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The Anthon Transcript

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The ANTHON

An Evidence for the Truth of the Prophet's Account of the Origin of the Book of Mormon

INTRODUCTION

By ARIEL L. CROWLEY, LL. B.

ONLY a man of truth would dare to leave for future critical study the Book of Mormon, the revelations found in the Doctrine and Covenants, the revised version of the Bible, the Book of Abraham, and other similar works, with the claim that they were divinely revealed to him. Unafraid, Joseph Smith left for examination by posterity an unparalleled array of documents. In this he is distinguished and alone. History holds no precedent for his life.

In strict accord with this method of open disclosure, the Prophet copied from the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, seven lines of the characters which were engraved upon the plates, to be examined by the learned, to determine whether they really were of any language, ancient or modern.¹ He says in his record:

Immediately after my arrival there [in Pennsylvania] I commenced copying the characters off the plates. I copied a considerable number of them, and by means of the Urim and Thummim I translated some of them. (*Documentary History of the Church*, Vol. I, p. 19.)

The copied characters had a strange and peculiar appearance, very unlike the forms of writing familiar to the people of the neighborhood. In the translation of the Book of Mormon, it was disclosed that the engravings were "reformed Egyptian,"² but at the time the transcript was made, the characters were only a puzzling enigma. Martin Harris, who received the transcript for examination, was a man of energetic mind and inquiring habits. Therefore, he proceeded with a minimum of delay to lay the transcript before a scholar learned in the ancient languages, Charles Anthon, adjunct professor of languages and ancient geography in Columbia College, New York, 1828. A telegram from New York, dated July 7, 1941, adds also this information concerning him and his degrees and scholastic pedigree:

¹*History of the Church*, Period I, Vol. 1, p. 19.
²*Mormon* 9:7, 9:31-33; *Mosiah* 1:4; *1 Nephi* 1:2; *Ether*, 12:23-28, 35.

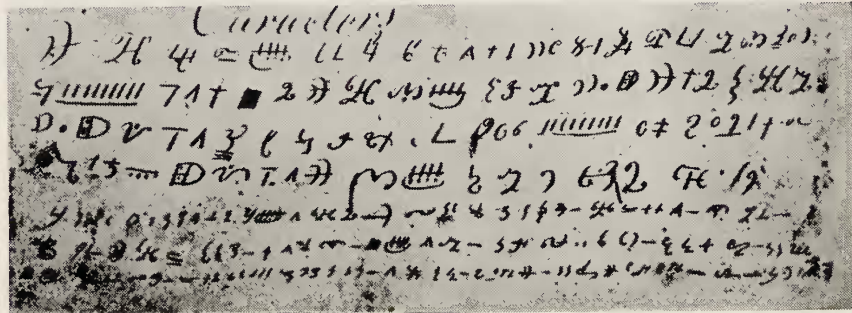


FIG. 1: THE "ANTHON TRANSCRIPT"—CHARACTERS COPIED FROM THE GOLD PLATES BY JOSEPH SMITH, WHICH TRANSCRIPT MARTIN HARRIS TOOK TO PROFESSOR CHARLES ANTHON.

Ariel L. Crowley:

Charles Anthon, A. B., Columbia, 1815; and LL.D., 1831; was adjunct professor Greek and Latin here 1820 to 1830. . . .

MILTON HALSEY THOMAS,
Curator of *Columbiana*.

The story continues in the words of Joseph Smith:³

Sometime in this month of February, the aforementioned Mr. Martin Harris came to our place, got the characters which I had drawn off the plates and started with them to the city of New York. For what took place relative to him and the characters, I refer to his own account of the circumstances, as he related them to me after his return, which was as follows:

"I went to the city of New York, and presented the characters which had been translated, with the translation thereof, to Professor Charles Anthon, a gentleman celebrated for his literary attainments. Professor Anthon stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian. I then showed him those which were not yet translated, and he said that they were Egyptian, Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic; and he said they were true characters. He gave me a certificate, certifying to the people of Palmyra that they were true characters, and that the translation of such of them as had been translated was also correct. I took the certificate and put it into my pocket, and was just leaving the house, when Mr. Anthon called me back, and asked me how the young man found out that there were gold plates in the place where he found them. I answered that an angel of God had revealed it unto him.

