upon him and Oliver Cowdery were conferred the keys and the authority of the Holy Priesthood. And from them, the keys of the priesthood have been passed to



all deserving men who have accepted the restored gospel of the Lord Jesus. Secondly, Joseph Smith instituted a perfected Church polity—the Church of Jesus Christ, with divinely appointed officers and divisions. That Church organization persists, the wonder of the world. Thirdly, Joseph Smith promulgated a perfect system of Church doctrine and religious philosophy. Even the defamers of the Prophet have declared that Mormonism is the most nearly perfect system of philosophy with which they have ever become acquainted. Then, the blessings of the gospel have accompanied the believers. Many miraculous gifts and manifestations have been displayed in the Church. Finally, the testimonies of thousands declare that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. And all these things have been accomplished outside of, and besides, the Book of Mormon. While the translation of the Book of Mormon was a wonderful achievement, it was after all but an incident in the establishing of the Church of Christ and in the promulgating of his gospel, Joseph Smith was accepted as a leader, not merely because he translated the ancient Nephite record, but because he was really a divinely appointed prophet. What he has given to the world in the way of divine authority, and Church organization, and Church doctrine, forms really the basis for his claims to leadership. And all this he would have given even had there been no Nephite record. That record confirms his divine inspiration.

What is to be gained, then, by shifting the responsibility for Joseph Smith's greatness from the real achievement of his life-endavor, to some important, yet minor, accomplishments in the fulfillment of his mission. I can see no purpose in it other than to create the impression that Joseph Smith has no other claim to greatness than that of translator. And if there can be found a flaw in his translations, then we are asked, nay, required as intelligent men and women, to repudiate all that consti-

tutes really his great life-work, in which he has been surely proved a prophet of God. Nay, bishop, the implication is unfair, the premise is false. And if the argument so far has been built up on unfair implications and false premises, how are we to know—applying again the bishop's own logic—that the whole argument is not unfair, that both premises and conclusions are not false?

The next step in the bishop's inquiry is the great and final one, by means of which the bishop hopes to make the whole structure of "Mormonism" and the "Mormon" Church topple to the ground. Let us see if he has been any more fair and just and accurate in the real point of his argument than he has been heretofore.

#### THE FAC-SIMILES ARE NOT THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM.

The crux of the "Mormon" question, as Bishop Spalding sees it, is, "Did Joseph Smith translate the plates of the Book of Mormon correctly?" Upon the accuracy of his work as a translator, Joseph Smith must stand or fall, in the bishop's opinion, as a prophet of God. "If the Book of Mormon was not a correct translation," asserts the bishop, "and yet Joseph Smith thought that it came to him by inspiration and revelation from God, thoughtful men cannot be asked to accept other revelations which Joseph Smith, Jr., asserted were also given him by the Deity." This argument is clearly fallacious, but we need not consider it now. The question before us is, if the bishop's test question is just, how shall we determine whether or not the translation of the Book of Mormon is correct? Bishop Spalding answers the question thus: "Joseph Smith's competency as a translator of ancient languages can be ascertained in but one way. The original texts, together with his interpretations, must be submitted to competent scholars, and if they declare his translation to be correct, then it must be accepted as true." Conversely, of course, if scholars should declare the translation to

be incorrect, then it must be rejected as untrue.

It might be interesting to comment on the weakness of this argument, too. Such comment would hardly be in place, however, in the purpose of the present review. All the discussion and the preliminary arguments that have gone before—arguments that are in every instance based on unfair implications and false premises—have but led up to this “test” question. The effort has been, plainly, to impress on the reader's mind the importance of the translation of the Book of Mormon, and to attempt to base upon the correctness of the translation the final test of the Prophet's divine inspiration. If all the arguments that have gone before were founded in fairness on correct premises, the climax of the Bishop's inquiry might appear formidable. As it is, we step fearlessly forward into the bishop's master-point to discover his method of procedure there.

How is the accuracy of the translation of the Book of Mormon to be tested? If he could, the bishop would of course hand over the original plates to such men as he would consider competent scholars. And if it were possible to do so, the Latter-day Saints would not hesitate nor fear to submit the plates to competent scholars. “But the plates are not available,” says the bishop. “They are kept by ‘the heavenly messenger’ who delivered them to the prophet, and to whom they were again delivered up, ‘and he has them in his charge unto this day.’” Evidently, then, the test of Joseph Smith's competency as a translator can not be applied directly to the Book of Mormon. What is to be done?

