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Internal Evidences—The Originality of the Book of Mormon an Evidence in Support of its Claims

Author(s): B.H. Roberts

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

INTERNAL EVIDENCES—THE ORIGINALITY OF THE BOOK OF MORMON AN EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF ITS CLAIMS.

How far originality may be insisted upon as a necessary element in a book avowedly containing a revelation from God is an open question; just as how far originality in a prophet may be insisted upon is. In both cases, however, it cannot be doubted but that originality would be regarded as evidence of considerable weight in favor of the divinity of the message of either prophet or book. Somehow men look for originality in any thing that purports to be a revelation from God, come how it will. They look for a word "from the inner fact of things" in a revelation. A new word that shall add somewhat to the sum of known things, and spoken in a way to attract anew the attention of men. And yet it must not be forgotten that "every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven * * * bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old"^a—the old, mark you, as well as the new—and one of olden time doubted even if there really was any new thing under the sun. "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, see, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us."^b

From all which I conclude that while in a way originality may be regarded as affording some evidence in favor of

^aMatt. xiii: 52.

^bEcclesiastes i: 9, 10.

the claims of a prophet and his message, or of a book and its revelation, still originality is not an indispensable quality in either prophet or book. Contemporary prophets, or prophets living in succession, may come burdened with the same word of the Lord, with the same divine message; but the one who speaks secondly or thirdly, and hence with all claim to originality gone, is none the less God's messenger; and the word he speaks may not with safety be rejected for that it lacks the quality of originality. So, too, with books. It would be a senseless manner of handling the scriptures to reject the books called first and second Chronicles because they chiefly duplicate the matter of the books called first and second Kings, and have little originality to commend them to our acceptance. So with the books of the New Testament. Accepting for our purpose here the order in which they stand in the commonly received versions of the New Testament, as the order in which the books were written, shall the book of Mark be rejected because in the main it deals with the same matter that engages the attention of Matthew, and there is but little on the score of its originality of matter to commend it as an inspired book? The same question could be asked in relation to the book of Luke. The truth is that God in books as in prophets sometimes requires more than one for a witness to his message, and hence repeats the revelation in a number of inspired books, in which case the books merely repeating the revelation are as truly inspired, as truly scripture as the one in which the message first appeared, although it could be said that the quality of originality is wholly wanting.

Since the Book of Mormon feigns the introduction of no new religion, but gives merely an account of the introduction of the Christian religion in the western hemisphere, by inspired teachers, both before and after the coming of

Messiah, and by the personal ministry of Messiah after his resurrection; and as the Christian religion is always the same, in all times and in all lands, it must have been the same when introduced into America as when taught in Judea—where is room for originality? Is not originality by the very nature of the claims of the Book of Mormon excluded? The reader, I believe, will recognize the force of the question; and I take occasion here to remark that the point in the question exhibits the weakness of those objections that are sometimes urged against the Book of Mormon on the score of sameness of matter in it and the New Testament; and also it exhibits how senseless is the clamor for the existence of some new moral or religious truth^c in the Book of Mormon, not to be found in the Old or New Testaments.

Since, then, the Book of Mormon, so far as it treats of religion, treats of the Christian religion, it is comparison not contrast that should be made; sameness, not difference that should be looked for; identity of moral and religious truths, not differences; accordance with old truths, rather than the existence of new ones. The Christian religion may not be contrasted with itself; and as the fullness of the gospel was revealed in the proclamation of it in Judea, it would be sufficient if a dispensation of the same gospel proclaimed in America is in strict accordance with that taught in Judea. In fact this is all that the nature of the case strictly requires. Still, after the reasonableness of all this is estab-

^cFor this clamor see a brief discussion on the Book of Mormon between the writer and an "Unknown" writer in "The Salt Lake Tribune," impressions of Nov. 22, 29; and December 6, 13, 1903. See also "The Golden Bible" (Lamb), Edition of 1887, p. 207-213. Also the views of the Rev. Dr. Wm. M. Paden, of the First Presbyterian Church; Salt Lake City, quoted by the writer in a discourse on "The Fifth Gospel"—Third Nep'hi—"Defense of the Faith and the Saints," Vol. I, pp. 373-399.

lished, there may be claimed for the Book of Mormon an originality in the fact of the existence of new and important Christian truths in its pages; as, also an originality of emphasis placed on certain other Christian truths.

This much that a proper estimate may be formed of the value of originality as an evidence of the divine authenticity or inspiration of a book; neither giving an exaggerated value to it on the one hand, nor accounting it of little or no importance on the other.

I.

Originality of Structure.

