



Type: Magazine Article

Portions of the Book Opposed to Scientific Deductions at the Time of its Coming Forth

Editor(s): Susa Young Gates

Source: *Relief Society Magazine*, Vol. 7, No. 10 (October 1920), pp. 603-607

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

Abstract: No abstract available.

I will take away and none shall rescue him." Hosea 5:14 Here the thought is that Ephraim is to be torn to pieces, scattered. The big thought that comes out of all these prophecies concerning Ephraim is that he had lost his identity as a nation, mixed among the people, and, hence, unable these many centuries to trace his lineage. But in the last days Ephraim is to come out from the people, establish his identity, and assume his responsibilities, as Jeremiah sets forth, "They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble. For, I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first born." Jer. 31:9. In the last days, Ephraim is to be first in the work. He never has been before. He has been patiently awaiting his opportunity to assume the functions of the first born in that day where he is brought to light through the instrumentality of a prophet standing up with the Urim and Thummim as was the case in the time of Nehemiah.

LESSON III.

"BOOK OF MORMON."

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TESTIMONY.

(Third Week in November.)

Subject: Portions of the book opposed to scientific deductions at the time of its coming forth.

Text: Robertson's History of America, vol. II, pages 28-30; edition, 1790; vol. II, edition, 1776; Ibid, Note 58, to page 298; vol. II, edition, 1790; Ibid, vo. II, pages 31, 35 and 36, edition of 1817, and vol. II, pages 31 and 32, edition, 1796; The American Universal Geography, page 75, edition, 1793.

Aim: Living up to the light we possess often leads to wrong conclusions unless we take God into the reckoning.

When the "Book of Mormon" was first published, in 1829-30, little was known as to this continent's past in any particular. The Indians were here, and in different states of development, from crudest savagery to semi-civilization; but as to who they were, or how they came, science and history were alike, non-committal and unenlightening. What is the origin of America's red man? a curious world had asked. Until the "Book of Mormon" came forth with its definite and positive statements, announcing without equivocation, the

relation of the Indian to the past: that from a high plane of civilization he had retrograded to a state of savagery. None could be found who would venture more than an opinion as to the past of the red man and his country.

It is true that early writers had expressed opinions and set up sundry claims concerning the subject, probably the earliest dating back as far as 1607, when Gregoria Garcia, a missionary in South America, published a work in Spanish favoring a Tartar and Chinese origin. Others followed, but space will not permit of even mentioning their publications and the dates of issuance. It is not our purpose, however, to dispose of these earlier publications summarily. Dr. William Robertson, D.D., principal of the University of Edinburgh, and a member of the Royal Academy of Madrid, as far back as the year 1790, published a work entitled, "The History of America." In this work the learned doctor has canvassed and analyzed the most plausible opinions and conjectures of those from Garcia, 1607, to his own time. Answering his own question set out in his history, "How was America peopled?" he says: "There is hardly any nation from the north to the south pole, to which some antiquary, in the extravagance of conjecture, has not ascribed the honor of peopling America. The Jews, the Canaanites, the Phoenicians, the Carthagenians, the Greeks, the Scythians in ancient times, are supposed to have settled in this western world. The Chinese, the Swedes, the Norwegian, the Welsh, and the Spaniard, are said to have sent colonies thither in later ages, at different periods, and on various occasions. * * * * . We may lay it down as a certain principle in this inquiry, that America was not peopled by any nation of the ancient continent, which had made considerable progress in civilization. The inhabitants of the new world were in a state of society so extremely rude, as to be unacquainted with those arts which are the first essays of human ingenuity in its advance towards improvement. Even the most cultivated nations in America were strangers to many of those simple inventions which were almost coeval with society in other parts of the world, and were known in the earliest periods of civil life with which we have any acquaintance. From this it is manifest, that the tribes which originally emigrated to America, came off from nations which must have been no less barbarious than their posterity, at the time when they were first discovered by the Europeans. For, although the elegant and refined arts may decline or perish, amid the violent shocks of those revolutions and disasters to which nations are exposed, the necessary arts of life, when once they have been introduced among any people, are never

lost. None of the vicissitudes in human affairs affect these, and they continue to be practiced as long as the race of men exists. If ever the use of iron had been known to the savages of America, or to their progenitors; if ever they had employed a plow, a loom, a forge, the utility of those inventions would have preserved them, and it is impossible that they should have been abandoned or forgotten.

"We may conclude, then, that the Americans sprung from some people, who were themselves in such an early and unimproved stage of society, as to be unacquainted with all those necessary arts, which continued to be unknown among their posterity, when first visited by the Spaniards."

(Robertson's History of America, vol. II, pages 28-30, and the same information is found in a later edition of 1796.)

