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Government and Religion among the Nephites

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CHAPTER XIII.

GOVERNMENT AND RELIGION AMONG THE NEPHITES.

Nephite Government.

Some twelve or fifteen years after Lehi's colony arrived in the new world, Nephi with that part of the colony which he could influence—the more righteous part, by the way—separated from the elder sons of Lehi and their following, and established a separate community. Such was the esteem in which Nephi was held by his following that his people besought him to be their king. Nephi appears not to have favored the establishment of this kind of government, but yielded to the desire of his people.² Perhaps he had inherited the prejudices of the Hebrew prophets against the kingly form of government,^a and would gladly have seen his people live under an administration of government by judges, as in ancient Israel. This, however, is but an inference drawn from the fact of Nephi's expressed desire that his people would have no king.

Succession to the kingly dignity was made hereditary in Nephi's family,^b and the kings on their accession to the kingly power took the title of Nephi I., Nephi II., Nephi III., Nephi IV., etc.^c What the nature of this kingly government was, what secondary officers existed in it, and what means were employed for the administration of its laws cannot be learned from the Nephite record. For some time the community over which the established government held sway

²II. Nephi v: 17, 18.

^aI. Samuel viii: 1-9 and 19-22.

^bMosiah xxv: 13.

^cBook of Jacob i:9-11.

was but a small one, hence the kingly office had no such dignity as attaches to it in more extensive governments; but was most likely akin to the petty kingdoms which existed in Judea^d at various times and with which Nephi and some few of those who had accompanied him from Jerusalem were acquainted. The Nephites had the scriptures containing the law of Moses, and were taught to some extent in some of the customs of the Jews, but not in all of them.^e And these customs, and the law of Moses administered with no very great amount of machinery, I apprehend, constituted the character of the Nephite government. Under it the Nephites lived for a period of more than four hundred and fifty years.

The transition from a kingly form of government to what may be called a democracy was made at the death of Mosiah II., 509 years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem, or 91 years B. C. The Israelitish genius in matters of government inclines them to the acceptance of what men commonly call a theocracy, which is defined as meaning literally "a state governed in the name of God." The election of this form of government by Israelites as most desirable, grows out of the fact of the Mosaic legislation; for Moses received the law by which Israel was governed direct from Jehovah; its regulations were carried out in Jehovah's name, by the administration of judges, both during the lifetime of Israel's great prophet and also after his demise. Living thus under the divine law, administered in the name of Jehovah by judges divinely appointed, was to be governed of God. And so completely was this form of government recognized as the government of God, that to reject it was held to be rejecting

^dGen. xiv. In many cases these Judean "kings" ruled but a single city.

^eII. Nephi xxv: 2.

God as the ruler of the state, as witness the words of the Lord himself in the closing years of the prophet Samuel's life when Israel clamored for a king. The Lord said unto Samuel: "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them."^f

No one, it appears to me, could have a clearer conception of the evils that grow out of kingly government than the Nephite king, Mosiah II. Nor a clearer conception of the strength and advantages of that form of government. I give a summary of his reasoning upon two sides of this question: "It is better that a man be judged of God than of man; for the judgments of God are always just, but the judgments of men are not always just." This is said in support of the old Israelitish idea of government—a theocracy: "If it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God and judge this people according to his commandments, * * * then it would be expedient that you always have kings to rule over you;" but "because all men are not just, it is not expedient that you should have a king or kings to rule over you. * * * Behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea and what destruction!" Moreover Mosiah understood the strength of those forces behind which an ungodly king could intrench himself. "Behold, * * * ye cannot dethrone an iniquitous king, save it be through much contention, and the shedding of much blood; for behold, he has his friends in iniquity, and keepeth his guards about him, * * * and he enacteth laws, and sendeth them forth among his people; yea, laws after the manner of his own wickedness; and whosoever does not obey his laws, he causeth to be destroyed; and whosoever doth rebel

^fI. Samuel viii: 7.

against him, he will send his armies against them to war, and if he can, he will destroy them: and thus an unrighteous king doth pervert the ways of all righteousness." "Behold I say unto you the sins of many people have been caused by the iniquities of their kings."

