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Conversions THROUGH THE BOOK OF MORMON

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V. Lester F. Bardin

Lester F. Bardin was born at the turn of the present century. He tells me that for ten years, up to the time when he was twenty-seven, he lived "a rather unstable life,



LESTER F. BARDIN

devoid of any spirituality whatever."

One day he heard one man ask another man, over the radio, how

he might be "saved." The answer was, "Read a certain passage of scripture," the reference to which was thereupon given. Mr. Bardin immediately turned off the radio and found it in the New Testament, which "a kindly woman had presented me with long ago," but which he had not thought to read till now. The reference struck him "very forcibly." But, instead of stopping with that single verse, he went on reading from the middle of that afternoon till the next morning. Thus he read all the Four Gospels.

The effect on him was electrical. "I was prostrate and griefstricken, after reading what our Lord went through, to think that he did so that such as I might have an opportunity to repent and be saved."

Then he thought he ought to join some church. "I hungered and thirsted for righteous fellowship." In the belief that "all churches were of God," he went to the nearest communion he could find, just around the corner. It happened to be the Episcopal Church. Here the minister admitted him through the usual ceremony of baptism, which in this case was sprinkling. But the communicants of this church treated him somewhat coldly, when what he was passionately yearning for

was warmth and comfort. Thereupon he severed his connection with the Episcopalians by not going to their church any more.

Soon after this, while his thoughts were still bent on religion, he ran upon "a very humble, sociable old gentleman," who told him that he had done well in ceasing to attend the Episcopal Church, since it was not after all the right church. The right church was that of the Seventh Day Adventists, to which he himself belonged. So our friend went to that church. He did more than that, for he paid one-tenth of his income to the church, refrained from eating meat, abstained altogether from stimulants, and even "quit my job rather than break their Saturday sabbath." But when, after all this, he asked permission to join the church, the minister refused to admit him on the grounds that he was not sufficiently "rooted in the faith."

Again he was left stranded and alone.

His next venture into religion was equally discouraging. This time it was the Presbyterians that drew him in. To this church he was admitted on the strength of his prior "baptism" into the Episcopal persuasion. This connection came about through a meeting with "a very fine man, a Presbyterian minister." This man "showed me many errors in the Adventist doctrine, and persuaded me to join his church."

Mr. Bardin, it appears, showed both talent and a bent for the ministry. So his friends in this church sent him to one of their eastern col-

leges, with a view to making a preacher of him. (He was, it should be known, a Westerner by birth and residence.) At this seminary he made a discovery that greatly saddened him. It was that the institution "was turning out ministers who did not believe in the divinity of Christ, who believed that the Bible account of the Creation was a myth, and who further believed that man had evolved to his present stage from the lower forms of life."

Believing otherwise, "I quit the Presbyterians."

One of his reasons, however, for leaving Presbyterianism lay in the fact that, meantime, he encountered certain members of the Church of the Disciples of Christ, commonly known as "Campbellites." His studies in the New Testament had led him to the belief that the proper form of baptism was immersion, not sprinkling or pouring. This was also the belief of Alexander Campbell. Moreover, he liked the idea held by the Disciples, that the proper book to get religious information from was the Bible. After being with this church for some time he "entered their ministerial college, preached while attending school for two years, and learned a great deal about the gospel meanwhile. I studied prayerfully, worked hard for what I believed to be right, and always refused to be paid for preaching."

But this, too, presently passed away. "This church, also, taught the doctrine of a never-consuming fire for all those who had died without being baptized into the Chris-

tian church. The more I studied such notions, the more revolting they became to me. They offended my sense of reason and justice." Then he left the Disciples.

About this time his mother, who lived on the Pacific Coast, fell sick, and he returned to her. "Soon she recovered, and soon, too, I returned to some of my old habits and acquaintances. I became inactive in the church. But I never lost my faith in the divinity of Christ. I often read the Bible, and I sometimes prayed. Meantime I had a great longing to overcome the temptations that beset me."