Our friend, the bishop, is resourceful. In the Pearl of Great Price he finds a book called the “Book of Abraham.” Accompanying the “Book of Abraham,” he finds three fac-similes of Egyptian texts. Subjoined to the fac-similes, he discovers interpretations made by the Prophet Joseph Smith of some of the inscriptions on the fac-similes. The case is clear. Since we cannot apply the test of com-

petency as a translator to the Book of Mormon directly, “our purpose will be served equally well if the other translations of the prophet referred to can be examined, and fortunately one of these translations together with the original text is available. We refer to ‘The Book of Abraham,’ translated from the papyrus by Joseph Smith. ‘A translation of some ancient records, that have fallen into our hands, from the catacombs of Egypt; the writings of Abraham, while he was in Egypt called the Book of Abraham written by his own hand, upon papyrus.’ ”

Commenting further upon this very important “find”—in the bishop's estimation—the bishop says, “The Book of Abraham, with three fac-similes of the original text of Abraham ‘written by his own hand, upon papyrus,’ together with the prophet's explanation and the translation, is a part of the ‘Pearl of Great Price.’ ” and, again, he declares, almost exultantly, “It is now clear that in the translation of the Egyptian hieroglyphics, known as the ‘Book of Abraham,’ we have just the test we need of Joseph Smith's accuracy as a translator. The original text with the prophet's translation are available for our investigation.” And so, the bishop hands the “Book of Abraham,” with the three fac-similes, to eight competent Egyptologists. Their testimonies are recorded in the final chapter of the bishop's inquiry. Mormonism, imagines the bishop, is overwhelmed; the Church is laid in ruins.

But the bishop has, after all, built up a very poor argument. It is not my purpose here to inquire carefully into the verdict of the jury of eight. That has already been done by others. But I have shown successfully, I believe, that all the preliminary arguments in the bishop's case are founded on unfair implications and false premises. In considering now the bishop's great, final point—the climax of his argument—I discover that the bishop is again guilty of an unfair and unjust implication, that he has based the crucial point of his argument upon a false premise.

As one reads Bishop Spalding's de-



velopment of his crushing stroke against Mormonism, one infers from the bishop's statement of the case that the original manuscript of the "Book of Abraham" is available. Note carefully these statements: "Fortunately one of these translations together with the original text is available" (ch. 5, p. 13;) "the original text with the prophet's translation are available for our investigation" (ch. 6, p. 18.) Again, one would infer from the bishop's statement of the case that the Book of Abraham was translated from the three fac-similes accompanying the book. Note these passages: "The Book of Abraham, with three fac-similes of the original text of Abraham . . . is a part of the 'Pearl of Great Price'" (ch. 5, p. 13); "it is now clear that in the translation of the Egyptian hieroglyphics, known as the 'Book of Abraham,' we have just the test we need of Joseph Smith's accuracy as a translator" (ch. 6, p. 18). And, finally, one would infer from the bishop's statement of the case that the three fac-similes accompanying the Book of Abraham—constituting in the bishop's implied explanation the original text of the Book of Abraham from which it was translated—were written by Abraham's own hand. Note this passage with its subtle wording: "The Book of Abraham, with three fac-similes of the original text of Abraham, 'written by his own hand, upon papyrus,' . . . is a part of the 'Pearl of Great Price'" (ch. 5, p. 13). And it was these inferences, undoubtedly, that the learned jury of eight drew from the documents submitted to them. It is unfortunate, and I may say, again, unfair, that the bishop has not included in his pamphlet his own letters to the competent scholars who were to sit in judgment upon the divine inspiration of the Prophet Joseph Smith. We might then be able to judge of the fairness of the bishop's statement of the case to them. However, it is quite evident from their letters to the bishop, that they got the unfair understanding of the case that he would have the readers of his pamphlet get. Thus, Dr. Sayce writes, "It is difficult to deal