In enumerating the several particulars in which the Book of Mormon manifests originality, I would name its peculiar structure—so at variance with all modern ideas of book making—pointed out in the treatment of the last subdivision of chapter xxxviii, and ask the reader to consider that treatise brought over into this subdivision, and the peculiar structure of the Book of Mormon made one, and the first, of the evidences of its originality.

II.

Originality in Names.

So also as to names; so far as they are original, I would have that fact considered as another, the second, evidence of the originality of the Book of Mormon; and so much of that treatise as deals with the originality of the names, (see chapter xxxvii) considered as brought over into this subdivision.

III.

In the Manner of its Coming Forth.

In the manner of its coming forth no less than in its structure and its names, the Book of Mormon is original. It must be remembered that at the time of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon such a thing as a new revelation from God was utterly unlooked for. Indeed it was the consensus of Christian opinion and teaching that the time of revelation had passed; that the days of miracles were over; that God in the Christian dispensation to mankind (the dispensation in which Messiah ministered in person) spoke the final word; that no more divine communication would be given. Speculating upon this very subject in connection with the desirability for knowledge respecting the ancient inhabitants of America; Ethan Smith, in his "View of the Hebrews; or the Tribes of Israel in America," says, most emphatically:

We are to expect no new revelation from heaven, and the days of miracles are thought to be past. We probably must look for just such evidence to exhibit to the world that people so long lost [as the ten Tribes of Israel], as is in fact exhibited by the natives of America.^d

It is well to remember that this was said some years before the Book of Mormon was published, and I repeat that it represents the generally accepted Christian idea concerning revelation and miracles. Furthermore, it is notorious that the prime objection urged against the Book of Mormon was the fact that it claimed to be a new revelation from God; and the arguments found in the discourses and

^dView of the Hebrews, 2nd Edition, (1825) pp. 168, 169.

writings of the early Elders of the Church clearly prove that the chief contention over the Book of Mormon in those early days was on this point.^e It follows, therefore, that Joseph Smith's account of the manner in which the Book of Mormon was brought forth and translated was a very original one; for it involved a revelation from God to make known its existence, and what men call a miracle to secure its translation. Here, then, was not only originality, but a bold contradiction of what was supposed to be the most completely settled doctrine of modern Christendom, *viz.* that the age of revelations and miracles had forever passed away. It is scarcely probable that imposters would move along such lines as these. The proclamation of a new revelation making known the existence of a new volume of scripture was the most remarkable innovation upon Christian opinion that the world had ever witnessed. Orthodoxy stood aghast at the presumption as they called it; and seemed for a time to forget all other points of controversy in order to concentrate their attack upon this innovation of their most cherished idea. They thought the very claim that the Book of Mormon involved a new revelation from God was sufficient to justify its rejection. Yet never was opposition so completely demolished in controversy as this sectarian argument against new and continual revelation. So completely was it overthrown that we to-day scarcely ever hear it mentioned. With this, however, I have nothing further to do. My only point at present is that there was

^eSee the works of Orson and Parley P. Pratt; John Taylor's Discussion with three ministers in France; early volumes of Millennial Star, Spencer's Letters—in fact all the early Church literature. Of late opponents of the Book of Mormon have not pressed this point of controversy, since the sectarian arguments respecting it have been utterly demolished. For a brief consideration of the various points of that argument see "New Witnesses for God," Vol. I., Ch. viii.

a bold originality in Joseph Smith's account of the coming forth and translation of the Book of Mormon, which, in addition to contravening the accepted Christian opinion of the times on the subject of revelation and miracles, carried with it much weight in support of the claims made for this American volume of scripture; for surely imposters seeking to foist a book upon the world either for obtaining fame or money would never be found moving along lines so diametrically opposite to accepted opinions.

IV.

Its Accounting for the Peopling of America.

In its account of peopling America no less than in its structure and the manner in which its existence was made known and its translation accomplished, the Book of Mormon is original. All the books on American antiquities that could possibly have been accessible to Joseph Smith and his associates favored the theory of migrations from north-eastern Asia by way of Behring Straits where the Asiatic and American continents approach each other. See Josiah Priest's *American Antiquities*, preface. Ethan Smith, referring to the authorities that he was acquainted with on this subject, says:

All seem to agree that the Indians came from the northwest, and overspread the continent to the south. * * * * *
I forbear to offer any further remarks upon these testimonies incidentally afforded by this most celebrated author, [meaning Humboldt]. Let them be duly weighed by the judicious reader; and he surely cannot doubt but that the natives of America came from the north over Behring's Straits; and descended from a people of as great mental cultivation, as were the ancient family of Israel.^f

^fView of the Hebrews, pp. 187, 188.