These were the considerations which led him to recommend the abandonment of kingly government and establish a reign of judges chosen by the voice of the people. By this arrangement Mosiah held that the people would bear the responsibility of the government. "It is not common," he reasons, "that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the smaller part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe, and make it your law, to do your business by the voice of the people; and if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgment of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction, even as he has hitherto visited this land." All of which is a clear setting forth of the responsibilities of self-governing communities.

It should be pointed out, however, that there were some other events which led to the consideration of the propriety of changing the form of the Nephite government at this time. The sons of Mosiah, who were heirs to the Nephite throne, were miraculously converted to the gospel, and so thoroughly imbued had they become with the importance of the work of the ministry of the Church that they abandoned their rights of succession to the kingly dignity, and departed from the land of Zarahemla to perform missions among the Lamanites. In consequence of the action of these young princes, Mosiah II. was confronted with the problem of succession to the Nephite throne, since those to whom be-

longed the right refused to accept the honor. He feared that if another were appointed instead of one who had constitutional claims to the throne, there might arise contentions over the question of succession: "And who knoweth," said he, "but what my son to whom the kingdom doth belong, shall turn to be angry, and draw part of this people after him, which would cause wars and contentions among you, which would be the cause of shedding much blood?" He therefore recommended the election of a chief judge or president of the theocratic-democracy, who would be possessed of both administrative and judicial powers, in the hope that such action, taken by the people themselves, would obviate all difficulty or question about the legitimacy of the government about to be established.

It is difficult to determine with precision the entire character of the constitution of the Nephite democracy. But from what is written in the Book of Mormon this much may be learned: The chief judge, elected by the people, was the supreme governor of the land, the chief executive.^g His oath of office bound him "to judge righteously, and to keep the peace and the freedom of the people, and grant unto them the sacred privileges to worship the Lord their God; to support and maintain the laws of God all his days, and to bring the wicked to justice, according to their crimes."^h A similar oath was doubtless administered to the inferior judges. To a limited extent also legislative powers were granted to the chief judge,ⁱ but these powers appear to have been limited to framing laws, which were not of force until ratified by the voice of the people. No limit seems to have been set to the term of office of the chief judge, but as the voice of the people placed him in office, the same power could also dismiss

^gMosiah xxix. Alma iv: 16. Alma xxx: 29.

^hAlma 1: 39.

ⁱAlma iv: 16.

him from it; and it may be that the power of impeachment, vested in a certain number of inferior judges—as explained later—extended to deposing even the chief judge. In any event it may be concluded that he held his position only during good behavior.

Just how the inferior judges were graded cannot be ascertained, but that they were graded is evident since Mosiah II., in explaining the character of the constitution of the democracy he proposed to his people, said: “And if ye have judges, and they do not judge you according to the law which has been given, ye can cause that they may be judged of a higher judge; if your higher judges do not judge righteous judgments, ye shall cause that a smaller number of your lower judges should be gathered together, and they shall judge your higher judges, according to the voice of the people.”^j A salutary provision this, for it made all amenable to the law, but the manner in which the judges were graded is unknown, as well as what number of inferior judges were designated to try the superior judges.

These administrators of the law were paid for their services “according to the time which they labored to judge those who were brought before them to be judged, * * * a senine of gold for a day,” or its equivalent in silver—a senum of silver.^k It is, of course, impossible to determine the value of these denominations of Nephite coins, and therefore impossible to determine the value of the *per diem* of the judges. The nearest approach that can be made to an estimate is that a senine of gold or a senum of silver was equal in value to “a measure of barley and also for a measure of any kind of grain.”^l This is again indefinite, as neither the

^jMosiah xxix: 28, 29.

^kAlma xi: 1-4.