seriously with Joseph Smith's impudent fraud." I presume he means in foisting upon the world the Book of Abraham as an alleged translation of the fac-similes; for he admits that the fac-similes themselves are Egyptian. Dr. Petrie says, "They are all many centuries later than Abraham." Evidently he was made to understand that, according to the prophet's claims, they were all written by the hand of Abraham himself. Dr. Breasted says, "The point, then, is that in publishing these fac-similes of Egyptian documents as part of an unique revelation to Abraham, Joseph Smith was attributing to Abraham a series of documents which were the common property of a whole nation of people who employed them in every human burial, which they prepared." Again, this learned man was given to understand from some source that the fac-similes were the Book of Abraham, and should therefore form a unique manuscript written by Abraham himself. Dr. Mace writes that "the 'Book of Abraham,' it is hardly necessary to say, is a pure fabrication;" because, undoubtedly, he cannot interpret the fac-similes as the text of the book itself. And so with all the learned doctors: they seem to have labored under the impression that the original manuscript of the Book of Abraham was available, that the three fac-similes, accompanying the Book of Abraham constitute that original manuscript, and that the inscriptions on those fac-similes were "written by his (Abraham's) own hand."

To one who is acquainted with Church history, there could be made no representation farther from the truth than this of Bishop Spalding's concerning the Book of Abraham. Instead of the Abrahamic manuscript's being available, it is entirely unavailable—as much so as the original plates of the Book of Mormon. In fact, the original manuscript of the Book of Abraham has been destroyed, so far as we know. Instead of the three fac-similes forming the original text of the Book of Abraham, they really constitute no part thereof. They were merely found



with the mummies. Instead of the facsimiles, being written in Abraham's own hand, and thus recording a unique revelation to Abraham, it is undoubtedly true that they are fac-similes of "a series of documents which were the common property of a whole nation of people." It does not affect the importance of the fac-similes, therefore, if they belong to a period centuries later than that of Abraham. It might have proved unfortunate if the doctors had declared them much more ancient than Abraham.

Now, without going into tedious details, the simple facts in the case are these: "On the 3rd of July (1835,) Michael H. Chandler came to Kirtland to exhibit some Egyptian mummies. There were four human figures, together with some two or more rolls of papyrus covered with hieroglyphic figures and devices." The papyri were rolled, we are given to understand, in the usual Egyptian manner. The Saints became interested and purchased the mummies and the papyri. "I commenced the translation of some of the characters or hieroglyphics," writes the prophet, "and much to our joy found that one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt, etc." And since these were true Egyptian mummies, buried according to Egyptian custom, I have no doubt that there were found with them hypocephali and other documents "which were the common property of a whole nation of people who employed them in every human burial, which they prepared."

But these hypocephali and other devices were not the source of the Book of Abraham, though they may have depicted scenes from his life. It was one of the papyrus rolls that contained the Book of Abraham. This particular roll may or may not have been written by Abraham's own hand. Possibly it was a copy of Abraham's original manuscript. However, this roll the prophet translated in part—but in part only. The translation of part of the papyrus roll forms the Book of

Abraham. It was not taken from the fac-similes accompanying the book. For these the prophet prepared the special appended interpretations, and published them with the translation of the part of the Book of Abraham which he had mastered. Now, after the prophet's martyrdom, the mummies and the papyri passed into the hands of a St. Louis syndicate. Some years later they were sold to a museum in Chicago. During the great fire of 1871, the museum in which the mummies were displayed was destroyed, and, presumably, the mummies also, and the papyri. All, therefore, that Bishop Spalding would imply in his subtle statements concerning the Book of Abraham is controverted by the facts of history. The original manuscript of the Book of Abraham is unfortunately not available. The three fac-similes accompanying the Book of Abraham are certainly not the original manuscript of the Book of Abraham. There is no evidence that Abraham himself wrote in his own hand any part of the papyri found with the mummies, certainly not the hypocephalus. But at the same time, there is no evidence that the inscriptions and devices on the three fac-similes did not originate in the experiences of Abraham, who probably became the object of a kind of hero-worship in the mythology of the Egyptians.

What, then, happens to the bishop's carefully and cunningly wrought argument? It is robbed utterly of its force. It falls broken and harmless to the ground. Not only is every preliminary argument based on a false premise; but the great climactic point to which the argument builds, and which is intended to overwhelm the claims of Joseph Smith, is founded on premises that are absolutely false.

The Book of Abraham itself has not been touched. The Book of Mormon is left intact. The claims of Joseph Smith for recognition as a Prophet of God remain unanswered. "Mormonism" is yet unaccounted for by the learned. The conclusion Bishop Spalding would have us deduce from his argument, that since Joseph Smith

failed as a translator of ancient languages he failed also as a prophet of God, does not follow since every premise leading to such a deduction is false.