Not only were such the prevailing views at the time Ethan Smith wrote, 1825, but even to this day the same general opinion prevails among authorities;^g that is, that America was peopled from Asia by way of Behring Straits. The migrations of the Book of Mormon, however, contravene this quite generally accepted theory. While it is supposed that the Jaredites passed out of the Euphrates valley and wandered several years eastwardly through Asia, they crossed the Pacific and landed in the south part of the north continent of America and settled in a district of country they afterwards called Moron, near what was afterwards the Nephite province called Desolation, which was in the region of country known to us as the Central American States.^h The Nephite colony, as we have seenⁱ, landed on the west coast of South America about thirty degrees south latitude; and Mulek's colony is supposed to have landed somewhere in the south part of the North American continent. These Book of Mormon accounts of migrations to the American continents constitute the widest possible departure from usually accepted theories upon the subject.

v.

The Nativity of Ancient American Peoples.

The Book of Mormon is original with reference to the facts it presents respecting the nativity of its peoples. On this point, more is sometimes claimed by believers in the Book of Mormon than is warranted by the facts in the case. For example, it is sometimes stated that the Israelitish

^gSee chapter xxix, especially taking account of foot note references.

^hDictionary of the Book of Mormon, Reynolds, p. 168. And Vol. II, pp. 139-40.

ⁱVol. II, pp. 157-8.

origin of the native Americans was first asserted by the Book of Mormon. That is not true. Long before the advent of the Book of Mormon James Adair, whose work was published in 1775, advanced the theory that the native American Indians were the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel, and argued for the truth of his theory at great length.^b Ethan Smith, in his work we have several times quoted, advances the theory that the native Indians were the "Ten Lost Tribes of Israel," the very title of his book—"View of the Hebrews; or the Tribes of Israel in America"—is the evidence of his holding that theory.

It is therefore a mistake to say that the idea of Israelitish descent of the native American Indians originated with the Book of Mormon. Indeed the theory that the native Americans were the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel found many advocates both in Europe and the United States, especially, I may say, in the New England states, before 1830. Wherein the Book of Mormon is original in respect of this matter is that while declaring the Israelitish descent of the ancient people of America, it directly contravenes the idea that the native Americans, are the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, by incidentally declaring those tribes to be in another part of the world, and Jesus announcing to the Nephites his intention to appear unto them, and administer among them.^m Of course reference to Israelitish descent is here made to the two last migrations only, that is, to the colony of Lehi, and the colony of Mulek. The colony of Jared were doubtless of the same race, but of earlier ancestors, among whom the patriarch Shem. The Book of Mormon refers to Lehi's colony as made up of descendants of Man-

^bSee this volume, pp. 46-48.

^mSee III. Nephi xv, xvi, xvii.

asseh [Lehi] and Ephraim [Ishmael]" while the colony of Mulek were Jews.

From this it appears that the Book of Mormon is as boldly original in declaring the nativity of these colonies that peopled America with teeming millions of their descendants, as it is in its account of the course of their migrations or the manner in which the Book of Mormon came forth. For, in limiting the nativity of these colonies to the descendants of Joseph and of Judah, it as radically contravenes existing opinions upon the subject as it does in respect of the manner in which the book came forth, and the course of migration.

"The statement here that Ishmael was of Ephraim is set down upon the authority, first, of inference. The inference is based upon the fact as already stated that there are promises in the Hebrew scriptures respecting Ephraim which cannot be realized so far as we know, except through the seed of Ephraim dwelling upon the land of America, as we have seen in considering the evidence of the Bible for the truth of the Book of Mormon; and as Lehi and his family were of the tribe of Manasseh, and Mulek's colony being Jews, it leaves the family of Ishmael, and perhaps Zoram, the servant of Laban to introduce the descendants of Ephraim into the western world. Second, a number of Latter-day Saints, familiarly acquainted with the Prophet Joseph Smith, declare that in conversation they had known him to say that in Mormon's abridgment of the book of Lehi (which supplied the 116 pages of manuscript lost by Martin Harris) it was plainly stated that Ishmael was of the tribe of Ephraim. Among those who heard such remarks was the late Elder Franklin D. Richards, of the Council of the Apostles and Church Historian, who records his recollection of the Prophet's statement in the following manner:

"One day in the autumn of that year, (1843) as I was passing near, (the "Nauvoo Mansion") it being in warm weather, I observed the door standing open and the Prophet Joseph inside conversing with one of the brethren, leaning against the counter. It being a public house, I ventured to walk in, and scarcely had more than time to exchange usual civilities, when this brother said: 'Brother Joseph, how is it that we call the Book of Mormon the Stick of Joseph, in the hands of Ephraim, when the book itself tells us that Lehi was of the lineage of Manasseh? I cannot find in it about the seed of Ephraim dwelling on this land at

VI.