^lIbid. xi:7.

bulk nor the weight of "a measure of grain" is known; but it does convey the idea that it was no very great amount; and, indeed, in all that is said upon the subject of compensation for public service in the state, it is manifest that the Nephite government was administered on the strictest lines of economy.^m

The organization of the military forces among the Nephites would be a subject of great interest, since, by reason of the constant aggressions of the Lamanites, they were often forced into war, and would be classed as a defensively warlike state. Of their military organization, however, but little can be definitely known. Two items, however, connected with the commander-in-chief of the armies, are quite clear: First, that he was nominated for his position by the Chief Judge of the land,ⁿ which nomination had to be ratified by the voice of the people; second, that on occasions the people delegated to him absolute power, created him military "dictator" in fact. This has ever been the means by which republics have sought to remedy one of the chief defects of their system, viz., ineffectiveness of administration—a tardiness in executing the law, or meeting an emergency not technically provided for in the constitution or law. In order to obviate this difficulty democracies have not infrequently adopted the plan of creating trusted leaders dictators; clothing them with all the authority of an absolute monarch during periods of special peril to the government. Thus did the Romans a number of times during the existence of their republic, when occasions arose that required prompt executive action, and by an authority that would be unquestioned.

^mThis is true not only with reference to the republic, but also with reference to the monarchy. Mosiah xxix: 40. Mosiah ii: 12-14. Compare Alma xxx: 32, 33.

ⁿAlma xlvi: 34, 35. Also Alma li: 15-21.

And such, I believe, was the power conferred upon the commander-in-chief of the Nephite armies, when occasion arose for it.

Relative to the body of the laws that obtained among the Nephites, whether under the monarchy or the republic, I apprehend that it was made up of the Mosaic legislation,^o with some slight modification, and some especial enactments of their kings. As for instance it was enacted in the law of Mosiah (most likely Mosiah II.) that the judges should receive wages according to the time they devoted to their office.^p So doubtless other special acts obtained, which, with the general laws of the Mosaic legislation formed the Nephite jurisprudence.^q And in the transition from the monarchy to the republic, Mosiah was careful to stipulate for this body of jurisprudence. "Let us appoint judges to judge this people according to our law."^r—i. e., the law which had obtained under the monarchy, the law of God. "We will appoint wise men to be judges, that will judge this people according to the commandments of God."^s So the body of the law that obtained under the reign of the kings went over into the jurisprudence of the republic.

From the Nephite record it appears that murder was punished with death; robbery, theft, and adultery were also punished, but with what penalties is not stated. But the law provided that men should be judged—and therefore punished—according to their crimes.^t One thing stood out unique in the Nephite policy: that was the recognition of the

^oAlma xxx: 3.

^pIbid. xi:1.

^qIbid. xxx: 3 Nephi v:9. II. Nephi v:10. II. Nephi xxv: 24, 25. Jacob iv: 4, 5. Jarom i:5. Mos. ii:3. Mos. xiii: 27, 35: xvi: 14, 15. Alma xxv: 14, 16, et seq.

^rMos. xxix: 11.

^sMos. xxix: 11.

^tAlma xxx: 10, 11.

right of the subject to the enjoyment of religious liberty. The scripture—"choose ye this day whom ye shall serve"^u—seems to have impressed the Nephites with the idea that the right of choice in the matter of worship was left with the individual; and hence "if a man desired to serve God, it was his privilege;" "but if he did not believe in him [God], there was no law to punish him"^v—hence religious liberty.

The history of the Nephite republic was a stormy one, especially during the first quarter century of its existence. It was assailed by traitors from within, who sought to re-establish a monarchy; and by the Lamanites from without, who often joined with the royalists to overthrow the republic. But if traitors assailed, patriots defended; and the republic was preserved, for about one hundred and twenty years, from 91 B. C. to 30 A. D. An attempt then made to displace the republic by a monarchy, ended in anarchy for a time, followed by the establishment of a sort of tribal government, which conditions prevailed at the time the land was visited with that terrible destruction which took place at the crucifixion of Messiah, and well nigh swept out of existence the entire population.

What form of government obtained among the people of the western hemisphere after the appearance of the risen Messiah among them must be left largely to conjecture, since the Nephite records now in our hands are silent upon that subject. Neither monarchy nor republic is referred to; and the most reasonable conclusion is that the people, after the establishment of the Church of Christ among them, found its institutions and authority sufficient as well in secular as in ecclesiastical affairs; for the entire people were converted to the gospel, and were members of the Church.