"He then said to me, 'Let me see that cer-

tificate.' I accordingly took it out of my pocket and gave it to him, when he took it and tore it to pieces, saying that there was no such thing now as ministering of angels, and that if I would bring the plates to him, he would translate them. I informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them. He replied, 'I cannot read a sealed book.' I left him and went to Dr. Mitchell, who sanctioned what Professor Anthon had said respecting both the characters and the translation."

THE story is well attested. Professor Anthon himself confirms it in two letters, one to E. D. Howe, February 17, 1834,⁴ the other to Rev. T. W. Coit, April 3, 1841.⁵

The incident caught the fancy of numerous early writers on Mormonism, many of whom were personally acquainted with Joseph Smith, the Prophet. They accepted the story without question and retold it with little variation from the Church version. Though most of them were hostile to the Church, their works serve to settle beyond any doubt that the visit of Martin Harris to Professor Anthon actually occurred.⁶

Interest in the incident has continued, until a great volume of literature has accumulated about it. In no case however, has any doubt been cast upon the actual exhibition of the

⁴Howe, E. D., *Mormonism Exposed*, 1834, pp. 270-72; 273; 352.

⁵Clark, John A., *Gleanings by the Way*, 1842, pp. 232-238.

⁶Howe, E. D., *Mormonism Exposed*, 1834; Clark, John A., *Gleanings by the Way*, 1842, p. 229; Kidder,

TRANSCRIPT

A STRONG PROOF OF THE DIVINE CALLING OF JOSEPH SMITH ARE HIS CHARACTERISTICALLY BOLD ACTS BY WHICH HE SUBJECTED HIMSELF AND HIS WORKS TO CRITICAL EXAMINATION.

ARIEL L. CROWLEY, an able young attorney of Boise, Idaho, who has a prodigious capacity for private research, has here done the thing, in part at least, which must have been in the mind of Martin Harris. Since the Prophet Joseph Smith, and since the Book of Mormon itself, states that the characters on the gold plates were "reformed Egyptian," and since, happily, a well-documented transcript of some of those characters has been preserved from the days of the Prophet, it would seem to be a relatively simple procedure to compare what we have with the numerous existing Egyptian dictionaries and other scholarly works of linguists and Egyptologists to see if resemblances occur. One wonders almost why it hasn't been done before, but, in any case, this is what the author has now done, and his findings are described beginning in this issue of the Era.

transcript by the country farmer to the learned professor.⁶

Pomeroy Tucker, who was a printer in Palmyra in the days of the Prophet, and knew both Joseph Smith and Martin Harris, and was therefore likely to possess first-hand information, says, though he was inclined to ridicule Martin Harris:⁷

Yet he [Martin Harris] evidenced some method in his madness, for before doing so, he sought out the "wisdom of learned men," as he said, relative to the genuineness of the revelation and discovery. He accordingly procured from Smith some resemblances of antique characters or hieroglyphics purporting to be exact copies from the plates; which, together with the translations in his possession, he carried to New York City, where he sought for them the interpretation and bibliographical scrutiny of such scholars as Hon. Luther Bradish, Dr. Mitchell, Professor Anthon, and others.

The genuineness of the Harris-Anthon meeting is well established.

Undoubtedly, also, Martin Harris sought to secure the opinion of other learned men.⁸

Daniel B., *Mormonism and the Mormons*, 1842; Caswall, Henry, *The Prophet of the Nineteenth Century*, 1843, pp. 39-40; Hunt, J. H., *Mormonism*, 1844, p. 13; Sexton, George, *Portraits of Mormonism*, 1849, p. 41; Mackay, Charles, *The Mormons*, 1856, p. 28; Smucker, *History of Mormons*, 1855, p. 37-39; Hyde, John, *Mormonism*, 1857, p. 216; Taylder, T. W. P., *The Mormons' Own Book*, 1857, p. 29; Tucker, Pomeroy, *Origin, Rise and Progress of Mormonism*, 1867, p. 42; Sjodahl, J. M., *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon*, pp. 38-43; Gregg, *The Prophet of Palmyra*, 1890, pp. 57-62; Kennedy, J. H., *Early Days of Mormonism*, 1888, p. 49.

⁶Tucker, Pomeroy, *Origin, Rise and Progress of Mormonism*, 1867, pp. 41-42.
⁸Hon. Luther Bradish, and Dr. Mitchell are two others alluded to above by Pomeroy Tucker.