Accounting for the Existence of Christian Ideas in America.

The Book of Mormon is original in the matter of accounting for the existence of Christian ideas and doctrines among the native Americans. I would have this statement so understood as to include all Bible ideas, since right conceptions of Christianity in its fullness includes the Old Testament and the dispensation of God to the children of men described therein as part of the Christian heritage, as well as the specific Christian dispensation which is described in the New Testament.

The manner in which the Book of Mormon accounts for Christian ideas and doctrines among native Americans is, first, by detailing the facts of direct revelation of Christian truths to the ancient inhabitants of America, as, for instance, in the case of the Prophet Moriancumer among the Jaredites, where that great prophet is represented as being permitted to stand in the revealed presence of the pre-existing spirit of Jesus Christ, and to hear the proclamation

all.' Joseph replied: 'You will recollect that when Lehi and his family had gone from Jerusalem out into the wilderness, he sent his son Nephi back to the city to get the plates which contained the law of Moses and many prophecies of the prophets, and that he also brought out Ishmael and his family, which were mostly daughters. This Ishmael and his family were of the lineage of Ephraim, and Lehi's sons took Ishmael's daughters for wives, and this is how they have grown together, 'a multitude of nations in the midst of the earth.'

"'If we had those one hundred and sixteen pages of manuscript which Martin Harris got away with, you would know all about it, for Ishmael's ancestry is made very plain therein. The Lord told me not to translate it over again, but to take from Nephi's other plates until I came to the period of time where the other translation was broken off, and then go on with Mormon's abridgment again. That is how it came about that Ishmael's lineage was not given in the Book of Mormon, as well as Lehi's.'"—Frankling D. Richards, "The Contributor," Vol. XVII, p. 425.

that in him should all mankind have life and that eternally; and that as he appeared unto that prophet in the spirit, so would he appear unto his people in the flesh; and that those who would believe on his name should become his sons and daughters.^o Also the revelation of Christian truths vouchsafed to the first Nephi; who, in vision, some hundreds of years before the advent of Christ, was permitted to foresee the birth of the Redeemer, the labors of his forerunner, John the Baptist, who prepared the way before him, and much of the Judean ministry of Christ, including his crucifixion, his resurrection, and the establishment of his ministry through twelve Apostles; so also his advent and ministry among the inhabitants of the western world,^p ending in the establishment of the Christian sacraments, and of the Christian Church, as the sacred depository of Christian truths. Secondly, the Book of Mormon accounts for the existence of Christian ideas and doctrines among native American races by declaring the Nephites to be in possession of the Hebrew scriptures extant among that people from the beginning up to 600 B. C., including the five books of Moses, some of the writings of Isaiah and Jeremiah.^q And also ascribing to the Jaredites the knowledge of most ancient events through scriptures in their possession, dealing with events from the Tower of Babel back to the very days of Adam.^r It is, then, by most direct means of the revelations of God to the ancient inhabitants of America and the personal ministration of Jesus Christ among them and the knowledge imparted by these several volumes of very ancient scripture that the Book of Mormon accounts for

^oEther iii.

^pI. Nephi x: 11, 12.

^qSee I. Nephi v: 11.

^rEther i: 3-6.

the existence of Christian ideas and Christian truths among the native Americans.

There is nothing like this in the theories of men to account for the existence of these truths in America. In the first place let the reader be assured that it is quite generally conceded by the very best authorities that ideas closely analogous to Christian truths are found in the traditions of the native Americans. "Most ancient and modern authors," says De Roo, "agree in saying that the Christian religion has been taught on our [the American] continent at an epoch not so very much anterior to the Columbian discovery. Bastian establishes the latter opinion by the numerous analogies he points out between the religious belief and practices of the Christians and those of American aborigines. Von Humboldt admits the parity to be so striking as to have given the Spanish missionaries a fine opportunity to deceive the natives by making them believe that their own was none other than the Christian religion. 'Not a single American missionary who has, until this day, left any writing has forgotten to notice the evident vestiges of Christianity which has in former time penetrated even among the most savage tribes,' says Dr. de Mier, commenting on Sahagun's History. Quite a number of ancient writers, such as Garcilasso de la Vega, Solorzano, Acosta, and others are equally explicit in asserting that several Christian tenets and practices were found among our aborigines; but they deny their introduction by Christian teachers, giving, strange to say, to the devil the honor of spreading the light of Christianity, in spite of his hatred of it."^s Later he says:

^sHistory of America Before Columbus, P. De Roo, Vol. I., 423, 424.