Further, the same author says: "The houses of the people were mere huts of turf or mud, or the branches of trees, like those of the rudest Indian. There is not in all the extent of that vast empire a single monument, or vestige of any building more ancient than the conquest."

(Ibid, Note 58 to page 298.)

Again: "In all America, however, there is not one animal, tame or wild, which properly belongs to the warm or even the more temperate countries of the ancient continent. The camel, the dromedary, the horse, the cow, were as much unknown in America, as the elephant or the lion. From which it is obvious, that the people who first settled in the western world, did not issue from the countries where those animals abound, and where men, from having been long accustomed to their aid, would naturally consider it, not only as beneficial, but as indispensably necessary to the improvement, and even the preservation of civil society." (Ibid, pages 31, 35, 36, edition of 1817, and included again in an earlier edition, on pages 31 and 32 of 1796.)

Here, then, we have the verdict of science with reference to the question under discussion, just preceding the publication of the "Book of Mormon." At that date it was probably the foremost scientific conclusion, and accepted as such almost universally. Certain it is that it was accepted and taught in the schools of this country as is evident from the following, taken from "The American Universal Geography, or a View of all the Empires, Kingdoms, States, and Republics in the Known World, and of the United States of America in Particular," printed at Boston, Massachusetts, 1793, by Jedediah Morse, A.M., page 75, and answering the question, "But who were they?" (meaning the Indians). This work disposes of the question in the following simple manner: "To

recite all the opinions given in answer to this question, and the reasons to support them, would fill a volume. Doctor Robertson, and the Abbe Clavijero have extensively and learnedly investigated the subject. I can not expect to afford the reader more satisfaction than to give him the results of their inquiries. Doctor Robertson having recapitulated and canvassed the most plausible opinions on the subject comes to the following conclusion." (And the author proceeds to give these conclusions as hereinbefore expressed.)

Science, according to Herbert Spencer, is simply a higher development of common knowledge. It will be the purpose of our next lesson to show how far afield Doctor Robertson wandered in expressing scientifically his deductions concerning the American Indian in relation to his progenitors, to prehistoric America, and the civilizations with their arts and sciences which flourished at different periods on this continent. In a word, it will be shown how utterly unscientific and untenable are his positions when thrown against the truth as revealed in the pages of the divine record.

The foregoing, then, was the teaching of Joseph Smith's boyhood days. Such was the attitude of the public mind toward prehistoric America. Out of this teaching and attitude would naturally come the inspiration for the writing of an entirely different book than the "Book of Mormon" proved to be. This would be true whether Joseph Smith, in and of himself, or any other man, or set of men, had attempted to write a book dealing with prehistoric America. All would have been influenced more or less by the teachings of their day. It is not at all probable, or possible, that any dreamer or speculative genius, could, by conjecture, have so imagined or written anything that might have formed a basis for the production of the "Book of Mormon." But what are the facts in the case? We shall find them to be contradictory and diametrically opposed, as set forth in the book, to all the positions established by scientific research up to the time of, and for years after, the coming forth of the book. We shall find, among other things, that the book clearly sets forth:

First, three civilizations have existed, flourished and decayed, upon parts of the continent, and one on nearly every part.

Second, that the civilization, in so far as the occupancy of the country is concerned, in each instance was from the south to the north.

Third, that the order of the last civilization, unlike any other known country, was reversed. That it did not proceed

in the natural order from the lower to the higher, from the savage to the civilized; but on the contrary, the order was, strange and significant to say the least, from the higher to the lower, from the civilized to the savage.

Fourth, that each of these civilizations possessed the arts and sciences to a remarkable degree.

Fifth, that there was early brought to this continent by the first people the common and domestic animals.

Sixth, that these people, as well as those who came at a later date, builded many large and wonderful cities.

Seventh, that the last great civilization was of Israelitish extraction.

(Note:—The members of the society will do well to search the book with a view of ascertaining its positions as pointed out by the seven foregoing statements.)

LESSON III.

LITERATURE.

(October Lesson.)

(Optional)

(Some of Tennyson's Minor Poems.)

Some of Tennyson's poems might almost be styled wisdom literature; at all events they deal with the deep problems of life and death.

"Tithonus," a poem with a Greek name, presents one of life's problems. We have, in this ancient gentleman, one who is destined to live the mortal life, forever, because, forsooth, favored of the gods, he had asked for immortality.

Then he sees all things about him die in season and refresh themselves again, while he alone wanders a "white-haired shadow roaming like a dream."

He watches the spring come forth in all its loveliness and freshness, and in the agony of his soul cries out, "The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,

The vapors weep their burden to the ground,
Man comes and tills the earth and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.
Me only cruel immortality consumes;
I wither slowly in thine arms,
Here at the quiet limit of the world."