THE TRANSCRIPT

THE transcript is on a "slip of paper, eight inches long by three and one quarter inches wide." It is written on paper much like that on which the manuscript of the Book of Mormon is written.⁹ Figure 1 is a photographic reproduction of the transcript, now in possession of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.¹⁰

GENUINENESS OF THE TRANSCRIPT

MARTIN HARRIS, with David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery, became one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon. The three were therefore closely associated.

⁹Considerable discussion has ensued as to the writer of the word *Caractors*. Evidently this word, as the whole transcript, was very carefully, laboriously penned. The existing evidence points to Joseph Smith himself as the author of the title of the transcript.
¹⁰This photographic copy of the transcript has been published in Roberts, B. H., *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 1830, Vol. 1, p. 106; Evans, John Henry, *Message and Characters of the Book of Mormon*, p. 32; *History of the Church* (Reorganized), Vol. 1, p. 22.

The transcript itself passed into the hands of David Whitmer along with the second copy of the manuscript of the Book of Mormon. David Whitmer's statement to that effect was made in his *Address to All Believers*, in 1887:¹¹

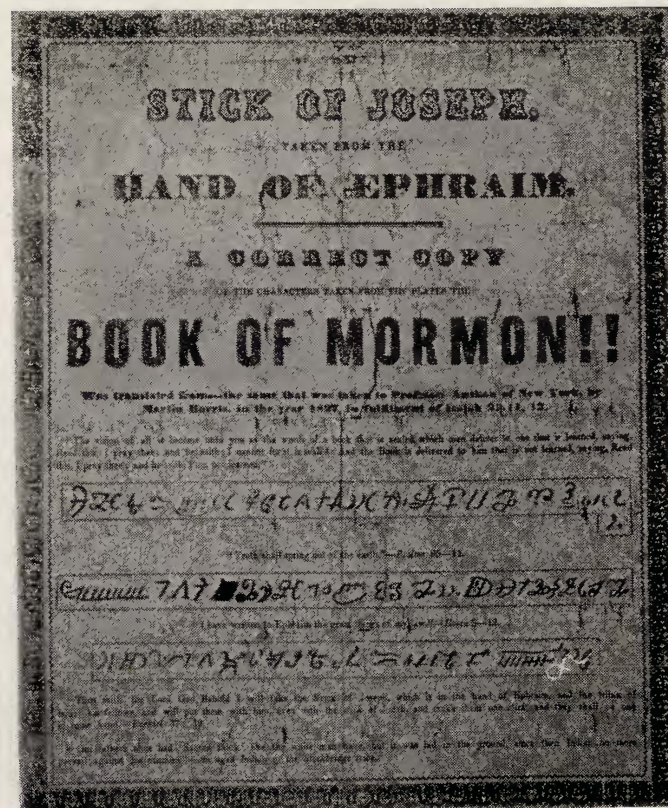
I have in my possession the original paper containing some of the characters transcribed from one of the golden plates, which paper Martin Harris took to Professor Anthon of New York, for him to read "the words of a book that is sealed."

The existence of the transcript was well known. Edward Stevenson of the First Council of the Seventy saw it and copied it in 1871.¹² Andrew Jenson, Assistant Church Historian; Joseph F. Smith, Orson Pratt¹³ also saw it on their visits to David Whitmer. Anti-Mormon writers such as Linn¹⁴ and Riley¹⁵ confirm the existence of the document in the possession of David Whitmer.

David Whitmer died January 25, 1888, and the transcript passed into
(Continued on page 58)

¹¹Page 11. Also see editorial in Richmond (Mo.) *Conservator*, March 25, 1881.
¹²*Reminiscences of Joseph Smith*, by Edward Stevenson, 1893, p. 32.
¹³*Historical Record*, Vol. VI, p. 211 (Andrew Jenson).
¹⁴*Story of the Mormons*, 1902, p. 40.
¹⁵*The Founder of Mormonism*, 1902, p. 81.

FIGURE 2: EARLY CIRCULAR SHOWING THREE LINES OF CHARACTERS COPIED FROM THE GOLD PLATES.



STUDENT COOPERATIVES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

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the guiding influence behind what is probably the most remarkable student cooperative system in America. Kitchen managers go to him for suggestions on operation problems. Scholarship chairmen consult him when the "house average" falls. Proctors and hostesses request his advice on varied problems they meet in their relationships with students. Most important, individual members of the group go to him with personal problems.

