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### The Dogberry Papers and the Book of Mormon

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**Abstract:** On September 2, 1829, a new paper was born in Palmyra, New York, called *The Reflector* and published by O. Dogberry, Jun. The object of the papers was to "correct the morals and improve the mind." O. Dogberry was the pseudonym for a certain Esquire Cole, an ex-justice of the peace, who had obtained access on Sundays and evenings to the use of the idle E. B. Grandin & Co. press, the same press which was being used to print the Book of Mormon. Apparently rumors and gossip about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon were widespread; and Esquire Cole, who looked upon Joseph as an impostor, printed rather tart comments about him and the Book of Mormon.



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# The Dogberry Papers and the Book of Mormon

RUSSELL R. RICH\*

On September 2, 1829, a new paper was born in Palmyra, New York, bearing the following title and heading:

THE REFLECTOR  
printed and published weakly [*sic*], by  
O. Dogberry, Jun., Editor and Proprietor

The object of the papers was to "correct the morals and improve the mind."<sup>1</sup>

O. Dogberry was the pseudonym for a certain Esquire Cole, an ex-justice of the peace, who had obtained access on Sundays and evenings to the use of the idle E. B. Grandin & Co. press, the same press which was being used to print the Book of Mormon.

Vol. 1, No. 1 bears the September 2, 1829, date and started the First Series which continued through December 16, 1829. The December 22 issue began a "New Series" and, therefore, started with No. 1 again. Price was to be \$1 per series, and the issues were to be published weekly for four months.

Apparently rumors and gossip about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon were widespread; and Esquire Cole, who looked upon Joseph as an imposter, printed rather tart comments about him and the Book of Mormon. Listed below are some of the comments taken from Vol. 1:

"The Gold Bible, by Joseph Smith Junior, author and proprietor, is now in press and will shortly appear. Priestcraft is short lived!" (No. 1, page 2, September 2, 1829.)

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\*Dr. Rich is a professor of history of religion at Brigham Young University and a specialist on the schismatic groups of the Restoration.

<sup>1</sup>*The Reflector*, New Series, No. 4, p. 29.

"The Book of Mormon is expected to be ready for delivery in the course of one year. Great and marvellous [*sic*] things will come to pass about those days." (No. 3, page 10, September 16, 1829.)

Three separate statements appeared in the next number. "We understand that the Anti-Masons have declared war against the Gold Bible. Oh! How impious!"

"The number of the Gold Bible apostles is said to be complete. Jo [*sic*] Smith Jr. is about to assign to each, a mission to the heathen."

"Some few evenings since, a man in the town of Mendon, had a loud call to go and preach the doctrines contained in the Gold Bible, under heavy denunciations." (All from No. 4, page 14, September 23, 1829.)

"The 'Gold Bible' is fast gaining credit; the rapid spread of Islamism was no touch to it." (No. 5, page 18, September 30, 1829.)

"The 'new Jerusalem Reflector' states that the building of the TEMPLE of NEPHI is to be commenced about the beginning of the first year of the Millenium. Thousands are already flocking to the standard of Joseph the Prophet. The Book of Mormon is expected to astonish the natives!" (No. 6, page 22, October 6, 1829.)

#### "Gold Bible"

"A work bearing this Cognomen ["Gold Bible"] is now in the press; as much curiosity has been excited in this section of the country on the subject, and as the work itself will not be ready for delivery for some months to come—at the solicitation of many of our readers—we have concluded to commence publishing extracts from it on or before the commencement of the second series." (No. 15, page 57, December 9, 1829.)

The Second Series of the *Reflector*, called in the masthead "New Series," began publication on December 22, 1829. It had been changed in size to about eight inches by ten inches, with eight pages of three columns. No. 1 contained nothing about Joseph Smith or the Book of Mormon, but the first page of No. 2 (page 9) in the New Series was filled with Chapter 1 of 1 Nephi and the first three verses of Chapter 2 (in the current edition), though it did not contain Nephi's explanation immediately under the chapter heading. With the exception of

one printing error, there is only one change from the reading in the first edition of the Book of Mormon. 1 Nephi 1:9 of the present edition which reads “. . . and he beheld that his lustre was above that of the sun at noon-day” is printed thus in the *Reflector*, “. . . and he beheld that his lustre was above that to the sun at noon-day,” the word “to” being substituted for “of.”

On the fourth page (page 13) of this No. 2 issue, in another article under the heading “Gold Bible,” Mr. Cole seems somewhat softened in his attitude toward the Book of Mormon for he wrote:

We do not intend at this time to discuss the merits or demerits of this work, and feel astonished that some of our neighbors, who profess liberal principles, and are probably quite as ignorant on the subject as we are, should give themselves quite so much uneasiness about matters that so little concern them. The Book, when it shall come forth before the public, it must stand or fall, according to the whims and fancies of its readers. How it will stand the test of criticism, we are not prepared to say, not having as yet examined many of its pages. —We are, however, prepared to state, that from a part of the first chapter, now before us, and which we this day publish, we cannot discover anything treasonable, or which will have a tendency to subvert our liberties. As to its religious character, we have as yet no means of determining, and if we had, we should be quite loth [*sic*] to meddle with the tender consciences of our neighbors.

