



JOHN HENRY EVANS

### X. Heber J. Grant

In Heber J. Grant's connection with the Book of Mormon we take another step forward in our examination of that volume as an influence in human life.



HEBER J. GRANT AS A YOUTH

The first eight persons considered in this series showed how it brought men and women into the Church from the outside, how it caused them to change their reli-

gion. In the case of the ninth—A. William Lund—we saw how a reading of the Book of Mormon gave a substantial footing for a faith already established, supplied the rock of certitude on which to stand, so to speak, instead of the shifting sandbar of belief.

The case of Heber J. Grant is different from both of these approaches to the Nephite Record. Out of his reading of the Book of Mormon, as we shall see, came an influence that was to stabilize, to shape, and to direct his life, partly through one of its characters, partly through its spirit.

The way in which he came to read the Book of Mormon in the first place is so ordinary that many would be inclined to pass it by as of no value.

When he was fourteen years old, his uncle, Anthony Ivins, said to him and Anthony Ivins's son: "Boys, if you will read the Book of Mormon through and give me a pledge not to skip any of it, I will make you a present of a ten-dollar pair of buckskin gloves."

A pair of ten-dollar buckskin gloves in those days was a highly prized possession to a fourteen-year-old boy. So the two cousins began the reading of the Book of Mormon that very night.

Now, from the time he could read unhaltingly Heber's mother had urged him to read the Nephite Record. She had not, however, been successful in getting him to do so. She had told him that it was a true history. His Sunday School teacher had told him the same thing. And so had others. He believed them all, of course, because he knew them to be truthful men and women. Nevertheless he had not been interested in finding out for himself that this was so—until the offer of that ten-dollar pair of gloves.

The next day after Heber began to read the Book he met his cousin on the street. A conversation ensued.

Heber: Well, Tone, how many pages of the Book of Mormon have you read?

Tone: A hundred and fifty pages! I sat up until midnight reading it.

Heber: Then goodbye, gloves, for I've read only twenty-five pages!

But Heber kept on reading. He had become interested. Sometimes he read only the allotted twenty-five pages at a sitting, but at other times, when his interest increased to the point where he found it hard to quit, he read fifty or seventy-five pages. He had early decided not to go so fast that he could not get the meaning of what he read.

His cousin, however, after finding that he was far ahead of his fellow contestant, either read sporadically or went more slowly, and so, without realizing it, he fell behind.

Heber won the gloves!

The difference between the two boys, it seems, lay in the element of interest.

As to the way in which Heber did his reading, he said this many years later: "I read carefully and prayerfully, and there came to my heart an abiding and firm testimony of its divine authenticity. From that day to this its wonderful teachings have been a comfort, a blessing, and a guide to me."

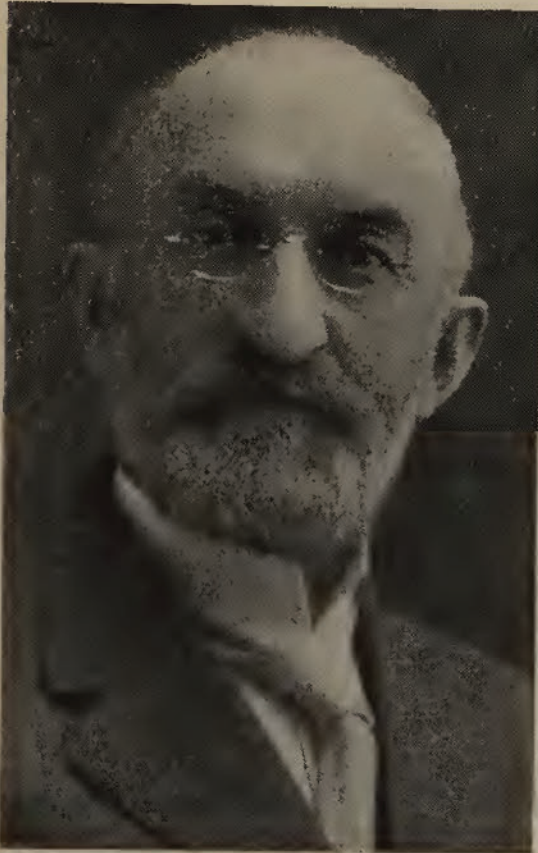
What did this youth get out of the Book of Mormon? Well, he got two very definite things.

First of all, he absorbed the spirit of one of its main characters — Nephi, the first of this name. If he had received nothing but this, it would have amply repaid the effort and the time he spent in reading the Book.

"I thank God from the bottom of my heart," he said in his later manhood, "that I read the life of Nephi in my youth. I fell in love with him then, and his life has influenced mine for good more than that of any other character in ancient history, sacred or profane—save only that of the Redeemer of the world."

The Book of Mormon, like the Bible, abounds in characters. Most of these characters, at least the major characters, as in the Bible again, are of the earnest, devotional, fervid type. When all is said that can be said of the internal evidence for the divine origin of the Nephite Record, it will be found that the power shown there of character de-

lineation is one of the two most powerful tests of the greatness of the Book. Incidentally, it may be remarked that one would be hard put to it to name many great world stories that have not lived to our time by reason of their characters



PRESIDENT HEBER J. GRANT

rather than their plot, or purpose, or setting. While the characters of that volume are mostly of the same general type, yet there is as much difference between them as can be found in this class of persons in our modern life. That is, there is essentially the same individuality in them that we may see in the men around us who are also religious.

