



Type: Magazine Article

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Source: *The Instructor*, Vol. 79, No. 7 (July 1944), pp. 322-327

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Conversions THROUGH THE BOOK OF MORMON

JOHN HENRY EVANS

VIII. Otto and Josephine Gaeth

Although Otto Gaeth was born in America, his parents were natives of Austria. They had, however, come to the New World when they



JOSEPHINE L. GAETH

were young. Josephine Linnhard (that was her maiden name) was also born in Austria, and, at twenty-nine, she had immigrated to Mil-

waukee, in Wisconsin, where her future husband was by this time. He worked in one of the breweries; she, in a restaurant there. Milwaukee, one should know, was then a miniature Germany, and German and English were spoken indiscriminately in the town.

Otto's mother must have been an unusual woman. She was what we know as "psychic," in her way. Extremely sensitive to spiritual impressions from outside her mind, she told her son many things about his future. The girl he was to marry, she said, was not yet in this country. He would know her as soon as he set eyes upon her. She would be small and dark-complexioned. Otto would die when he was between sixty-two and sixty-three years old. Meantime he was to be on the lookout for the true religion (Mrs. Gaeth was a devout member of the Baptist Church), and when he found it, he must join it and live according to its teachings; otherwise he would "lose all." That is the way she put it.

Otto Gaeth was born in 1871, and he died in 1934, before he reached his sixty-third birthday!

One time Otto Gaeth and a male friend of his walked into that certain eating house in Milwaukee, to

have lunch. There was a new girl in the place, an employee. Turning to his companion, Otto said, "Do you see that young woman? She's my future wife!"

"Do you know her?" the friend asked.

"No. Never saw her before. Just the same we will be married some day."

The friend scanned Otto's face curiously, but he said nothing. He did not know about Otto's mother.

This new girl was Josephine Linnhard, twenty-nine years old and speaking no English.

Josephine Linnhard had had an eventful life. Three years younger than Otto, she had lost both of her parents in Austria when she was a child and had been taken care of by a cousin till she was fourteen. Meantime she had gone to school half days between five and fourteen. At this latter age she had quit school and gone out on her own—in domestic service.

In religion she was a Roman Catholic, telling her beads and saying her written prayers and going to confession and mass, as all good Catholics do. But all the time she had a vague, ill-defined, inexpressible feeling that she was doing the wrong things. For she, too, was "psychic" in a way, as we shall see presently.

It was not long till Otto Gaeth, tall and weighing two hundred and fifty pounds, and Josephine Linnhard, small and dark-eyed, were married.

They took up their residence by themselves in Milwaukee. He had

not been too much on the look-out for the "true church," and she had not got over her expectation, slight though it was, of a better spiritual life. But the couple was happy, as all newly-weds are apt to be anywhere, anytime. This sort of life went on for eight years. In 1912 he was forty, and she was thirty-seven. Meantime, children had come into the home—one in particular. Arthur, called "Art" for short, was one of these, and of him we shall hear something later on in this writing.

The Gaeths, of course, had neighbors, with whom they fraternized. One of them was a Mrs. Labbs, and she spoke German. One time she mentioned to Mrs. Gaeth, rather casually, it would appear, something about an "inspired book." And she asked her neighbor to kneel down with her and pray over it. Mrs. Gaeth was taken by surprise. Mildly the visitor protested.

"We do not pray that way, Mrs. Labbs," she explained. "We pray with beads and written prayers."

Mrs. Labbs corrected her. "You do not need beads and a written prayer when you go to God. You ask Him for what you want, just as you would anyone else, of whom you wanted something. That is all there is to it."

So the two knelt down and prayed over the Book. Mrs. Labbs did not show her neighbor the Book. She did not explain its origin. Nor did she tell what it was about. She merely told her of it and called it "inspired."

Mrs. Gaeth never forgot that les-

son in prayer. You asked the Lord for what you wanted, just as you would your friend.

When she got home, Mrs. Gaeth knelt down in her own room and prayed. She wanted to know several things. Particularly her curiosity was piqued about that "inspired book." It obsessed her mind, focused her attention. When her husband awoke (he was on the night shift), she told him about it, as the head of the house.

Would it be all right for her to borrow the Book of Mrs. Labbs? He saw no harm in it. And so she went to her neighbor's and got it.

Its title was the Book of Mormon, and it was in English, not in German. It was, therefore, a sealed volume to Mrs. Gaeth, for she could not then read English.

