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The Spaulding Manuscript

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Abstract: Provides a history and selections of the Spaulding manuscript with the goal of showing that it was not the source of the Book of Mormon.



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The Spaulding Manuscript.

By Howard R. Driggs.

Some years ago considerable stir was made among the opponents of the Latter-day Saints by the announcement that the source of the Book of Mormon had been discovered in a certain manuscript written by one Solomon Spaulding, of Conneaut, Ohio.

The manuscript contained a story remotely suggestive, in a few details, of the Book of Mormon story. It was said to have been discovered in a cave in Ohio. It was written in the Latin language, and translated by Mr. Spaulding into English. Some people jumped to the conclusion that from this story Joseph Smith got his story told in the Book of Mormon.

This hasty conclusion has been proved absurd by students not only within but without our Church. The stories are so utterly unlike in most respects as to have little in common, so we need spend no time controverting the claim already amply disproved. But we are naturally interested in this old Spaulding manuscript because of the notoriety thus thrust upon it.

A few years since I visited Oberlin, Ohio, and there I found in the Oberlin College library the Spaulding manuscript. Having a kodak, I took the pictures herein reproduced of it. The manuscript has been covered with a substantial binding to preserve its worn and discolored leaves. The faded writing may still be read, and Solomon Spaulding's signature, in bold hand-writing, is in it.

I sat for an hour or more threading my way through the story, and copied from it the following excerpts, which, with the inserted explanations, will give our readers an idea of the style and story of the manuscript:

INTRODUCTION.

“Near the west Bank of the Con-caught River there are the remains of an ancient fort. As I was walking and forming various conjectures respecting the character situation, and numbers of those people who far exceeded the present race of Indians

in works of art & ingenuity,—I hapned to tread on a flat Stone. This was at a small distance from the fort: & it lay on the top of a small mound of Earth exactly horizontal—the face of it had a singular appearance I discovered a number of characters which appeared to be letters but so much effaced by the ravages of time, that I could not read the inscription. With the assistance of a leaver, I raised the Stone. But you may easily conjecture my



READING ROOM, OBERLIN COLLEGE, OBERLIN, OHIO.

Spaulding Manuscript shown against base of statue.

astonishment when I discovered that its ends and sides it rested on Stones & that it was designed as a cover to an artificial cave. * * * Determined to investigate design of this extraordinary work of antiquity—I prepared myself with necessary requisites for the purpose and descended to the bottom of the cave—Observing one side to be perpendicular nearly three feet from the bottom, I began to inspect that part with accuracy; Here I noticed a big flat Stone fixed in the form of a door, I immediately tore it down & Lo a cavity within the wall presented itself—it being about three feet in diameter from side to side and about two feet high. Within this cav-

ity I found an earthen Box with a cover which shut it perfectly tight—the Box was two feet in length one & half in breadth & one and three inches in diameter. My mind filled with awful sensations which crowded fast upon me would hardly permit my hands to remove this venerable deposit but curiosity soon gained the ascendancy & the box was taken & raised to open * * * When I had removed the cover I found that it contained twenty eight sheets of parchment. & that when * * * appeared to be manuscripts written in an elegant hand with Roman Letters & in the Latin Language."

They were written on a variety of Subjects. But the Roll which principally attracted my attention contained a history of the author's life & that part of America which extends along the great Lakes & the waters of the Mississippi."