To all he gives inspiration and

sound common sense. Probably no other man in the community has won more loyalty from those whom he has helped nor more respect from those whom he has opposed. He has fought to transform a religious ideal into a practical reality. Even those who, for selfish reasons, have opposed the cooperatives, admit that he has succeeded.

"Our people have always believed," he explains, "that religion should be more than a Sunday affair. I did nothing new or outstanding when I helped start the cooperatives. It was part of my Church program.

I think the movement has succeeded partly because we started with a nucleus of Latter-day Saint students who had been trained in cooperation since childhood."

His contributions to Idaho education may be a natural outgrowth of his religious convictions, but students who have benefited from his work will dispute his claim that they are not "outstanding." They have won for him and his Church the respect of hundreds of non-Mormons who judge any creed mainly by the results it achieves in human progress.

THE ANTHON TRANSCRIPT

(Continued from page 15)

the hands of his family. It was there in early 1903 at the time of the preparation of Chapter V in volume 2 of B. H. Roberts' *New Witnesses for God*.¹⁸

In April, 1903, the Whitmer heirs transferred the transcript to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, where it now remains. This is confirmed by a recent letter from President Frederick M. Smith of the Reorganized Church.

THE REORGANIZED CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS

The Auditorium
Independence, Missouri

May 9, 1941

Mr. John A. Widtsoe
47 E. South Temple Street
Salt Lake City, Utah

Dear Sir and Friend:

I have delayed answering your letter of May 1st, in looking up the history of the document referred to by you.

Without reasonable doubt we have the original paper taken by Martin Harris to Professor Anthon. In 1884, a committee of the Reorganized Church had a conference with David Whitmer. From July 8 to August 17 of that year this committee worked with Father Whitmer in comparing published Books of Mormon with the manuscript then in his possession. At this time this paper was with the manuscript, and it was exhibited by him to the committee and he stated it was the original taken to Professor Anthon.

In 1890 a "cut" was made which was published in a book written by William H. Kelley called *Presidency and Priesthood*; and in 1896 it was reproduced in our *Church History*, Vol. 1, p. 22.

When the Book of Mormon manuscript was delivered to my father in April, 1903, this fragment was tied up with it and has remained in our possession.

Our historical department states that "possibly the first published reference to such a document was a letter of Professor

Anthon dated February 17, 1834, published by E. D. Howe in his book that year."

In *Times and Seasons*, Vol. 3, p. 773, appears the statement of Martin Harris doubtless made some time before.

Of course many published accounts are now to be found.

Mr. S. A. Burgess comments: "In addition to the history of the fragment, the word 'characters,' their uneven size and growing smaller with each line, all indicate an unskilled copyist. Also, the paper itself is old, and of the same quality and appearance of the paper of the manuscript and of early revelations, manuscripts undoubtedly made before 1833."

The appearance of the fragment, eight inches by three and one-fourth inches, evidences its antiquity, and since 1924 we have kept it under glass. . . .

With best wishes, I remain,

Yours sincerely,

(s) Frederick M. Smith.

There can be little if any doubt that the transcript possessed by the Reorganized Church is the one used by Martin Harris in his meeting with Professor Anthon. That the Prophet may have made other transcripts goes without saying, but no account of them exists.¹⁷

THE TRANSCRIPT AND ITS REPRODUCTIONS

THE first printed reproduction of a part of the transcript seems to be a black and gold placard, apparently designed for framing, published before 1845. (Fig. 2)¹⁹ The one known copy of the placard is preserved in the L. D. S. Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City. The placard bears on its back the signature of "Mrs. Hyrum Smith" (who died in 1852) and the recital "1844 placard Stick of Joseph. This was formerly owned by Hyrum Smith. Sent to the Historian's Of-

ice, March 22, 1860, by his son, Joseph Fielding Smith." Only three of the seven lines of the transcript are reproduced on the placard, and while these are badly drawn by a copyist satisfied with an approximation, it is clear that they were copied from the Anthon transcript.

A similar copy appears in 1884, in *The Prophet*, a paper published by the Church in New York and edited by Samuel Brannan.²⁰ This is very plainly copied from the placard of 1844. The divergencies from the original, and the size of the reproduced characters are identical in both reproductions.²⁰

In 1893, Edward Stevenson, later a member of the First Council of the Seventy, made a much more faithful copy than any previously published. However, by close examination slight variations may be found, such as inevitably occur in the most diligent attempts at accuracy, when the copy is done by hand. Elder Stevenson wrote:

I will vouch for the correctness of the characters, as I have compared them with the original copy, which is still in existence, intact, just as it was when Martin Harris, as a messenger, took it with the translation Joseph Smith had made, to Professor Anthon of New York. The copy here presented was traced from the original copy, and is an exact reproduction of it.²¹

In 1903, Elder B. H. Roberts of the First Council of the Seventy in his *New Witnesses for God*²² reproduced both the Brannan and the Stevenson copies, with the comment that "doubtless inaccuracies exist in both of them."