Issue No. 3 of the New Series was published on January 13, 1830, and continued on with 1 Nephi 1 (in the original edition) publishing to the end of verse 15 of Chapter Two of the current edition, with no changes, except the word “thou” is misspelled “though” (1 Nephi 2:9) the first time it is used. Thereafter, it is spelled “thou” (verse 10) as in the official Book of Mormon. This much filled half of the first page. Again, on the fourth page (page 20) there was an article under the heading “Gold Bible”:

We inadvertantly neglected in our remarks last week, respecting the wonderful work, to accompany them with the explanations requisite to a correct understanding of it. The appellation of ‘Gold Bible’ is only a cant cognomen that has been given it by the unbelievers, for be it known that this book, as well as the sacred volume which is held so valuable by all good christians, is not without its revilers and unbeliev-

ers by way of derision. The true title of the work, as appears from the copy-right [*sic*] is 'The Book of Mormon'—comprising a great number of books, or parts, by different primary authors, all of which are divided into chapters. The first is the 'First Book of Nephi,' of which we gave an extract in our last, and is continued in the present number of our paper. The whole purports to be a compilation, in ancient hieroglyphics, on plates said to resemble plates of gold by one of the chosen of the lost tribes, whose name was Mormon.

The next part of the Book of Mormon that was published was in the January 22 issue, a four page unnumbered "Extra." The Book of Mormon material was not on the front page this time but was on the third and fourth pages (numbered pages 27 & 28). Rather than continuing with 1 Nephi 1, Esquire Cole skipped over to Alma 22, where he began with Alma 43:22 (current edition) and continued through verse 40 of the same chapter just as it reads in the first edition. This took just a little over two-thirds of a page and was the third and last time that Book of Mormon material was quoted directly in the *Reflector*.

As to why no further material from the Book of Mormon was quoted, we find the story in the *History of Joseph Smith*, by his mother, Lucy Mack Smith.<sup>2</sup> She does not tell us the date but merely states that one Sunday afternoon while the Book of Mormon was being printed, Hyrum became worried about the safety of the work and persuaded Oliver Cowdery to go to the printing shop with him. When they arrived, they found Mr. Cole busy printing his newspaper. Mother Smith states:

Upon reading the prospectus of his paper, they found that he had agreed with his subscribers to publish one form of "Joe Smith's Gold Bible" each week and thereby furnish them with the principal portion of the book in such a way that they would not be obliged to pay the Smiths for it.<sup>3</sup>

Mrs. Smith remembered the paper was called *Dogberry Paper on Winter Hill*. There never was any paper published under this name, but the editor and proprietor of the *Reflector* called himself O. Dogberry and occasionally inserted a note that the paper was published at the "Bower on Wintergreen

<sup>2</sup>Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft) 1958, chapter 32.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 164.

Hill." And so, putting these facts partially together in her memory many years later, Mother Smith remembered it incorrectly as *Dogberry Paper on Winter Hill.*"

Hyrum and Oliver were vigorously opposed to Esquire Cole's printing of sections of the Book of Mormon. When Cole ignored their argument that they held the copyright and continued to print what he wanted, Hyrum and Oliver reported such to the Prophet's parents. Joseph Smith, Sr., immediately went to Harmony, Pennsylvania, and arrived back in Palmyra with Joseph the following Sunday. As soon as Joseph had warmed himself, he went to the printing shop where Mr. Cole was again working on his paper. When Joseph insisted that Mr. Cole not print anymore of the Book of Mormon, Cole wanted to fight him; but through patience and firmness, Joseph and Mr. Cole agreed to submit the matter to arbitration, where it was decided that Mr. Cole must stop his violation of the copyright. There are probably many ramifications of the copyright arbitration with which we are not acquainted, but one obvious one appears in the following issue of the *Reflector*. Even though Esquire Cole had softened his language and even his attitude toward the Book of Mormon from what it was in the First Series to what it became in the New Series, he returned to his earlier stance after his disputation with the Prophet Joseph over his illegal use of the Book of Mormon. He reverted to calling the Book of Mormon the "Gold Bible" which title he had said was used by "revilers" and "unbelievers." This is illustrated in the March 16, 1830 *Reflector* when the following letter and editorial were printed:

Palmyra, March 11, 1830

O. Dogberry, Esquire

Dear Sir—When the present series of the *Reflector* is completed, you will please erase my name from your list of subscribers.

Yours, etc.

Luther Howard

Mr. Cole's comments concerning this letter were:

We have only to regret that this 'little lump of anguish,' who measures something more than four feet in his shoes, had not requested an immediate discontinuance, as he is the only person of the same description our list contains. It is from the enlightened, independent, and liberal minded, that

we receive and expect support—not from meddling, canting, or whining hypocrites—it is not from a man who professes ostentatiously to belong to a Calvinistic Church, where himself and the family display a profession of fine clothing, while he privately advocates the 'Gold Bible.' This man has an itching to appear in print—he shall be gratified. We have many communications on hand respecting this pious as well as meddling worthy. His Geneva friends will not be forgotten.

Many other comments appeared in later issues of Mr. Cole's paper shortly after the publication of the Book of Mormon. They all reflect this same negative outlook, as Mr. Cole's softened attitude was only temporary.

#### 1970 RESEARCH PROJECT

The Institute of Mormon Studies research project for this year will be the Ohio Period. The findings will be published in the Spring 1971 issue of *BYU Studies*. Students, research librarians, and other interested persons who would like to participate in, make suggestions about, or provide information on this period of research, please write to Institute of Mormon Studies, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84601.