^uJoshua xxiv: 15.

^vAlma xxx: 7-9.

A righteous people have small need of government. The necessity for government is born of men's vices and wickedness, that lead to the disorders of society, which government must needs be called upon to regulate, and, if possible, suppress. For two centuries the people of the western world were most righteous, prosperous and happy. "There were no envyings," says their chronicler, "nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God."^w

In consequence of these conditions nothing is said of government, and nothing may be learned of its nature beyond what has been suggested in the foregoing. As to what was done in the matter of government when this period of general righteousness drew to its close, and pride and wickedness hastened the disintegration of the Church, and pushed society headlong into disorders, may not be known, as our present Nephite records on this subject are again silent. We only know that secret organizations sapped the foundations of society; that security of person and property vanished; that anarchy and tribal relations usurped the place of orderly government; and that darkness spread over the land, and gross darkness over the minds of the people.

Religion

Religion among the Nephites consisted in the worship of the true and living God, the Jehovah of the Jews, whose revelations to the children of Israel through Moses and all the prophets to Jeremiah were brought with them into the new world. They therefore accepted into their faith all the

^wIV. Nephi x.

Bible truths, and in its historical parts they had before them the valuable lessons which Bible history teaches. It furnished also a foundation for literature among them. For not only by the Bible were their prophets instructed in the law of God, but copies of some parts of it were multiplied and read by the people.* What is more they were possessed of some other books not now in our so-called canon of the Old Testament, such as the books of the Prophets Zenodk, Neum and Zenos; all referred to by the first Nephi, who quotes some of their prophecies concerning the coming of Messiah in the flesh, and of three days of darkness to be given unto some of the inhabitants of the isles of the sea as a sign of the Christ's death.† The Nephites also had the writings of Ezias referred to be one of the Nephite prophets in the Book of Helaman.‡ Elder Orson Pratt, in a foot note on the passage, suggests that Ezias "may have been identical with Esaias, who lived contemporary with Abraham."^a These books contained very precious truths concerning the coming and mission of the Messiah; and when information on this subject was lacking in the books which the Nephites brought with them from Jerusalem, it was abundantly made up to them by the things which the Lord revealed directly to their own prophets; for in the clearest manner possible the Lord made known to this branch of the house of Israel in the western world, the future coming and mission of the Messiah, together with

*Alma xiii:12. Helaman iii: 13-15. Commenting on this passage Elder Orson Pratt says: "These numerous copies of the sacred books were undoubtedly transcribed directly from, or compared with, the records on the original metallic plates."

†I. Nephi xix: 10-17. Reference is made to these same prophets in Alma xxxiii: 15, Alma xxxiv: 7. Helaman viii: 20, III. Nephi x: 16.

‡Helaman viii: 20.

^aElder Pratt quotes Doc. & Cov., Sec., lxxxiv: 11-13 in evidence.

the effectiveness of the atonement which he was appointed to make for mankind. While the Nephites kept the law of Moses previous to the advent' of Messiah, as to its sacrifices and ordinances, yet they understood that these things but shadowed forth the real sacrifice to be made for them by the Savior of the world; and that these ordinances in which they administered were only of virtue by reason of the things which were to be done by Messiah afterwards.

In order to offer sacrifices and administer in the other ordinances of the law of Moses (which the Nephites were commanded to observe),^b it was necessary, of course, that they have a priesthood, and this they had; but not the priesthood after the order of Aaron; for that was a priesthood that could only properly be held by Aaron's family and the tribe of Levi; while Lehi was of the tribe of Manasseh.^c Lehi held the priesthood, however, the higher priesthood, which was after the order of Melchizedek, and was a prophet and minister of righteousness. This Lehi conferred upon his son Nephi; and Nephi, shortly after his separation from his elder brothers on the land of promise, consecrated his two younger brothers, Jacob and Joseph, to be priests and teachers unto his people.^d Jacob, when explaining his calling to his brethren, states that he had been called of God, "and ordained after the manner of his holy order."^e What the significance of the phrase "His holy order" means, is learned very distinctly from other parts of the Book of Mormon. Alma, for instance, before giving up the chief judgeship of the land, is represented as confining himself "wholly to the priesthood of the holy order of God, to the testimony of the

^bAlma xxx: 3.