In 1915, R. C. Webb published a

¹⁸No. 31, p. 2, Dec. 21, 1844.

²⁰The editor of *The Prophet* errs in setting the date of the Anthon visit as 1827 instead of 1828.

²¹*Reminiscences of Joseph the Prophet*, 1893, p. 33.

²²Vol. 2, pp. 71-82.

¹⁷See Cannon, George Q., *Life of Joseph Smith*, 1888, p. 54.

¹⁸Reproduced in Smith, Joseph Fielding, *Essentials in Church History*, 1922, p. 63.

¹⁹See page 45.

The Anthon Transcript very carefully made copy of the transcript.²³

Since 1903, several distorted copies of the transcript have appeared in various works.²⁴

The fact that the characters on the placard of 1844 are unquestionably poorly drawn from the characters of the Anthon transcript is additional evidence of the genuineness of this transcript.

In recent years the transcript has been photographed, so that errors of copying have been eliminated.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE CHARACTERS

THE interest which throughout the years has attached to the Anthon transcript makes it surprising that, with one exception, neither friend nor foe has attempted seriously to identify the characters with known alphabets or writing signs or symbols, and to determine if they were in use 600 B. C.

At least one anti-Mormon writer has even dared to make the unsupported and unscholarly statement that "there is not a letter of Egyptian in the whole."²⁵ Others have come near dismissing the whole subject in a similar manner.

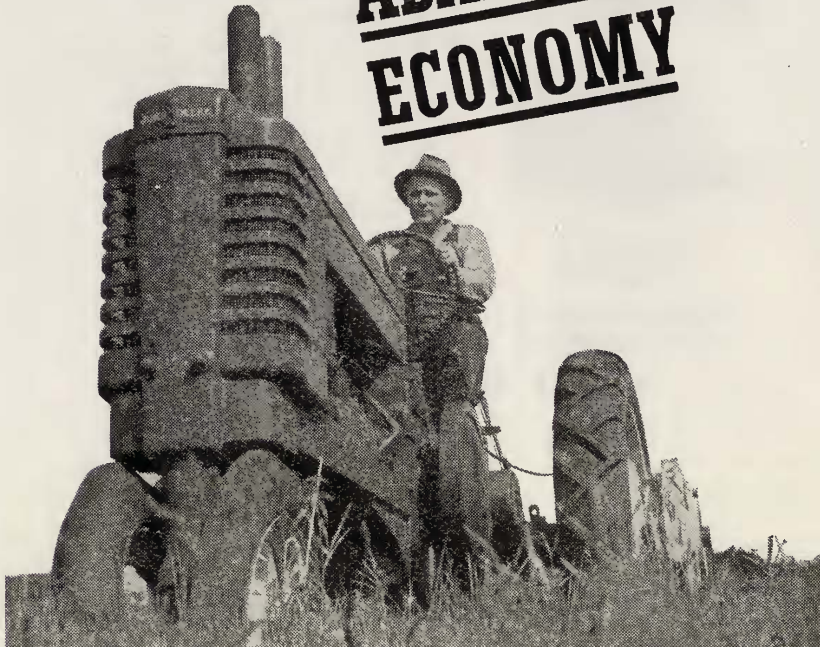
The one exception is R. C. Webb, who wrote:²⁶

Allowing, however, for the evident unskillfulness of the writer as a penman—and this fact might be urged to indicate that he had copied many of the characters poorly and inaccurately, distorting some of them in fact—the entire scree closely resembles a manuscript in some ancient form of Egyptian hieratic. (This latter text, in a general sense, held about the same relation to hieroglyphic as handwritten script holds to square printed type; being a "cursive form," in fact, hence diverging from hieroglyphic in very many particulars). Thus it is possible to find several striking resemblances to common hieratic characters in this paper, and close study has revealed several others with the same possible description. One curious fact about this writing is that, although, evidently copied by the penman beginning at the left hand upper corner, as in modern European languages, it seems to represent, or to be intended to represent, a text reading from right to left, as did Egyptian texts of all varieties, as well as the writing of most Semitic languages. This conclusion might be formed by noting the fact that three square figures, closely suggesting stops of some kind, as between sentences or sections, are to be seen in the writing, the third of them being at the extreme left hand end of the seventh, or last line. If a "fake" pure and simple, it is certainly an extremely clever one, somewhat more carefully concocted than one might expect from "so ignorant a man as Joe."