It is not at all surprising, therefore, that Heber Grant, in his

youth, should have become interested in a character in the Book of Mormon, and it is not surprising that this character should have been Nephi.

Nephi's nature was intense. Perhaps this was natural to him, but it had become more intense through knowledge. Nephi is one of the best examples we have of the positiveness that always comes through knowing, instead of merely believing, that something is true. Knowledge is power.

There is something unique, too, in Nephi's approach to the spiritual. His father had told him (and told his brothers, also) about a certain vision which he had had concerning the family's removal to another part of the world. But, Nephi, unlike Laman and Lemuel, wished to *know*, not merely to *believe*, what his father had said. So he went to the same source of knowledge that his father had done. The result was that he came to know as his father had known. Faith had been swallowed up in knowledge.

This is, as a matter of fact, the only way to know spiritual truth, as it is the only way to know anything—through individual experience

It was this absolute knowledge that gave, or reinforced, the positive character of Nephi.

Again: Nephi was by nature, it appears, highly endowed with determination, will power, assertiveness. He never gave up. He never yielded an inch of the right, as he understood the right. And his in-

domitable will overcame every obstacle that got in his way. If he had not been religious, he would have shown the same trait in material things. As it was, he transferred to the spiritual the energy that would have been exhibited in agriculture, or mechanics, or political government. To him nothing, either physical or spiritual, was impossible.

He himself said, in a passage that President Grant has often quoted: "I know that the Lord giveth no commandment unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which He commandeth them." It is indeed a notable, pregnant passage.

One who knows President Grant well might wonder just how much of his intense nature, his positive character, and his determination is due to his study of the character of Nephi in the Book of Mormon.

But young Heber Grant got more out of the Book of Mormon than the spirit of a man, important as that was; he got the spirit of a great book.

"In the darkest hours, when death has entered my home, or when financial and other troubles have oppressed me," President Grant used to write to his grandchildren who were about to be married, "I have gone to the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants for inspiration and comfort, and have never gone in vain."

The fourteen-year-old Heber

could not but have been deeply impressed by that incident in the life of Enos, where, following the example of the great Nephi, he sought the Lord in the forest and, like Nephi, received complete and satisfying knowledge of the coming of the Christ and the forgiveness of sin. In this extraordinary narrative is the very essence of the Book of Mormon, which may be condensed for us in this simple manner:

First, the necessity of our obtaining first hand knowledge of the spiritual entities; second, the necessity of our ordering our lives in accordance with that knowledge, whatever this may require; and, third, the necessity of our devoting our lives to the service of others, instead of to ourselves merely.

This is the heart and core of the religion of Jesus in any age and country, and it has never been put so compactly, so beautifully, so graphically, as in this incident.

Over and over again President Grant has said that, as a boy, he received, in answer to his prayerful reading of the Book of Mormon, a "testimony" that it is what it purports to be, a history and not a piece of fiction. It was this, no doubt, that led him to accept many of its statements and narratives, even though there was no explanation of them that proved satisfactory then.

"When I was a young man," says President Grant, "another young man who had received a doctor's degree ridiculed me for believing in the Book of Mormon. He said he could point out two lies in that book. One was that the people had

built their homes out of cement, in which they were very skillful. He said there had never been and never would be found a house built of cement by the ancient inhabitants of this country, because the people in that early age knew nothing of cement. He said that would be enough to make one disbelieve the Book.

"I said, 'That does not affect my faith one particle. I read the Book of Mormon prayerfully and supplicated God for a testimony in my heart and soul of the divinity of it, and I have accepted it and believe it with all my heart. If my children do not find cement houses, I expect my grandchildren will.'

"Now, since that time, houses of cement and massive structures of the same material have been uncovered. Not far from the City of Mexico there is a monument two hundred and ten feet high, built of cement. That was supposed to be a big hill. You could put forty tabernacles like this [the Salt Lake tabernacle] inside of it. From the top of that monument one can see small mounds, and as these mounds are being uncovered, they are found to be wonderfully built cement houses, with drainpipes of cement, showing skill and ability superior almost to anything we have today, so far as the use of cement is concerned."

Another statement that this doctor made was this: The voice of a man can only carry a few hundred feet, and yet the Book of Mormon teaches us that Jesus Christ spoke to the people, and His voice was

heard all over the land. 'That is a lie,' he said, and 'you know it.'

"'That is no lie,' I said. 'Jesus Christ, under God, was the Creator of this earth, and if He had the power to create the earth, I believe He could arrange for His voice to carry over all the earth at one and the same time.'

"The radio is doing what? I read the other day that a song had been heard nine thousand miles away—not only every word of it, but every note. The radio has proved what I said."

Heber J. Grant's faith had been justified.

"Faith is a gift of God, and I thank God for the faith in and the knowledge of the divinity of the Book of Mormon, which I had in my youthful days, and that these two alleged scientific facts, now known to be fallacies, did not destroy my faith."

President Grant has always maintained that the Book of Mormon is one of the greatest missionary tracts—a belief that is illustrated and shown in the various articles of this series. He says:

"I rejoice in the wonderful spirit of the Book of Mormon. I believe that it is one of the greatest missionaries. No man can open that book and read it with a prayerful heart, and ask God in the name of Jesus Christ for a testimony regarding its divinity, but what the Lord will manifest unto him by His Spirit the truth of the book itself. And God has performed it; He has done it in thousands of cases."