Then it was that Mr. Bardin came upon the Book of Mormon.

In the town where he lived he obtained a job in connection with the local hospital. One of the patients at this hospital was a Mormon, a man who had been sick there for some time. This man often talked with Mr. Bardin about his faith, particularly about the Book of Mormon, which he said he knew to be true. At his elbow all the time the sick man kept a copy of the Bible and a copy of this other volume. Whenever the patient expressed the view that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, Mr. Bardin always replied, "I believe the Bible to be the only word of God to man." And there the matter ended.

"One day," says our friend, "I went into the room to get the Bible, which I wished to read in another room, when I saw, lying beside the Good Book, another volume. I noticed, on the cover of it in gold

letters, the title, The Book of Mormon. [This was the first time he had set eyes consciously on this book] Right then a feeling of great curiosity came over me, that I should examine it. Thereupon I asked if I might take it and look it over somewhat. The man excitedly told me to read it, but his wife added calmly, 'If you will read that book from the educational standpoint alone, you will receive much good from it.'"

So he borrowed it.

"Strange as it may seem," he goes on, "the first thing I remember reading in that book was this: 'When ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.' No proposition could be more fair, I thought; so, with that faith and good intention, I began prayerfully to read the Book of Mormon.

"After a few days a very fine young man, representing himself to be a Mormon missionary came to visit my patient. I wanted to size up this man, to see how a Mormon treated me. So, after quite a little coaxing, I persuaded him to share my lunch and then to visit with me. He answered my few questions, but did not force his religion upon me. He told me, however, to keep on reading the book.

"Soon after this, the missionary's companion came to see me. He told

me that a man might try to persuade me to stop my reading of the Book of Mormon. This I thought was strange for him to say. But that very night an elderly man, an acquaintance of mine, came in and earnestly tried to get me to stop reading the book, for Christian reasons, he claimed. I told him that I could find nothing wrong in the the book, but rather it was a great joy to me.

"He left and came again the next night, arguing against it. He said, 'I've made a study of Mormonism for forty years. The Book of Mormon may be all right, but wait till you come to the Doctrine and Covenants.' I answered that I would keep on reading it and see. He left, but came again the third night. Again he asked me to stop reading it. By this time his attempt at persuasion seemed to me an inference against my intelligence, and so I was somewhat provoked at him. I repeated that I could find nothing wrong in the book, but that, on the contrary, there were many wonderful things in it that I had never heard before. I further told him that I believed it to be true, that if the rest of the book turned out as I expected, I was going to ask for admission into the church. The old gentleman never came back.

"When I started to read the Book of Mormon, beside me on a stand lay my cigarettes, which many times I had tried to quit, but, having insufficient will, was unable to do so. But from the moment I started to read I had no desire for

them. The craving left me. This I could not help noticing, and it added to my joy, and helped me.

"Immediately after reading the Book of Mormon I was a new man. A feeling of intense joy was within me, a feeling of comfort and satisfaction, a burning within me that I had at last found the truth.

"Three weeks from that time, when I first laid eyes on the Book of Mormon, I was baptized. I knew that it was true, as I knew that I lived. And great is my joy this day. I have been in the Church now four years [at this writing it is eight years]. I was ordained an elder, have been married in the Temple, and we have a fine daughter.

"I have been on both sides of the great fence of life, and I know from sad experience what is on the dark side; and so great is my joy in Christ for tasting the bitter, the sweet is all the sweeter for that."

Lester F. Bardin, still a young man, is now a part-time missionary in San Luis Obispo, California, a counselor in the Branch Presidency there, and a district aide in the Sunday School. And he is looking forward anxiously to the time when, in fulfilment of a patriarchal blessing, his "voice will be heard from ocean to ocean, proclaiming the tidings of the Gospel," and when "many shall accept" his "message." Meantime, he says: "I'm glad for all my experiences. Especially am I glad for an appreciation of the beliefs and positions of other men not of our Church."