# WHOSE TRANSLATION IS CORRECT?

But I suppose the Reverend Doctor Spalding will not rest content with this summary disposition of his crafty but fruitless argument. "Let it be granted," says he, "that I made a mistake about the original text of the Book of Abraham; there remain yet the fac-similes with the alleged translation." Ah; but that is quite another matter. The translation of the Book of Abraham was not accomplished in the same manner as was that of the Book of Mormon. The difference has been clearly pointed out by Elder J. M. Sjodahl. The translation of the hieroglyphics and devices on the fac-similes, too, was accomplished in a different manner from that of the Book of Mormon; and, perhaps, even from that of the Book of Abraham. When the prophet came into possession of the papyri, he began a serious study of Egyptian. As he progressed in his understanding of the hieroglyphics, he recorded his findings. Gradually he gained somewhat of a mastery of the peculiar form of writing. Under date of July 17, 1835, the prophet made the following entry in his journal: "The remainder of this month I was continually engaged in translating an alphabet to the Book of Abraham, and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients." Evidently, then, while the prophet worked under the inspiration of God—as have the prophets in all ages—yet his translation of the Book of Abraham, and of the accompanying fac-similes, was very largely the result of careful study and investigation. The translation of the Book of Abraham we believe is absolutely correct. Is the translation of the fac-similes also correct? Who shall say? Bishop Spalding insists that his jury of competent scholars shall

render the final decision. But the doctors do not agree upon any one thing, except upon denouncing the "impudent fraud" of Joseph Smith. Nearly all of them say that the devices are incorrectly copied—that they should be thus, or so. All of them recognize the fac-similes—whether correctly or incorrectly copied—as copies of common Egyptian devices. But while one doctor interprets a certain figure to be but recently dead and to be undergoing the rite of embalming, another doctor interprets the same figure to be rising from death. While one doctor declares that "the hieroglyphics which should describe the scenes . . . are merely illegible scratches," another doctor, experiencing apparently no difficulty in deciphering the inscriptions, declares that "it should be noted further that the hieroglyphics in the two fac-similes from the 'Book of Abraham' (Nos. 2 and 3), though they belong to a very degenerate and debased age in Egyptian civilization, and have been much corrupted in copying, contain the usual explanatory inscriptions regularly found in such funerary documents." And so I might continue from point to point. The disagreement between the doctors is so marked, and so wide, that their opinions in the case are rendered wholly worthless. However, it is not my purpose here to study critically the opinions of the learned jury of eight. That has been done by others.

I am reminded of an amusing experience of my own. I have a friend who prides himself on the correctness and the purity of his English. He is, in fact, an excellent student of modern English; but, unfortunately, he knows nothing about the earlier periods of the mother tongue. My friend came to my room one day when I was reading Wiclif's translation of the gospel of Saint Matthew. I had just begun the fifth chapter, which runs thus:

"Jhesus forsothe, seynge companyes, wente up into an hill; and when he hadde sete, his disciplis camen nighe to him. And he, openynge his mouthe, taughte to hem, sayinge, 'Blessid be



the pore in spirit, for the kingdam in hevenes is heren. Blessid be mylde men, for thei shuln welde the erthe. Blessid be thei that mournen, for thei shuln be comfortid."

I handed the book to my friend and asked, "Can you read that?" He read the passage over, then replied, "Well, I see that it is intended to be the Sermon on the Mount, but it is an abominably poor copy. The man who printed that knew very little about spelling didn't he? And some of those words are entirely wrong; they should be quite different. Let me see your King James Bible."

I fancy that a little lesson may be gained from this experience. While the bishop's learned doctors are not so ignorant of Egyptian as was my friend of Middle English, yet I am quite sure that the last word has not yet been spoken on the interpretation of Egyptian hieroglyphics. It is asserted that Egyptian can now be read almost as easily as Greek: and yet, from a jury of eight learned men, we can select no two who agree in their interpretation of the three fac-similes accompanying the Book of Abraham.

