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Internal Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon

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H. L. MULLINER.

The Winner of the IMPROVEMENT ERA Scholarship Prize.

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INTERNAL EVIDENCES OF THE TRUTH OF THE BOOK OF MORMON.

BY H. L. MULLINER.

[A year ago the General Board, Y. M. M. I. A., offered one year's scholarship in any one of the three Church schools located in Salt Lake City, Provo and Logan, to the young man between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two, and a member of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Associations, who should write the best essay on the "Internal Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon." In response to this offer there were fifteen essays received; and it is the unanimous opinion of the committee appointed by the General Board to judge of the merits of these essays, that the following essay by H. L. Mulliner of Iona, Idaho, is the best among them, and that he has fairly won in the contest. We return thanks to the young men who responded, and only regret that we cannot send them all to school.

H. L. Mulliner, whose portrait is presented in this month's ERA, was born in Lehi, Utah, and is the son of Joseph and Emily Woodard Mulliner. At the age of two years his parents moved to Idaho, and settled upon a farm, where the young man resided until he was eighteen. The family consists of six children, one boy older, and four girls younger than himself. His father was bishop of the Iona ward for several years after its organization, and later acted as counselor to the President of the Bingham Stake. He was a representative from Bingham County in 1896, to the State Legislature, and was elected to the Senate, in 1898. Through sickness he was incapacitated for work or business of any kind in the spring of 1900, at which time his son, H. L. Mulliner, was attending the Ricks' Academy, Rexburg. He had only been there some three or four months when, owing to the

sickness of his father he was immediately compelled to discontinue school. In September, 1901, he attended the Latter-day Saints University, Salt Lake City, where he took a business course during that year; the following year he was enabled to attend, through the kindness of Elder C. W. Penrose, who permitted him to do odd labors for his board, and through President J. H. Paul, who provided him a position in the bookkeeping department which netted him enough to pay his tuition and incidental expenses. Leaving school, he was employed by E. H. Dyer & Co., who were erecting the sugar factory at Iona, and later obtained a position with a mercantile company, at Idaho Falls, which position he resigned, in March, 1904, to fill a mission to the Northern States. Returning from his mission on the 3rd of April, 1906, he again obtained employment with the same firm, as bookkeeper. During his absence on a mission, he labored twelve months in Indiana, eight months as traveling elder, and four months as president of the conference. A most important work which he did while there was prevailing upon the people of Robinson, Green Co., to unite with the elders in building a church. They made him the chairman of the committee, composed of citizens, to attend to the construction of the building which, with the lot on which it stands, was afterward deeded to the Latter-day Saints. He then labored in Chicago for thirteen months, the greater part of the time as secretary of the mission, and had charge of the proof-reading of an edition of ten thousand copies of the Book of Mormon, which was published while he was laboring there. The ERA congratulates him upon winning in the contest, and wishes him success in his studies. He has chosen to attend the L. D. S. University.—EDITORS.]

Evidence has been produced practically establishing the fact that the Book of Mormon is not such a book as an impostor could have made if he would. It is the purpose of this paper to show that it is not such a book as an impostor would have made if he could.

The Book of Mormon avows itself a revelation in the strictest and highest sense. It does not claim to have been written in this day, as its author was moved upon by the Holy Spirit, but testifies to having been so written anciently upon the plates of metal, in which tangible form it was given to a modern translator by an angel, acting under the immediate direction of the Lord. The concluding chapter promises also that to the honest and faithful, God will make manifest the truth of it "by the power of the Holy Ghost." No other book making such highly miraculous pretensions and promises has ever been given to man. If these professions were false, the "author" knew it, and was therefore a conscious impostor. What purpose could an impostor have had in making such a book?

No time in history has been less favorable to new revelation than the first half of the last century. The eighteenth century, prolific in religious imposture, and literary forgeries, had taught the world bitter lessons. Early in the nineteenth the impositions of Joanna Southcott, Richard Brothers, Hans Rosenfeld, and William Huntington, all of whom laid claim to direct revelation, were exploded, leaving the people in no mood to tolerate another avowed revelator, however modest his claims. The members of the Catholic church, then, as always, accepted nothing extrinsic. The protestant world, hopelessly divided on the principles of the Bible, believed in its exclusiveness with remarkable unity and fervor. As a result of these combined influences, the people were ready to take for granted, without investigation, that every reputed new revelation was an imposition.