"Extracts of the most interesting & Important matters contined in this roll, I take the liberty to publish."—

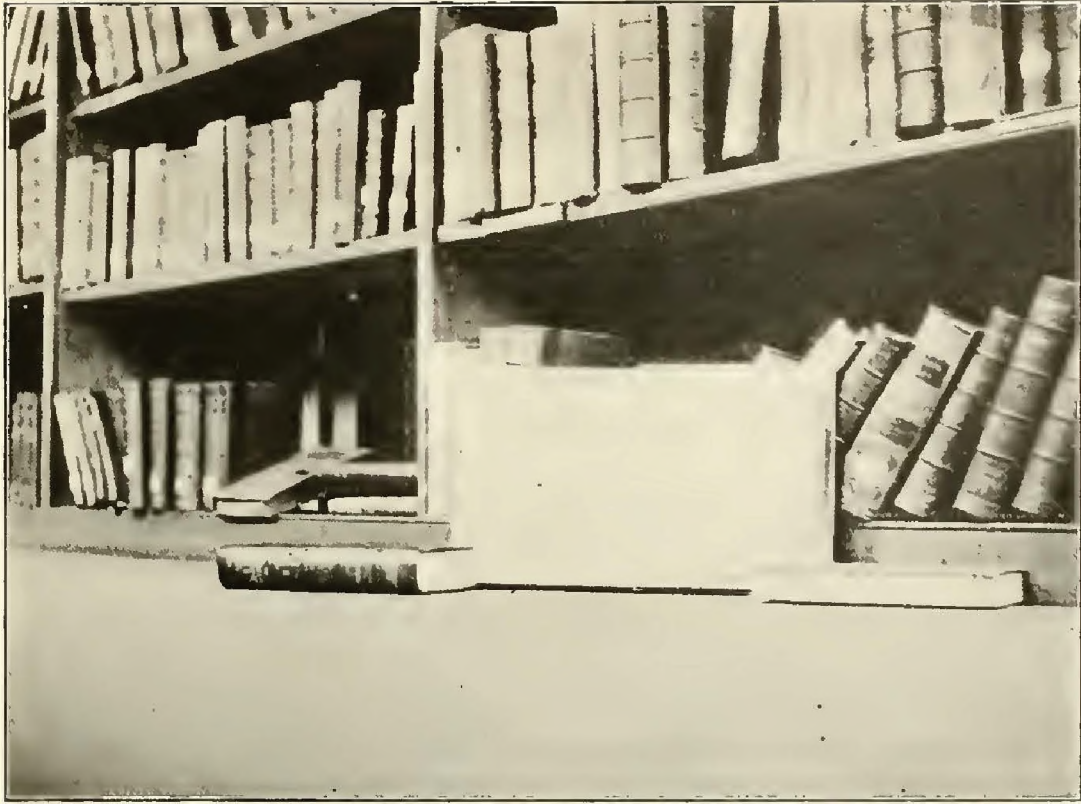
"[Gentle Reader, tread lightly on the ashes of the venerable dead.—Thou must know that this country was once inhabited by great & powerful nation considerably civilized & skilled in the arts of war, and on ground where thou now treadest many a bloody Battle hath been faught. heroes by thousands [have been] made to bite the dust."

Mr. Spaulding says he cannot publish all he finds; it would be "too expensive for general class of readers," etc. But if the first extracts are approved he will be "happy to gratify the more inquisitive & learned by a more minute publication." Skeptical will find entertainment. Reader entreated "to peruse volume with a clear head & a pure heart & a candid mind."

CHAPTER I.

An Epitomy of the Author's life & of his arival in America—

"As it is possible that in some future age this part of the Earth will be inhabited by Europeans & a history of



SHELF IN OBERLIN COLLEGE LIBRARY
Where Spaulding Manuscript is kept.

its present inhabitants will be a valuable acquisition, I propose to write one & deposit it in a box secured * * * so that the ravages of time will have effect upon it. That you may know the Author I will give a succinct account of his life & of the cause of his arrival—which I have extracted from a manuscript which will be deposited with this history:

"The family name I sustain is Fa-la-us, being descended from the illustrious General of that name.—I was born at Rome & received my education under the tuition of a very learned Master."

Constantine gives him position—sends him to Britain with message. Vessel laden with provisions, clothing, knives, and other implements for their use. Near Britain storm comes up, drives them into midocean. Crew bewildered.