Whose translation then, is correct? In view of the great mass of cumulative evidence that supports the claims of Joseph Smith as a prophet of the living God, I am justified in believing that his interpretation of the Egyptian devices is at least as nearly correct as that of any one of the disagreeing learned doctors. And it may be, that, when the doctors shall learn to read Egyptian a little bit better than they now do Greek, they will find that these same fac-similes had their origin in the experiences and teachings of father Abraham. Until that time, the opinions of the learned doctors concerning the fac-similes affects the Book of Abraham not at all. But the bishop's argument depends—pivots, if you will—upon proving the Book of Abraham incorrectly translated. The bishop's argument, then, falls forlornly to the ground, helping by its fall to support the claims of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

## CONCLUSION.

In conclusion, it may be interesting to summarize something of what has been done. When Bishop Spalding went about to prepare his little pamphlet, "Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Translator," he hoped to throw into the "Mormon" camp a bomb that would destroy "Mormonism" forever. Let us see why the feeble explosion of the bishop's bomb has failed to do damage. In a number of excellent papers contributed by thoughtful men, it has been shown clearly that the verdict of the jury in the case is worthless since the jourymen could not agree; that the Book of Abraham and the Book of Mormon are not exactly parallel cases; that the doctors disagree and have often been wrong; that there are many things in Egyptian mythology supported by the fac-similes; that the doctrines of the Book of Abraham have, in some cases, been borne out by the discoveries of modern science, and, even, that the Prophet's translation is at least more nearly correct than that of the doctors. Others have pointed out the weakness in the bishop's argument. Bishop Spalding would have us reject all that Joseph Smith did, if it can be shown that he failed in one thing. The argument should work the other way. Joseph Smith should be accepted as divinely inspired in all that he did, if it can be shown that he was inspired in any one thing. Dr. Pack points to predictions fulfilled, to work accomplished, and to the great revelation, the Word of Wisdom, which has gained wonderful support from the investigations of modern science. If we apply Bishop Spalding's logic strictly, there should be no hesitancy in accepting the divine inspiration of Joseph Smith in all things. Now, any one of the replies made to the bishop's pamphlet was sufficient. Together they have so shorn the argument of its strength, and have so deadened the explosion of the bomb, that it has become harmless. Finally,

I have shown—not ineffectively, I hope, in this hasty review—that while the bishop appears to treat his subject with fairness, that while he tries to impress his reader with his openness, his frankness, his candor, his honesty, yet his every argument is based upon some unfair implication, some false premise. Therefore, by every rule of logic, his conclusion must be false. In fine, the bishop has no case against the Book of

Abraham, no case against the Book of Mormon, no case against Joseph Smith, no case against "Mormonism"—the restored gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Latter-day Saints have nothing to fear. They need only to clean away the wreckage of another unsuccessful attack upon the stronghold of "Mormon" faith, and to proceed triumphantly on their way.

## An Open Letter to Bishop Spalding.

BY PROF. N. L. NELSON

My Dear Reverend Sir:—If in these days you hear—and overhear—a certain familiar quotation from an ancient prophet, you will probably have an uneasy feeling that somehow you yourself have furnished the latest occasion for bringing it forward.

The passage occurs in Isaiah 29, a prophecy believed by Latter-day Saints, to refer to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. The quotation here given refers to some of the after effects:

"Wherefore the Lord said, for as much as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men; therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid."

Moreover, if you should keep your ears alert for current comments on this famous passage, you would probably find many a "Mormon" elder just now classing your late jury of savants among the "wise men" there referred to. You yourself would doubtless be placed among the "prudent men," for up till your latest move among us, that was the mental quality which distinguished you from the rest of your clerical brethren. Let us hope that this fine talent is not to be "hid" very long.

My dear fellow-worker, for a month my bones have been aching for one of our three-hour chats, especially

along the lines of your recent pamphlet; but living as I do just now in the very heart of the desert, I must resort to this one-sided and therefore somewhat unsatisfactory method of "crying out in the wilderness," after having fired your broad-side at us—think, man, of the "imprudence" of it! without a declaration of war, and in a time of profound peace. You must be much oppressed with curiosity to know the exact psychological effect on a "Mormon" elder of being "hit."

Let me assure you, then, that as regards three-fourths of us, the effect was purely spectacular—a compound of smoke and noise. Like Nathaniel of old, such is the assurance with which their shield of faith protects them, that they stop neither to ask nor to entertain negative questions. It is of this type particularly that the Lord has said: "My grace shall be sufficient for you."

As for the rest of us, however, the case is unfortunately different. Our faith, I hope, is no less ardent than theirs; but, Thomas-like, we must make the findings of our heads coincide with the findings of our hearts before we can be completely at peace.

Speaking for myself, I may say that while this discussion has been going on, I have been distinctly at a disadvantage; for contrary to your past vogue, you neglected to furnish me with the "document" in question. I read, therefore—let me confess it frankly—with a growing sense of disturbance, the first three or four articles by the defense; and when you