^cIbid. x: 3.

^dII. Nephi v: 26.

^eII. Nephi vi: 2.

word, according to the Spirit of revelation and prophecy.”^f Again Alma explains, “I am called * * * according to the holy order of God, which is in Christ Jesus, yea, I am commanded to stand and testify unto this people.”^g All of which is made still clearer by what Alma says later. Having given an explanation of the plan of redemption which was laid for man’s salvation, and which he represents as having been understood from earliest times; Alma adds: “I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests after this holy order, *which was after the order of his Son* [meaning Jesus Christ], to teach these things unto the people. * * * This holy priesthood, being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world, or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity. * * * Thus they become the high priests forever after the order of the Son, the only begotten of the Father, who is full of grace, equity and truth.” Alma then admonishes his people to be humble, “even as the people in the days of Melchizedek, who was also a high priest after the same order [of which he had spoken]. * * * And he was the same Melchizedek to whom Abraham paid tithes.” The Nephite priesthood, then, was not a priesthood after Aaron’s order, but of a higher order, even the priesthood after the order of the Son of God; the same kind of priesthood held by Melchizedek, by Moses, by Lehi, and many other prophets in Israel.

That this higher priesthood was competent to act in administering the ordinances under what is known as the law of Moses, is evident from the fact that it so administered before the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood proper was given; and the fact that there was given to the household of Aaron

^fAlma iv: 20.

^gIbid. v: 44.

and the tribe of Levi a special priesthood, by no means detracts from the right and power of the higher or Melchizedek priesthood to officiate in the ordinances of the law of Moses; for certainly the higher order of priesthood may officiate in the functions of the lower, when necessity requires it. All the sacrifices and ordinances under the law of Moses, administered by the Nephite priesthood, I say again, were observed with due appreciation of the fact that they were of virtue only as they shadowed forth the things to be done by Messiah when he should come to earth, in the flesh, on his great mission of atonement. And in order that the reader may see how full Nephite knowledge was of the Messiah and of his life on earth, through the prophecies uttered concerning him—and prophecies, of course, are but history reversed—I present herewith a statement of the items known to them, collected by the patient labors of Elder George Reynolds, to whom I am indebted for the following passage:

One of the most remarkable things connected with the history of the Nephites is the great plainness and detail with which the coming of the Redeemer and the events of his life in Judea were revealed to their prophets, who lived before the time of his advent.

Among other things connected with his mortal existence it was declared of him that:

God himself should come down from heaven among the children of men and should redeem his people.

He should take upon him flesh and blood.

He should be born in the land of Jerusalem, the name given by the Nephites to the land of their forefathers, whence they came.

His mother's name should be Mary.

She should be a virgin of the city of Nazareth; very fair and beautiful, a precious and chosen vessel.

She should be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost.

He should be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

At his birth a new star should appear in the heavens.

He should be baptized by John at Bethabara, beyond Jordan.

John should testify that he had baptized the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world.

After his baptism, the Holy Ghost should descend upon him out of heaven, * * * and abide upon him.

He should call twelve men as his special witnesses, to administer in his name.

He should go forth among the people, ministering in power and great glory, casting out devils, healing the sick, raising the dead, and performing many mighty miracles.

He should take upon him the infirmities of his people.

He should suffer temptation, pain of body, hunger, thirst and fatigue; blood should come from every pore of his body by reason of his anguish because of the abominations of his people.

He should be cast out and rejected by the Jews; be taken and scourged, and be judged of the world.

He should be lifted upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.

He should be buried in a sepulchre, where he would remain three days.

After he was slain he should rise from the dead, and should make himself manifest by the Holy Ghost unto the Gentiles.

He should lay down his life according to the flesh and take it up again by the power of the Spirit, that he might bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise.

At his resurrection many graves should be opened and should yield up their dead: and many of the saints, who had beforetime passed away, should appear unto the living.