Then a strange thing happened. On taking the Book in his hands, Mr. Gaeth, as some others had done before him, began to thumb the volume. In the end his eyes stopped on a passage in that part called "Moroni." It read thus: "*And 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. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.*"

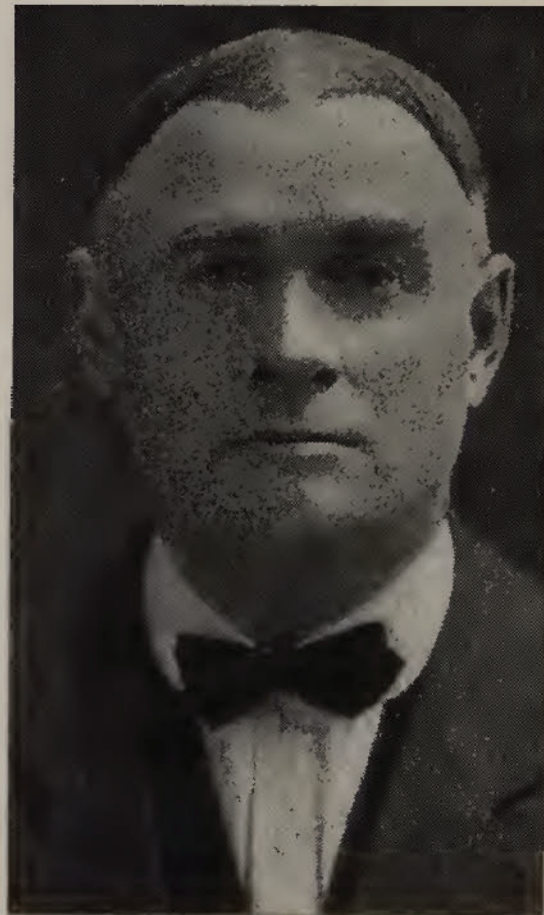
The words seemed to stand out on the page. It was as if they were in italics, in small caps, in large caps. It was almost as if they were

in flame. And yet, in fact and reality, they were hidden away at the end of the Book, nearly, submerged in a mass of German words!

Mr. Gaeth read the passage again. Then he translated it into German for his wife's sake. It answered exactly to her thought. It matched her feeling precisely. She believed it. "By the power of the Holy Ghost ye shall know the truth of all things."

Two chapters Mr. Gaeth read, and rendered into German for his wife.

Alone, one time when her husband was at work, she prayed that she might know "if these things are true." By this time "these



OTTO GAETH

things" included some matters that Mrs. Labb had made clear to her about the new Faith. Not the Holy Ghost, but an audible voice, told her that "*these things are true.*"

When she told her husband of this strange experience, he looked at her incredulously. She reaffirmed her statement about the voice. "I have never told you anything like that before," she said. "Why should you not believe me? I was not asleep. I was fully awake, as much so as I am now. And I did hear the voice, and it told me that the Book is true."

And she had not yet read it!

Then she wanted to be baptized.

The Branch President was one of those men, excellent men in their way, who want to be beforehand with the Lord, who would take the place of God where others are concerned. Mrs. Gaeth asked him to call some time, to "work" with her husband, with a view to hastening his conversion.

Meanwhile that husband was "working" with himself. He could hardly lay down the Book, to go to work, and when he returned home, it was at once in his hand. For he, too, was in a mood to learn "if these things are true," though he probably had no definite way in mind. Certainly he was not of a mind to listen for a voice.

The Branch President called at the Gaeths'. But he did no good. As a matter of fact, he did harm, rather. He gave a set-back to the faith of the prospective candidate for baptism. He said, bluntly, dogmatically: "Our Church is of God.

All other churches are of the Devil." And that was that. Nothing he could say from then on had any interest for Gaeth.

Later on, one of the missionaries came to "work" on the prospect. It was Livingston Montgomery, whose home was in Heber City, Utah. To him Mr. Gaeth listened avidly. This was on a Monday. On the Wednesday following there were to be some baptisms in the lake. Would the Gaeths be baptized then? Mr. Gaeth said he was not ready, but his wife might be baptized. And so the matter stood.

On Wednesday morning, however, Mr. Gaeth, when he came home from work, said to his wife:

"Have you got your clothes ready for your baptism?"

"Yes," she replied. And then he:

"Well, get mine ready, too. I'm going with you." And he added, facetiously, "It is not proper for the head of the house to follow his wife, who should be following him. I mean to be baptized with you."

Mrs. Gaeth stared at her husband, who immediately explained his new decision.

"Last night," he said, "I was alone at work, and I was thinking about the Book and whether it was right I should let you be baptized. So I prayed there in the brewery. A voice said to me plainly, so I could hear it, as I do your own voice, 'It is right; and you, yourself, should be baptized, too, else you may lose your chance.' And now I am going to be baptized with you, Josephine."