The reception accorded the Book of Mormon, then, was what might have been expected.* The opposition was proportionate to its pretensions. It encountered unprecedented bitterness, and at no time has had the slightest favor with the multitude. Even in more recent years, with increasing investigation and slightly more tolerance, in the American localities where the book sells most readily, it is shown by actual report that the missionaries dispose of fewer than four books each during a whole year, selling them at exact cost. By ascribing to God what he might have retained to advantage, the author, if false, perpetrated an impious forgery, clipped his own wings, and, commercially speaking, committed a signal blunder. Had he claimed that a hidden manuscript-history of ancient America had been discovered by any other than supernatural means, a moderate circulation of the published work might have followed, but to give to it a divine origin was fatal to its popularity. It was useless that proof of its divinity accompanied its claims. First of all, its coming was said to be unscriptural; and, if both reasonable and scriptural, entirely unnecessary. The book was an unwelcome superfluity, involving, as the world thought, neither obligation nor profit to anyone.

* It is difficult to think of any one thing that Joseph could have done, that would meet with more opposition from all the Christian world, without exception, than the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon.—William Halls, in the ERA for August, 1905.

That a conscious deceiver would antagonize this formidable array of prejudices with a previous knowledge of their existence seems incredible; that he would have opposed them advisedly without motive, unthinkable. If, then, we accept for consideration the hypothesis that our "author" was a forger, we have but two possible explanations for this seeming irrationality. Either he did not foresee, or seeing, was willing to forego immediate popularity for some advantage that the stamp of divine authorship upon the book would give him over a few who might accept it as being divine.

That the "author" knew beforehand of the exact unfavorable conditions related above is shown by the following quotations from the Book of Mormon itself:

For it shall come to pass at that day, that the churches which are built up * * * shall contend one with another, and their priests shall contend one with another, and they shall teach with their learning, * * * and they say unto the people, Harken unto us, and hear ye our precept; the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work. * * * If they shall say, there is a miracle wrought by the hand of the Lord, believe it not; for this day he is not a God of miracles; he hath done his work.*

And your churches, yea even every one have become polluted. And because of pride, etc., they [the members of the church] have all gone astray, save it be a few who are the humble followers of Christ: They [the Nephites] shall write the things that shall be done among them, and they who have dwindled in unbelief [all save it be a few] shall not have them, for they shall seek to destroy the things of God.

And it shall come in a day when it shall be said that miracles are done away, and it shall come even as one who shall speak from the dead. And it shall come in a day when the blood of the Saints shall cry unto the Lord; * * * Yea, it shall come in a day when the power of God shall be denied. For behold, at that day shall he [Satan] rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good.†

The popular belief that the canon of scripture was full, and that more revelation was superfluous, was among the greatest difficulties the Book of Mormon encountered. With this the "author" has shown his familiarity by a number of incidental statements. Here are a few:

* Page 117: 3-6.

† Page 566: 36; 118: 14; 112: 17; 565: 26; 565: 27; 118; 20.

And again I speak unto you, who deny the revelations of God, and say they are done away, that there are no more revelations.

Wo be unto him that shall say, We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough.

And because my word shall hiss forth, many of the Gentiles shall say, A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible.

Wo unto them that turn aside the just for a thing of naught and revile against that which is good.*

Nothing could be clearer than that the "author" of these statements, who was able to give the exact language used in denouncing his book, had a remarkable prevision of the universal unfriendliness to a new revelation. The contention is that he writes so clearly of it, that he writes *not* prophecy but of what he did *know*—experience. All that is contended for here is that this rare insight will be accepted as evidence at least that the "author" did not seek popularity; but rather that he antagonizes the passion and prejudices of his age with a perfect knowledge of their existence and the relentless opposition to which they would subject him.

Whatever might be said of the Book of Mormon, no one can read it and feel that it is the product of religious fanaticism. The author of it, if he were a deceiver, was in conscious rebellion against God, and his insight and the consistency of his work proclaim him surpassingly sane. Nor was he blinded by enthusiasm. The whole of his plan was foreshadowed in the book, completed, according to its own prediction, and its genuineness attested by eleven witnesses before the work contemplated was even printed. No age perhaps has been free from mistaken enthusiasts who have assumed distinction as fulfilling some prophecy or tradition, but who are generally exonerated from the charge of seeking primarily for personal advantage. Impostors also, more or less conscious of deception, have been carried along by enthusiasm, pride or obstinacy to sacrifice and even suffer rather than retract. But we can defy history to show where an intentional deceiver of sound mind, and impiety enough to forge the name and authority of God, ever deliberately planned a laborious scheme that was opposed to every human policy and totally unproductive of any possible ad-

* Page 567: 7; 119: 29; 120: 3; 118: 16.

vantage to its perpetrator. If, then, it is shown that the "author" of the Book of Mormon aimed at no personal benefit; that instead, the authority for which he consciously forfeited popularity was used to denounce every existing advantage in the field he proposed to enter, our thesis—it is not such a book as an impostor would have made if he could—will have been sustained.