He should redeem all mankind, who would believe on his name.

In the above we have mentioned the sayings of Isaiah and other Jewish prophets, which are inserted in the Book of Mormon, but which also appear in the Bible.^h

After the resurrection, in fulfillment of many predictions

^hDict. B. of M., Reynolds, Art. Jesus Christ, pp. 174-176.

of Nephite prophets that he would appear among the people of the western world;[†] Jesus Christ made his advent among the Nephites. The great event occurred some time after those awful cataclysms, which so changed the face of the western world, had ceased. It appears that a number of Nephites had gathered together near a temple in the land Bountiful, and were contemplating the changes that had been wrought in the land by the aforesaid cataclysms, and conversing about the Messiah, the signs of whose death had been so marvelously given—I quote the account of the appearing of Jesus unto this multitude as it is found in the Nephite record:

And it came to pass that while they were thus conversing one with another, they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; and they cast their eyes round about, for they understood not the voice, which they heard; and it was not a harsh voice; neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless and notwithstanding it being a small voice, it did pierce them that did hear to the centre, inso-much that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn. And it came to pass that again they heard the voice, and they understood it not; and again the third time they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it; and their eyes were towards the sound thereof; and they did look steadfastly towards heaven, from whence the sound came; and behold the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them, Behold my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name: hear ye him. And it came to pass as they understood, they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe, and he came down and stood in the midst of them, and the eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant, for they thought it was an angel that had appeared unto

[†]I. Nephi xii: 6. II. Nephi xxvi:1, 9. Alma xvi: 20.

them. And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying, Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified should come into the world; and behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning. And it came to pass that when Jesus had spoken these words, the whole multitude fell to the earth, for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should shew himself unto them, after his ascension into heaven.^j

After thus manifesting himself to the Nephites in this most palpable manner, Messiah continued his ministry by teaching them the gospel, and instituting baptism for the remission of sins, and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as symbolizing the sacrifice and atonement he had made. He also authorized the organization of a Church among them—himself conferring divine authority to do all these things upon twelve disciples, who held power similar to that of the twelve whom he had chosen at Jerusalem. He also taught them the moral law of the gospel; informed them of his work among their brethren, the Jews; declared to them also his intention of visiting and ministering to those who are called the "Lost Tribes of Israel," declaring that in this personal appearing to them (the Nephites), and to the Lost Tribes of the house of Israel, he was but fulfilling his own words to the twelve at Jerusalem as found in the testimony of John, wherein he said: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold:^k them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd."^l

^jIII. Nephi xi: 3-13.

^kThat is, not of this fold in Palestine. For an answer to the contention that the Savior referred to the Gentiles, see note at p.

^lJohn x: 16.

Thus the gospel was proclaimed among the Nephites, by Jesus Christ, in person, and by divine inspired men, directly called and appointed by Jesus to the holy office of the ministry. The Church of Christ was established among the Nephites, to teach the truth, and perfect the lives of those who accepted it—for such is the mission of the Church of Christ in all ages of the world. How successful it was through the first two Christian centuries, and how, after the expiration of that time, the Nephite race began to decline in righteousness, deny the faith once delivered to them, until they lost favor with God and were left to degenerate into anarchy and barbarism, has already been stated.

THE PEOPLE OF MULEK.

Government and Religion.

Of the government and religion of the people of Mulek in the western hemisphere we know even less than of the Jaredites or the Nephites. Mulek himself was of royal lineage, being the son of King Zedekiah of Jerusalem; but whether the prerogatives of prince and king were enjoyed and exercised by him in the new world we cannot learn, nor is there any glimpse afforded us in the Nephite records of the nature of government among their people. Still government of some sort must have subsisted among them, for when found by the Nephites in the valley of the Sidon they lived in association—chiefly in the great city of Zarahemla—a thing inconceivable apart from government of some sort. The gregarious instincts of man impel him to live in society, but the experience of the race is warrant for the truth of the fact that government is necessary to the perpetuity of that society. Hence when society of any permanent character is found, there, it may be taken for granted, government of some sort

also exists. Hence the people of Mulek, since it is evident that they lived in a permanent society, had a government, but the nature of it is unknown.