No modern student of American antiquity fails to notice the close and striking resemblances between several leading particulars of Christian faith, morals, and ceremonies and those of ancient American religions. Sahagun, who wrote in Mexico about the middle of the sixteenth century, and took such great pains to be correctly informed in regard to all religious rites of our aborigines, states already that all the Spanish missionaries who wrote in America before him had pointed out the numerous vestiges of Christianity to be found even among the savage Indian tribes.[†]

Devil propaganda of Christianity was quite a favorite theory with many of the early Spanish writers, while others advanced the theory that Christian apostles had evangelized the western hemisphere. Among the latter was the Archbishop of San Domingo, Davilla Padilli, a royal chronicler who wrote a book to prove that Christian apostles had formerly preached in the West Indies. So also Torquemada holds the same opinion, although he admits of the possibility of the devil teaching Christianity. More modern writers seek to account for the existence of these Christian analogies in other ways. Prescott for instance, in his *Conquest of Peru*, says:

In the distribution of bread and wine at this high festival, [the feast of Raymi] the orthodox Spaniards who first came into the country saw a striking resemblance to the Christian communion; as in the practice of confession and penance, which, in a most irregular form indeed, seems to have been used by the Peruvians, they discerned a coincidence with another of the sacraments of the Church. The good fathers were fond of tracing such coincidences, which they considered as the contrivance of Satan, who thus endeavored to delude his victims by counterfeiting the blessed rites of Christianity. Others, in a different vein, imagined that they saw in such analogies the

[†]Ibid. p. 517.

evidence that some of the primitive teachers of the gospel, perhaps an apostle himself, had paid a visit to these distant regions and scattered over them the seeds of religious truth. But it seems hardly necessary to invoke the Prince of Darkness, or the intervention of the blessed saints to account for coincidences which have existed in countries far removed from the light of Christianity, and in ages, indeed, when its light had not yet risen on the world. It is much more reasonable to refer such casual points of resemblance to the general constitution of man and the necessities of his moral nature.*

Of which I think De Roo very justly remarks: "The Christian mysteries admitted by the ancient Peruvians and Mexicans could hardly find their origin in man's constitution; nor are religious practices, like baptism, fasting, celibacy, and a cloistered life, to be considered as necessities of man's moral, yet corrupt nature. More reasonable and better historical causes should be found to account for the presence of Christian faith and Christian rites in ancient America."^v

H. H. Bancroft also concedes the existence of rites among native Americans analogous to those existing among Jews and Christians, but regards them as mere coincidences. He says:

Many rites and ceremonies were found to exist among the civilized nations of America that were very similar to certain others observed by the Jews and Christians in the old world. The innumerable speculators on the origin of the aboriginal inhabitants of the new world, or at least on the origin of their civilization, have not neglected to bring forward these coincidences—there is no good reason to suppose them anything else—in support of their various theories."^w

*Conquest of Peru, Vol. I., pp. 96, 97.

^vHistory of America Before Columbus, Vol. I., pp. 523-4.

^wNative Races, Vol. III., pp. 438-9.

On which De Roo remarks: "Coincidences, so many, so striking, in faith, in morals, and liturgy! Coincidences, indeed, little short of wonders!"

Nadaillac also would refer these "coincidences" to natural causes. He says "No dissemination of merely Christian ideas, since the conquest [by the Spaniards] is sufficient to account for these myths [having in mind the traditions of the creation, flood, migrations, Christian analogies, etc.], which appear to have their root in the natural tendencies of the human mind in its evolution from a savage state."^{*}

And so in these various ways men would account for the existence of Christian ideas and doctrines; but it was reserved for Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the dispensation of the fullness of times, through the Book of Mormon, to announce the boldly original idea that knowledge of Christian truths and doctrines had their origin among native American peoples in direct revelation to them from God; in the personal ministration of the Lord Jesus Christ, after his resurrection from the dead; and from being in possession of ancient scriptures which to the Nephites, no less than to the Jews, made known God's plan of redemption for mankind through the personal suffering and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. I hold that the very originality and boldness of these assertions respecting the direct means by which the people of America in ancient times received their knowledge of Christian truths, and which so far transcend the timid and tentative speculations of men, even of the most intelligent and courageous, have about them an atmosphere of truth that is most convincing; moreover, I cannot help but believe that originality in respect of such things as are here set down; structure, names, the manner of coming

^{*}Prehistoric America, p.531.

forth, in its account of peopling America, the nativity of American peoples, and lastly this accounting for the existence of Christian ideas among native American races, is of a vastly greater importance than originality in mere phraseology or style of composition.