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The Art of War among the Nephites (Continued)

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Abstract: Describes different aspects of warfare as found in the Book of Mormon, with emphasis on the battle techniques of Moroni. Notes that detailed accounts of warfare do not appear in the Book of Mormon until the period of the judges.

THE ART OF WAR AMONG THE NEPHITES.

BY G. R.

(Continued.)

IT does not appear, so far as can be gathered from the record, that any very great improvements, either in the system of fortification, the style of defensive armor, or the manufacture of their weapons, was made by the Nephite commanders who lived after the days of Moroni.

There is another kind of defensive clothing, beside plate armor, mentioned as being worn by the ancient American warriors. It consisted of very "thick clothing," * possibly made of cotton or woolen cloth, thickly padded. Moroni uniformed some of his troops in this manner when he first took command of the Nephite armies, (B. C. 74) and the next year the Lamanites followed his example and not only prepared themselves with shields and breast plates, but also "with garments of skins; yea, very thick garments to cover their nakedness." †

The various enemies that the Nephite armies had to meet, from time to time, on the field of battle—Lamanites, Amulonites, Amalekites, Zoramites, Gadianton robbers, etc.—were very differently equipped for their bloody work. Those who had dissented from the Nephites naturally held to the same tactics, used the same arms, and protected their bodies with the same armor as the people to whom they had turned traitors. With the original Lamanites it was different. At first when they came against the Nephites they were clothed with "a short skin girdle about the loins and their heads shaved; and their skill was in the bow and the cimeter and axe." The dissenters, while armed and equipped like the Nephites, set a mark upon themselves by which they might be known and distinguished on the battle field. In doing this they unconsciously fulfilled the word of the Lord to their fathers. Thus, the followers of Amlici, the would-be king, marked themselves with red in their foreheads after the manner of the Lamanites, though they did not shave their heads as did the direct descendants of Laman. (B. C. 87). ‡

The description of the Gadianton robbers, as they appeared when prepared for war (A. D. 18), is a very terrible one: § "they were girded about after the manner of robbers; and they had a lamb-skin about their loins, and they were dyed in blood, and their heads were shorn, and they had head-plates upon them: and great and terrible was the appearance of the armies of Giddianhi, because of their armor, and because of their being dyed in blood."

The forces of both races appear to have been composed very largely, if not entirely, of infantry. We have failed to notice any passages that give a definite assurance that either cavalry or war chariots were used in their campaigns.

Like nearly all rude or semi-civilized races, the Lamanites depended on the strength of numbers and brute force for victory in the open field. They massed their troops in solid bodies and with wild cries rushed to the assault in the hope of bearing down all resistance by their superior numbers, as in almost every war they greatly outnumbered the Nephites. Indeed it is doubtful if even the last-named people used much scientific strategy previous to the days of Moroni; before this time it was a hand-to-hand conflict, wherein the Nephites,

though fewer in numbers, had many advantages over their half-naked foes, by reason of superior weapons and defensive armor, and, above all, through the blessing and guidance of the Lord.

In the year B. C. 72 the armies of Moroni drove the Lamanites out of that portion of the east wilderness bordering on the land of Zarahemla into their own lands. The country of the Nephites was called the land of Zarahemla, that of the Lamanites the land of Nephi. They were divided by the great wilderness; to the north lay Zarahemla, to the south Nephi. The northern line or boundary of the latter country ran "in a strait course from the sea east to the west." The Lamanites having been driven out of those portions of the wilderness north of the dividing line, colonies of Nephites were sent to occupy the country and build cities on their southern border, even to the Atlantic coast. To protect the new settlers, Moroni placed troops all along this line and caused them to erect fortifications * for the better defense of the frontier. This fortified line ran from the west sea (the Pacific Ocean) by the head of the river Sidon (the Magdalena) eastward along the Northern edge of the wilderness. Some of the readers of the Book of Mormon have imagined this line of defense to have been one continuous rampart or wall—after the style of the great wall of China—reaching from ocean to ocean, and on this surmise have argued that the completion of such an immense work, in a few years was an impossibility to a people of the limited numerical strength of the Nephites. To get over this difficulty of their own creation they have resorted to various theories, inconsistent with the geographical details, with regard to its locality, on purpose to shorten its distance to what they deemed a reasonable length, possible for the Nephites to have built in a few years. The writer of this paper holds the opinion that the Book of Mormon conveys no such idea, it simply states that Moroni erected fortifications along this line; or, as he views it, Moroni took advantage of the natural features of the country, its wide rivers, far-stretching swamps and ranges of high mountains, and built fortifications at every point where the Lamanites could find ingress, such as at the fords of the rivers and the passes between the mountains. He there stationed bodies of troops sufficiently strong to hold their posts and, if necessary, defend the surrounding country. This system of defense would be more powerful and effective than an artificial wall; high mountains and deep rivers largely taking the place of earthworks, masonry and heavy timbers. A number of years later (B. C. 34) the Lamanites having temporarily driven the Nephites from the southern continent, Moronihah, the son of Moroni, fortified the Isthmus of Panama from sea to sea, † and in this way prevented the Lamanites from pushing yet further north. This defensive line was again fortified by Mormon (A. D. 360) in the last great series of wars between the two races. ‡

THE surest way of governing, both in a private family and a kingdom, is for a husband and a prince sometimes to drop their prerogative.

WHAT is the first business of one who studies philosophy? To part with self-conceit. For it is impossible for any one to begin to learn what he thinks he already knows.

*—Book of Mormon, new edition, page 561.
 † " " " " " 280.
 ‡ " " " " " 210.
 § " " " " " 181.

†—Book of Mormon, new edition, page 383.
 ‡ " " " " " 137.
 § " " " " " 553.