Her happiness was complete.

Almost at the very water's edge, though, there was a difficulty. The Branch President put in an objection to Mr. Gaeth's being baptized. He had some bad habits. He used tobacco, and he drank beer, and he was addicted, a little, to swearing. Elder Montgomery came to the rescue. "If there is any responsibility involved in the baptism of Mr. Gaeth, I am willing to assume it."

And so Otto Gaeth and his wife were baptized in the lapping waters of Lake Michigan.

There are some interesting sequels to this episode in the religious life.

For one thing, Otto Gaeth gave up his tobacco, his beer, and his swearing. He was that kind of man. Having set his hand to the plow, he did not look back. After his baptism, when he felt the urge to take a chew, he pulled the plug out of his pocket and performed the motion of putting it to his mouth for a bite, but instead halted the motion midway in the air. Then, looking at the tobacco in his hand, he said to himself, "No; I can't do that now." Whereupon he threw it into the furnace. He was done with tobacco for good and all. Beer and swearing went by the same board.

His fellow-workmen made great sport of his sudden change. "Now you drink beer with the rest of us," they shouted angrily, "and now you talk against it!" They could not quite understand. They would have him dismissed. But he was not turned off, and he persisted in his

own way of life. That was the sort of man he was.

For another thing, Mrs. Gaeth learned to read English by means of the Book of Mormon. Perhaps it would be more nearly accurate to say that she learned to read English through prayer, *with* the Book of Mormon.

"O Lord," she prayed, "help me to read this Book and to speak English, so that I may work with my English friends as freely as I do with my German friends."

And her prayer was answered—partly with the help of her husband and children, partly with that of the classes in the Sunday School and the Relief Society, which were then, fortunately for her, studying the Book of Mormon, but mainly, as Mrs. Gaeth believed, with the help of the Holy Ghost, working in her mind. For she had an active, profound belief in the power of the Holy Ghost, which had given her a testimony of the truthfulness of the Book, even before she had read it.

It had been through Arthur's influence that she had gone, with her husband, to the Mormon meetings. This was before her baptism. He had asked and been granted permission to go to the Sunday School, and came to like it; for his mother says, "Art was always religious." Then he had said to his parents, "Why don't you come, too?" And they had gone. Later Mrs. Gaeth had joined the Relief Society, and taken a part in reading aloud her favorite Book, with apologies for her imperfect accent and pronunciation.

A third result came from this

conversion of the Gaeths to the divine origin of the Book of Mormon. It was the sprouting and the culture of the tender plant of faith, especially in the heart of the mother.

"Art" became sick. He had double pneumonia. His life was despaired of. But his mother was philosophical even in her faith. "This child," she told the Lord on her knees, "was given me by Thee. His life is in Thy hands. If Thou hast a mission for him on earth, spare his life to perform that mission; if not, I shall not complain, though it break my heart."

The next day "Art" was out in the yard, playing with the other children, much to the astonishment of the attending physician.

Mrs. Labbs' idea about asking the Lord, simply and directly, for what you want, had borne fruit once again in the Gaeth home.

Mrs. Gaeth's double-edged faith was amply justified, she thinks, in the life of her son, thus miraculously healed. He has spent sixteen years preaching the gospel to the Austrians, the Germans, and the Czechs. He introduced Mormonism to Czechoslovakia, and learned its language, so that he speaks it like a native. After his return home to America, he became Professor of History at the Brigham Young University, in Provo, Utah. And now he is the outstanding radio commentator in the Intermountain

region, and writes articles weekly for its greatest newspaper.

Mrs. Gaeth, like her famous son, is a born missionary.

Her baptism pressed the button for her to begin this work of propaganda. In Milwaukee she distributed tracts and held meetings at her friends' homes, where she was received with respect and deference. For Mrs. Gaeth has a charming, contagious personality. Mr. Gaeth, too, preached on the street corners of the Wisconsin town, and drew from his fellow-toilers the charge of inconsistency whenever he urged his hearers to drop their beer-drinking and tobacco-chewing. Even Arthur, at eight, went out with the Elders distributing tracts and, at twelve, he went out on his own with his propaganda sheets. Two years the Gaeths did this in Milwaukee, and then they came to Salt Lake City to live. This was in 1919.

Here the head of the house became a high priest in the Church. He died in 1934. His wife worked in the Temple for four years, and for another similar period she served as a missionary in the Salt Lake Stake.

Verily, it is a miracle of words that a simple phrase written by a man whose very name is unknown to the world, except to a few, could, after fifteen hundred years, so steel the heart and illumine the mind and energize the spirit!