In parable and by direct statement the Book of Mormon condemns all the systems of religion existing at the time of its coming forth. Thus the originator of it imposed upon himself the obligation of introducing a new system, differing from them all and agreeing with the Bible, since he testified to the authority of the latter. This obligation he did not hesitate to assume, as is shown by the following passages:

And it shall come to pass that the Lord God shall commence his work, among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, to bring about the restoration of his people upon the earth.

But if they will repent, and hearken unto my words, I will establish my church among them.

And it came to pass that I beheld the church of the Lamb of God, and its numbers were few.*

Since it is clear from these quotations that a church organization was contemplated, it is necessary only to discover the kind of government advocated, and the advantages vouchsafed to leaders and rulers therein.

It is needless to say that absolute forms of government have always had exclusive favor with religious impostors of all degrees of sincerity. Reformers whose piety is above suspicion have assumed an absolute dictatorship. The "author" of the Book of Mormon could have reserved this right to absolutism without the slightest suspicion of remonstrance. Instead of doing so, he advocated government by the voice of the people, and denounced monarchy and autocratic power. In doing this, authorities of the greatest wisdom and favor with God are enlisted.

Of Jared's brother, the Book of Mormon says:

And because of the knowledge of this man, he could not be kept from beholding within the vail; therefore he saw Jesus and did minister unto him.†

* Page 122: 8; 529: 22; 31: 12.

† Page 577: 19.

The attitude of this great seer is given impressively in the following passage:

And it came to pass that the people desired of them that they should anoint one of their sons to be a king over them. And now behold, this was grievous unto them. But the brother of Jared said unto them, surely this thing leadeth into captivity.*

While the government of the Nephites was yet ecclesiastical, Nephi, their first leader, who was "highly favored of the Lord" and "loved exceedingly" by the people, gave his opinion in this paragraph:

And it came to pass that they would that I should be their king. But I, Nephi, was desirous that they should have no king; nevertheless, I did for them according to that which was in my power.†

Mosiah, whom the people esteemed "more than any other man; for they did not look upon him as a tyrant, who was seeking gain," said:

Now I say unto you that because all men are not just, it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you.‡

Alma, who established the Christian church in the land of Lehi-Nephi, thus advocated free government:

Behold, it is not expedient that ye should have a king; for thus saith the Lord: Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another, or one man shall not think himself above another; therefore I say unto you, It is not expedient that ye should have a king.§

Moroni, the first, was a great prophet and military commander "whose heart did glory in doing good * * * yea, in resisting iniquity." Of him the Book of Mormon says:

Yea, verily, I say unto you, if all men had been and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever.||

In this day there were a faction who were called kingmen.

* Page 583: 22.

† Page 71: 18.

‡ Page 230: 16.

§ Page 213: 7.

|| Page 378: 17.

For they were desirous that the law should be altered in a manner to overthrow the free government, and to establish a king over the land.

And it came to pass that Moroni commanded that his army should go against these king-men, to pull down their pride, and their nobility, and to level them with the earth, or they should take up arms and support the cause of liberty.*

This same Moroni ends an epistle to Pahoran, the Chief Judge, thus:

Behold, I am Moroni, your chief captain. I seek not for power, but to pull it down.†

It has been shown that the organization contemplated was that of a church. The following passages are added, in closing this part of the argument, to show that the Book of Mormon teaches impressively that equality and freedom are inviolable principles of true church government.

And those who were desirous that Pahoran should remain Chief Judge over the land, took upon them the name of freemen; and thus was the division among them: for the freemen had covenanted to maintain their rights, and the privileges of their religion, by a free government.

Now this Amlici had, by his cunning, drawn away much people after him; * * * and they began to endeavor to establish Amlici to be a king over the people. Now this was alarming to the people of the church, * * * for they knew, that according to their law such things must be established by the voice of the people.

Nevertheless, the Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power: * * * but they were fighting for their rites of worship and their church.‡

It is conceded that these principles of government, although strongly enforced, would be destructive only to the ambitions of an impostor who sought for power or complete control. There remains the possibility that a government less absolute in form was contemplated, or that advantages similar to those enjoyed by religious leaders today, in more loosely organized systems, were reserved. Before arriving at any conclusions it will be important, therefore, to investigate the privileges and duties of ecclesiastical officers in general, as defined by the Book of Mormon, and especial-

* Page 378: 17; 387: 5; 388: 17.