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²³Webb, R. C., *The Case Against Mormonism*, 1915, p. 22.
²⁴Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism*, 1902, p. 80; Linn, *The Story of the Mormons*, 1902, p. 40.
²⁵Nutting, John D., *Why I Could Never Be a Mormon*, 1913, pp. 5, 6.
²⁶*The Case Against Mormonism*, 1915, p. 22.

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THE ANTHON TRANSCRIPT

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CONCLUSION

Many years later, R. C. Webb made a study of Joseph Smith as a translator, and again touched upon the transcript,²⁷ being unaware, however, that it is the original document which was presented to Professor Anthon.

After reciting the general historical background of the document, and the means by which it had been preserved, Mr. Webb made the following significant statement:

Apart from these considerations, may be mentioned the interesting and curious fact, that the characters or figures composing its six lines constitute a total document which resembles, or suggests, nothing more closely than some form of variant, of Egyptian writing, after the so-called "hieratic" style.

In the nature of his treatise, Mr. Webb made no attempt to compare individual characters, but adopted a striking visual method of demonstration. First he set forth three lines of the characters taken from the Anthon transcript, following them with an Egyptian text written in the hieratic script. Then for conclusive force, he reproduced the last line of the demotic text of the celebrated Rosetta Stone, no less than thirty of the characters of which appear also in the Anthon Transcript.

If allowance is made for the fact that both the hieratic and the demotic system are cursive forms of writing, bearing the same relationship to hieroglyphic drawings as common English handwriting bears to formal print, the number may with reasonable certainty be increased. It should not be forgotten that the Egyptian language has also certain well known gymnastic characteristics, by which letter are sometimes reversed or arbitrarily compounded when convenience requires. Nor should it be forgotten that the demotic writing of 600 B. C. had undergone changes in the centuries which passed before the Rosetta Stone was engraved.

With these considerations in mind, Mr. Webb was forced to the conclusion, most important to the present inquiry,

That both the hieratic and demotic styles of writing, being modifications of the original hieroglyphic picture writing, and evidently preferred to it in the fact that they involved greater facility, and less expenditure of time and effort, could with eminent propriety be described as "reformed," "modified," "remodeled," or "improved" Egyptian writing.

²⁷Webb, R. C., *Joseph Smith as a Translator*, 1936, p. 4.

THE Book of Mormon recites in its opening verses that the history contained in its pages is engraved in the language of Lehi, which consists of "the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:2). Well along in the work the Egyptian character of the script is noted (Mosiah 1:4) in the exhortation of Benjamin, who reviewed the history of his people and reminded them that Lehi, who left Jerusalem and was responsible for the transportation of his family to the western hemisphere, had carried with him the ancient brazen record of his people, likewise engraved in Egyptian characters. Lehi, he said, "having been taught in the language of the Egyptians, therefore he could read these engravings and teach them to his children." From the changes which crept into the system of writing, the language used in writing the Book of Mormon became in later years known to the Nephite people as "reformed Egyptian" (Mormon 9:32).

Since the time of Joseph Smith, great strides have been made in modern knowledge of the Egyptian language and its forms. At the time of the Prophet only a handful of men in the whole world had any knowledge of the Egyptian language beyond knowledge of its existence and the several forms which it had taken. The riddle of the Rosetta Stone was unsolved, the basis for its ultimate decipherment having been laid in 1822 in the French works of Champollion. From that point, in the language of Sir Frederick Kenyon (*The Bible and Archeology*, New York, 1940), "Like all decipherments of unknown tongues, the working out of details was a long and laborious task, in which many scholars have taken part, and which it would be quite out of place to describe here."

If it can be shown that the characters on the transcript conform to ancient Egyptian characters, another strong evidence for the divine inspiration behind the translation of the Book of Mormon will be added to the many such evidences already existing. This has now been done, as will be shown in another article to appear in a succeeding issue of the *Era*.

Should it be further shown that the characters on the transcript make connected thought, the evidence for Joseph's inspiration will be more completely substantiated.