The people of Mulek came from the old world without scriptures or records of any kind. That is no matter of surprise, however, since they were fugitives, escaping from the wrath of the king of Babylon. Their anxiety looked not to the future, but to the present. To them was committed the protection of one of the princes of Judah. To reach a place of safety for him would be their one, absorbing thought. But the experience of this colony illustrates the value of the written word of God. By reason of having no records or books, and no opportunity, or inclination, perhaps, to teach letters, the language they spoke—the language prevalent in Judea in the sixth century B. C.—in course of time very much deteriorated.^m But that was not the worst consequence of their being without the written word. By the time the descendants of Mulek's colony were discovered by the migrating hosts of Nephites under Mosiah I—four hundred years from the time they left Judea—they were so far sunk in unbelief as to deny “the being of their Creator.” Their condition of unbelief sustains the views on the value of the written word expressed by King Benjamin—son of Mosiah I.—when teaching his people the importance of the records brought by Lehi's colony from Jerusalem. He held that had it not been for these sacred writings, the Nephites themselves would have been in ignorance of the mysteries of God; that it would have been impossible for Lehi to have taught all the things of God, but for the help he received from the written word; that but for this, their fathers would have dwindled in unbelief.” It may be taken for granted also

^mOmn i: 17.

ⁿMosiah i.

that with a people who had no religion—who “denied the being of their Creator”—their morality was of a very low order; for it is a truth, attested over and over again in the history of nations, that national morality cannot prevail in exclusion of religion, which teaches the recognition of moral duties as commandments of God. But these observations are based upon the universal experience of man, rather than upon anything in the Nephite record; for that is silent upon the matters of government, religion, and morality of the people of Mulek, except in so far as stated in the foregoing.

THE LAMANITES.

Civilization, Government, Religion.

Civilization, government and religion among the Lamanites should not be overlooked. It is true that they were idle; that they loved the wilderness and, for the most part, dwelt in tents; that they depended upon the fruits of the chase and such products of the earth as the rich lands they occupied produced without the labor of man, as the principal means of their sustenance; still they came in contact now and then with Nephite civilization, which must have modified somewhat their inclination to utter barbarism. It must be remembered that the Lamanites frequently invaded Nephite lands and prospered by the fruits of war. Moreover, as the Nephites repeatedly removed from their possession to escape Lamanite aggression, the latter took possession of their deserted cities and country, and dwelt in their habitations. When the righteous Nephites under Mosiah I. departed northward from the “Land of Nephi,” in which land was located the great cities of Lehi-Nephi, Shilom, and doubtless many other cities of less importance, these fell into the hands of the Lamanites. When a colony from Zarahemla returned under Zeniff to re-occupy these lands of their fathers, they were

tricked into bondage to the Lamanites, who laid heavy tribute upon their labor, and flourished for a period of well nigh eighty years upon the industry of the practically enslaved Nephites. This occasional contact with Nephite civilization must have had a modifying effect upon Lamanite life and Lamanite character.

That there was some system and regularity in Lamanite government must be apparent from the degree of efficiency with which that people conducted the protracted wars with the Nephites. The largeness of their armies, the length of the wars, and the extensive scale on which they were projected and prosecuted, would indicate the existence of some strong, central government capable of making its authority respected. That such a government existed among the Lamanites is disclosed through the facts that are brought to light by the mission of the young Nephite princes, the sons of Mosiah II., in the century preceding the birth of Messiah. It appears that at that time what I shall venture to call the Lamanite empire was divided into a number of petty kingdoms whose kings, as is always the case among semi-civilized peoples, were possessed of great and arbitrary power; but these in turn seem to have been subject to a central ruler whose dominion extended over all, and whose power in his large sphere was as absolute as that of the petty kings in the smaller states.