† Page 419: 36;

‡ Page 387: 6; 237: 2, 3; 363: 45.

ly the commandments given to those who would be engaged in this particular organization. Careful attention is asked to the decisive declarations that follow. It is considered that they dispose of every human advantage in religion, and show clearly the attitude of the Book of Mormon on the questions discussed. This passage is pertinent:

He [the Lord] commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain, and praise of the world; but they seek not the welfare of Zion. Behold the Lord hath forbidden this thing.*

Alma, who was the first chief Judge and a great high priest in the true Church, would be unquestioned authority among Book of Mormon believers. The following quotation will show his attitude on this subject:

And it came to pass that in the first year of the reign of Alma in the judgment seat, there was a man brought before him to be judged * * * And he had gone among the people, preaching to them that which he termed to be the word of God, * * * declaring unto them that every high priest and teacher ought to become popular: and they ought not to labor with their hands, but that they ought to be supported by the people; * * * But Alma said unto him, Behold, this is the first time that priestcraft has been introduced among this people, * * * and were priestcraft to be enforced among this people, it would prove their destruction. †

Speaking of an ideal condition among the people, who "were steadfast and immovable in keeping the commandments of God," the Book of Mormon says:

And when the priests left their labor, to impart the word of God unto the people, the people also left their labors to hear the word of God. And when the priests had imparted unto them the word of God, they all returned again diligently unto their labors; and the priest, not esteeming himself above his hearers; for the preacher was no better than the hearer, neither was the teacher any better than the learner; and thus they were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength. ‡

The instructions given by the first Alma, in founding the

* Page 113: 29.

† Page 233: 2, 3, 12.

‡ Page 235: 26.

Church anciently, would likely be considered especially binding upon anyone attempting another organization of it afterward. Here is a part of the account of the founding of it by Alma:

And they were called the Church of God, or the Church of Christ * *
 * And it came to pass that whosoever was baptized by the power and authority of God was added to his Church. And it came to pass that Alma, having authority from God, ordained priests; * * * And he also commanded them that the priests whom he ordained should labor with their own hands for their support; * * * And the priests were not to depend on the people for their support; but for their labor were to receive the grace of God.*

The rulers and leaders who were held out as worthy of office and the confidence of the people are those who, while in the unremunerated service of the people, supported themselves with their own hands. Mosiah and Benjamin, who were highly respected for their wisdom and greatness, are among this class. Alma, who for many years was president of the Church, and the most zealous religious worker of them all, said:

I have labored * * * with mine own hands for my support;
 * * * notwithstanding my many travels round about the land to declare the word of God unto my people, and notwithstanding the many labors which I have performed in the Church, I have never received so much as even one senine for my labor.†

Likewise, the three sons of Mosiah, who were "all men of God," preached the gospel while "suffering every privation, and depending upon the mercies of God." In short, all the true "prophets," and the priests, and the teachers, did labor diligently. Only those of the wicked king Noah and the Zoramites, and such others as were emphatically condemned by the Book of Mormon, enjoyed ease or luxury.

Speaking specifically of the coming of the plates, and the religious movement foreshadowed in them, the Book of Mormon further says:

For He, (the Lord) truly saith, that no one shall have them to get gain.‡

* Page 202: 17, 18, 24, 26.

† Page 323: 32, 33.

‡ Page 564: 14.

To this we add a portion of a commandment of God through Nephi:

But the laborer in Zion, shall labor for Zion; for if they labor for money, they shall perish.*

That the mass of impressive admonitions, prophecies, and examples of this nature, with which the Book of Mormon abounds, would have totally thwarted the purposes of a selfish impostor seems apparent. It is difficult to see what advantage an impostor could find among a body of worshipers who would accept this book as revelation from God, given for their instruction. It should be remembered also that priestcraft, as defined by the Book of Mormon, was a popular institution at this time. The clergy who shaped and guarded religious opinions, standing between the people and every innovation, practiced it well nigh universally. From the standpoint of popularity alone, there would have been a greater advantage in advocating than in condemning it.

Recall now the Book of Mormon's promise of divine confirmation, the uninviting prospects of persecution and death held out to believers, its offensive denunciation of all contemporary religions, and its uncompromising zeal in advocating a return to the unremunerative regulations of the true Christian Church. To this add the inevitable conclusion of this paper that the Book of Mormon was not only unproductive of any conceivable selfish advantage, but that, at the expense of certain denunciation, its author condemned every existing human policy in religion, shutting up the way to ease, wealth, distinction, power, and popularity against himself. To think that this was the work of an impostor is to wantonly misunderstand human nature.

*Page 113: 31.