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Chapter LXV

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Abstract: Personal Appearance of the Nephites—Their Beauty—Testimony of Remains Found—The Dark-Skinned Lamanites

CHAPTER LXV.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE OF THE NEPHITES—THEIR BEAUTY
—TESTIMONY OF REMAINS FOUND—THE DARK-SKINNED
LAMANITES.

EVER AND anon throughout the Book of Mormon, we are reminded by the inspired historians of the beauty of the Nephite race, especially in the days when the glory of righteousness beamed in their eyes, and shone in their countenances; then they were fair, very fair—a white and a delightsome people.

And well might it be so, for were they not descended from that kindred couple, Abraham and his half-sister, whose great beauty has been proverbial in every generation, since they graced the earth with their comeliness? So lovely was Sarah, the fairest of womankind of her generation, that when she was sixty-seven years of age, the royal Pharaoh, disregarding the charms of the darker daughters of Egypt, desired her for his wife; and his admiration was doubtless in good taste, for the Bible tells us that she was then very fair. And still more remarkable, when yet another twenty-two years had passed away, and she had seen nearly ninety summers and winters come and go on this earth, another monarch, Abimelech, sought to take her to himself. Nor was her husband's manly beauty less striking; obedience to God, the observance of the laws of life, and the cultivation of the generous virtues so ennobled his existence, that strength and manhood tarried with him in its force, long after that age when the sons of modern generations are feebly tottering to their graves.

Of the commanding beauty of Abraham's descend-

ants, we have many recorded instances, but none that exceed that of his great-grandson Joseph, whose surpassing manliness placed him in the greatest jeopardy, but whose uncompromising virtue and unaffected innocence brought him off conqueror over temptation, and raised him to the highest pinnacle of earthly splendor and heavenly favor. It was from this well-favored Joseph that the Nephites sprang.

God has set the mark of his displeasure on the Lamanites, whom he has cursed, because of the iniquities of their fathers, with a darkened skin, uncomely features, and strait, black, coarse hair. In the beginning it was not so with either Judah or Manasseh.

In confirmation of the testimony of the Book of Mormon, that the inhabitants of this continent were once a white and beautiful people, it may be stated that when very ancient burial places in North and South America have been opened, the remains of two races—one dark and the other fair—have been exhumed. The question may arise: How could this be told, when the skin had long rotted off the bones, and left only the skeleton behind, which fell in powder as soon as it was exposed to the action of the air? In this way: The dry, gravelly soil in which some of these bodies were buried, had so little affected the mummy, that portions of the hair still remained in good preservation, and in numerous instances it was such as is only found on the heads of light races. We will cite a few examples given by different inquirers in this field of research.

One writer, speaking of the ancient mummies found in Peru, says: The hair in general is of a lightish brown, and of a fineness of texture which equals that of the Anglo-Saxon race. Again: The ancient Peru-

vians appear, from numerous examples of hair found in their tombs, to have been an auburn-haired race. Another gentleman, a Mr. Haywood, has described the discovery, early in the present century, of three mummies, in a cave near the Cumberland River, in Tennessee; and the color of their skin was said to be fine and white, and their hair auburn and of a fine texture. The same investigator mentions several other cases where mummies were found in the limestone and saltpetre caves of Kentucky and Tennessee, with light yellowish hair. One scientist, to account for this peculiarity, suggests that it is possible that the light color was due to the action of the lime and saltpetre; but this suggestion will not affect those buried in other formations of rock, nor will it account for the fineness of the texture of the hair. Reasoning from other data, other writers have concluded that the great cities whose ruins still stand in Yucatan and Central America were the work of two races, a light and a dark-skinned race respectively.

The reference to the Anglo-Saxon race, above made, is not without its value. To us it seems highly probable that the righteous Nephites, in very many particulars of form and feature, resembled this people and its kindred races. Our reasons are: first, that there was a striking similarity in the appearance of the ancient Israelites and the olden Anglo-Saxons. This likeness has been remarked and commented upon by various authors. Again, it is well known to the Latter-day Saints that there was a large percentage of the blood of Ephraim in the stock whence the Angles and Saxons sprung. So much admitted, it is easy to understand how the two half tribes, descended from the

comely Joseph—the one from Ephraim, and the other from Manasseh—would bear a strong family likeness.

Were we introduced to a typical Nephite, we should expect to find him well proportioned, ruddy of countenance, auburn haired and light eyed. This, of course, is simply conjecture, and is entitled to consideration only as such.

From reliefs found sculptured on the walls of the ruined cities of Central America, it seems probable that the ancient Lamanites esteemed flat, receding foreheads the highest type of beauty. Most of the figures on which the greatest artistic skill is displayed appear to represent persons on whom some artificial means had been used, in infancy, to flatten the front part of the head, as their debased descendants, the Flatheads, do in our day. It is a noteworthy fact, that other races of Israelitish descent, or who have come in close contact with the Hebrews, show this same tendency.

Skulls thus flattened have been taken out of tombs in the neighborhood of ancient Media, where the Israelites were once in captivity; also from sepulchres in Circassia, Scandinavia, Great Britain, etc., and one was even exhumed from outside the walls of Jerusalem. It is true the Book of Mormon does not refer to this custom, but it often speaks of the Lamanites shaving their heads, which in all probability may have afterwards grown into the still more hideous practice of flattening the skull, under the idea that it made them courageous. Indeed, it is quite possible that it did make them recklessly bloodthirsty, by injuring their intellectual powers, and thus tending to develop their more savage instincts.