The religion of the Lamanites is more difficult to determine than their government. It is chiefly the absence of religion and of its influence that must be spoken of. Taught to believe that the traditions of their fathers respecting God, the promised Messiah, and the belief in a future life were untrue; persuaded to believe that their fathers had been induced to leave fatherland, and their rich possessions therein because of the dreams of the visionary Lehi; firm in their

conviction that the elder sons of Lehi had been defrauded of their right to govern the colony by the younger son, Nephi; and that through the force of the religious influence he learned to wield by following the spiritual example (to them, perhaps, the trickery) of his father—it was in the spirit of hatred of religion that the Lamanites waged war upon the Nephites, to subvert religion and free men from its restraints. But the Lamanites were true to human instincts.” They free themselves, as they supposed, from one superstition, only to plunge into others that were really contemptible—the superstition of idolatry; for they were an idolatrous people.^o This remark, however, must be understood in a general sense, and as applying to the Lamanites proper, previous to the coming of Messiah—of the followers, and the descendants of the followers, of the elder brothers of the first Nephi, Laman and Lemuel. After the coming of Messiah, when in the third century A. D., the old distinctions of Nephite and Lamanite were revived, after the long period of peace and righteousness following the advent of Christ, said distinctions could have no reference to race or family, as they had when first employed; but were strictly party distinctions; used, when adopted again in the period named, to indicate the Church or religious party, and the anti-religious party, re-

”“We know, and it is our pride to know, that man by his constitution is a religious animal; that atheism is against not only our reason, but our instincts; and that it cannot prevail long. But if, in the moment of riot, and in a drunken delirium from the hot spirit drawn out of the alembic of hell, * * * * we should uncover our nakedness by throwing off that Christian religion which has hitherto been our boast and comfort, and one great source of civilization amongst us, and among many other nations, we are apprehensive (being well aware that the mind will not endure a void) that some uncouth, pernicious, and degrading superstition might take the place of it.” (Edmund Burke, Works, Vol. III., p. 351.

^oEnos i:20.

spectively. But even this significance passed away in time, in the latter phase of the history of the people of the western hemisphere; for the Nephites went into transgression as well as the Lamanite party, and no longer stood as the champions of religion and the Church: and hence the names then stood for the respective parties, strangely bent on each other's destruction. It must also be understood that the term "idolatrous people" does not apply to all the Lamanites previous to the coming of Messiah through the whole period of their history; for at times there were very widespread conversions among them to faith in the true God, as at the time of the mission of King Mosiah's sons among them, three-quarters of a century B. C.; and again as the result of the labors of Nephi, the son of Helaman, and his brother Lehi (31 B. C. to 2 B. C.) In this last named successful ministry, the Lamanites reversed for a time the historic relations of the two parties, the Lamanites more universally accepting the faith taught by the prophets of God than the Nephites; exceeding them in righteousness of life and in zeal as champions of the cause of God and truth. But, speaking broadly, after noting the foregoing limitations and exceptions, from the first separation of the Nephites from the Lamanites, down to the coming of Messiah, the Lamanites were an idolatrous people. And again from the time of the destruction of the Nephite party, about 400 A. D., to the coming of the Europeans, near the close of the fifteenth century, superstition and the darkness of idolatry (enlightened here and there, perhaps, with a fragment of truth cherished in the traditions of the people) held the inhabitants of the western world under its dominion.

By way of recapitulation allow me here to say, in closing this second division of my treatise, that I have now considered the value of the Book of Mormon as a witness for

God; the purposes for which it was written; the manner of its coming forth through the agency of Joseph Smith; the manner of its translation, and the account of its publication; the migrations of its people to the western world; the lands they occupied; the intercontinental movements of its peoples; their government, literature and religion. All this, it is hoped, sets forth what the Book of Mormon is, and its value as a volume of history and scripture; and naturally leads up to the great questions to be considered in this treatise, viz.: Is the Book of Mormon what it purports to be? Is it an abridged history of the ancient people who inhabited the western hemisphere? Does it really give an account of God's hand-dealing with them? Is it the voice of sleeping nations testifying to the truth of God's existence, to the verity of Messiah's mission, to the power of salvation in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Is it verily a volume of scripture? Is it true?

These are the solemn questions to be considered in the next division; and it is believed by the writer that in the presentation of the evidence then to be considered, and the argument there to be made, that the importance of this merely preliminary part of the work will become more apparent.