"For the heavens were covered with clouds; & darkness had spread her sable mantle over the face of the raging deep." Driven five days with "incredible velocity before the furious wind." On sixth day storm wholly

subsides. Find themselves far out in ocean, no prospect of returning. "No pen can paint the dolorous cries & lamentations." At length a Mariner step Forward in the midst & proclaimed: 'Attend, O Friends, & listen to my words—A voice from on high hath penetrated my soul & the inspiration of the Almighty hath bid me proclaim—Let your sails be wide spread and the gentle winds will soon waft you into a safe harbor—A country where you will find hospitality.'—Hymn of thanksgiving spontaneously burst forth, in full confidence that the divine prediction would be accomplished. On fifth day after this we came in sight of land. Sail up to it. Natives run "with signs of surprise. Afterward receive wanderers with signs of friendship."

Led by chiefs to feast of fish, boiled beans, & samp, under wide spreading Oak, in wooden dishes. "A more delicious repast we never enjoyed."

War dance next; one thousand natives. Guests get into ring and a song is begun "with such discordant & heinous modification of sounds &

such frantic jesticulations of body that it seemed that chaos had bro't her furies to get the world in an uproar."

"Whole company fell to shouting, whooping and screaming, then dancing, jumping and tumbling. In fact they appeared more like a company of devils than human beings.

Tribe disbands with "three most tremendous whoops."

CHAPTER II.

Account of settlement of ship's company. Buy lands for cloth & knives. Had seven ladies on board, three of rank "the rest were healthy buxom lasses." These had been passengers to Britain.

A mariner "called droll Tom" arises and says: "Hark ye shipmates, says he, Whilst tossed on the foaming billows what brave son of neptune had any more regard for a woman than a sturgeon? But now we are all safely anchored on Terra Firma,—our sails furled & ship keeled up, I have a huge longing for some of those rosy dames—But willing to take my chance with my shipmates—I propose that they should make their choise of husbands. The plan was instantly adopted." Droll Tom was rewarded for his benevolence proposal with one of the most sprightly rosy dames in the company.

The young ladies of rank fixed their choice on the Captain, the Mate and myself (the author). "The young lady who chose me was possessed of every attraction, charm both of body & mind."

The Capt. & myself, attended with our fair Partners & two mariners repaired to a new habitation which consisted of two convenient appartments. After having partook of an elligant

Dinner & drank a bottle of excellent wine our spirits were exhilarated & the deep gloom which beclouded our minds evaporated. The Capt. assuming his wonted chearfulness made the following address My sweet good soald fellows we have now commenced a new voige—not such as brot us over mountain billows to this butt end of the world—No, no, our voyge is on dry land—& now we must take care that we have sufficient ballast for the riging—every hand on board this ship must clasp hands & condecend to each other's humour, this will pro-good cheer and smooth the raging billows of life. Surrounded by innumerable hords of human beings, who resemble in manners the Ourang Outang—let us keep aloof from them & not embark in the same matrimonial ship [*with them*]—At the same time we will treat them with good cheer—& inlighten their dark souls with good instruction—By continuing a distinct people & preserving our customs manners, religion & arts and sciences another Italy will grow up in this wilderness & we shall be celebrated as the fathers of a great and happy nation."

"May God bless your soul," says one of the mariners, "what would you have us do who have had the woful luck not to get mates to cheer our poor souls?"

The mariner given permission to get a native wife.

The story then goes on to tell of the fortunes of the new colony.

Whatever remote resemblance there is to the Book of Mormon is to be found in the parts quoted here. The reader may readily judge what inspiration for that wonderful story could come from this crude tale.

God Preserve Thee.

"May God preserve thy going out,
May God preserve thy coming in,
And send His angels round about
And keep thee pure from every sin.

"And when thy going out is done,
And when thy coming in is o'er,
When o'er death's threshold, all alone,
Thy feet shall go to come no more;

"May God preserve thy going out,
From this dark world of grief and sin,
And angels standing round about
Sing, 'God preserve thy coming in.'"