



Type: Magazine Article

Moroni, A Sketch of the Nephite Republic, VII

Author(s): B.H. Roberts

Source: *The Contributor*, Vol. 11, No. 7 (May 1890), pp. 262–266

Published by: The Contributor Company

Abstract: Roberts details how Captain Moroni both spiritually and physically fortified his people for the potential future conflicts with the Lamanites. The reversal of the Lamanites in trying to take the cities of Ammonihah and Noah is detailed. Roberts spends time discussing the physical characteristics of Moroni's fortifications and speculates that fortifications in Ohio built centuries later may have taken inspiration from them.

its conclusion—a silence that told of her failure. She caught a triumphant expression of Grisi's face. Despite the dimness of her senses she quickly realized that failure meant lost glory, disappointed hope, the destruction of happiness, grief and mortification to her family and friends. Suddenly a soft voice that seemed to come from heaven whispered to her: "Sing one of your old songs in your native language." She caught at the thought like an inspiration. The accompanist was striking his final chords. She stepped up to him, asked him to rise, and took the vacant seat. Softly her white fingers wandered over the keys in a loving prelude, then she sang. It was a little prayer which she had loved as a child; it belonged to her childhood's repertoire. She hadn't sung it for years. As she sang she was no longer in the presence of royalty, but singing to loving friends in her fatherland. No one present understood a word of the "prayer."

Softly at first, the plaintive notes floated on the air, swelling louder and richer every moment. The singer seemed to throw her whole soul into that weird, thrilling, plaintive "prayer." Gradually the song died away and ended in a soft sob. Again there was silence—the silence of admiring wonder. The audience sat spellbound. Jenny Lind lifted at last her sweet blue eyes to look into the scornful face that had so disconcerted her at first. There was no fierce expression now; instead a tear-drop glistened on the long, black lashes. After a moment, with the impulsiveness of a child of the tropics, Grisi crossed to Jenny Lind's side, placed her arms about her and kissed her warmly, utterly regardless of the admiring audience.—*Milwaukee Wisconsin.*

One fit and earnest word carries more weight than does a whole yard of high-flown eloquence.

MORONI.

A SKETCH OF THE NEPHITE REPUBLIC.

VII.

DURING the time that Amalickiah was installing himself king of the Lamanites, Moroni had been engaged in a two-fold manner to prepare his people for the conflict which he knew must be inevitable. First, he sought to instil into the minds of his soldiers faith in God, and to convince them that their cause was the cause of God and his kingdom. This Moroni believed sincerely himself, and he sought to breathe into his army a like faith. He knew such a conviction would strengthen their hands, and inflame their courage to deeds of valor. An army with such convictions is well-nigh invincible; if defeated one day the next sees it ready to renew the conflict. Being God's soldiers how can they be conquered while God lives? Nearly every noted commander has recognized the value of such a conviction in the minds of his men, and has ever sought to avail himself of it by claiming that his cause was God's cause, whether it was or no.

The second phase of Moroni's work was to introduce a method of defense in the Nephite mode of warfare. Hitherto they had met their enemies in open conflict on the borders of their [the Nephite's] possessions. The idea of erecting fortifications on their frontiers had never occurred to their leaders. It now presented itself to the mind of Moroni, and he at once acted upon it. It will be remembered that the most successful incursion of the Lamanites was in the eleventh year of the republic when they penetrated the Nephite country, as far as the wicked city of Ammoniah and destroyed it. Moroni doubtless reasoned that this would lead the Lamanites to believe that point to be most vulnerable; and since the city was now partly rebuilt he erected forts about it, and in like manner fortified the city of Noah.

The manner in which these forts were constructed, is difficult to determine, further than that huge banks of earth were thrown up, leaving a broad, deep

ditch between the face of the wall and the assailant, rendering them impregnable to the simple methods of warfare known to the Lamanites, except at the places of entrance, and there the assailing force attacked their enemies at great disadvantage, which rendered any superiority in numbers of little avail.

The Lamanites, when they came upon the city of Ammoniah, which they expected to take without difficulty, were not a little astonished to find this hitherto weak point on the Nephite frontier so entrenched behind fortifications, as to baffle all their strength. They knew not what to do. To attack a stronghold of that character appeared sheer madness, and they wisely withdrew their forces and determined to march upon the city of Noah.

Baffled rage is always the most rash, so it turned out that the Lamanite leaders, without stopping to consider that the city of Noah might be even better fortified than the one they were leaving, made solemn oath that they would take that city at all events. But when they reached it they found it behind higher walls than Ammoniah; and the forces detailed to defend it under the command of a leader as much dreaded by the Lamanites as Moroni himself. This commander was Lehi who proved such a scourge to the Lamanites at the battle of Riplah Hill.

The oath under which the Lamanite leaders had bound themselves was binding upon them. This branch of Lehi's descendants, degraded as they were, still held the old Israelitish superstition as to the binding nature of a covenant to which they had affixed the name of their God. "Thou shalt not forswear thyself; thou shalt perform unto the Lord all thine oaths" still rang in their ears, if not with the force of a religious conviction, at least with the force of a custom made sacred by a respectable antiquity. So, for the oath's sake, and to preserve their self-respect, the Lamanites commenced an attack upon the fortifications of the city of Noah. They first charged the entrances but were driven back. They charged again, only to be again driven back by the strong body of select men whom Lehi

had stationed to hold those posts. Each time they rushed up to the conflict, which they repeatedly did, their numbers were considerably reduced. It was evident they could never carry the entrances by storming them. They then determined, therefore, to level down the walls which so perplexed them; and leaping into the ditch began to undermine them. The Nephites were prepared for this, and from the tops of their fortifications rolled down rocks on the poor wretches below; so that instead of breaking down the walls of earth and filling up the ditches, the ditches were like to be filled up with their dead bodies.

In these assaults upon the fortifications the Lamanite chieftains had led the way and filled the posts of danger. The result was that the greater part of them had been slain. Their dead, officers and men, numbered more than a thousand; while the Nephites had not lost a single man, though many of them had been wounded. It was not to be wondered at, if in such an unequal contest they became disheartened and withdrew their forces to the wilderness. On their return to their capital they reported their failure. The wrath of Amalickiah knew no bounds. In his first transport of rage he cursed God. He swore with an oath that he would yet drink the blood of Moroni. That patriot had ever stood in his way; he had thwarted his ambition at every turn; he had not only defeated him in his hopes of being chosen king of the Nephites by a peaceable election, but had pursued him when he sought to unite his forces with the Lamanites, and literally captured his army, and well-nigh him; and now by his wisdom had so skillfully fortified his cities as to render him unassailable, and in attempting their reduction his army had met with so sore a defeat as would go far in breaking down their ardor forever. Could anything be more exasperating than this?

Moroni and Amalickiah were opponents by their very natures. The glorious light of mid-day is not more in contrast with the murky blackness of Egyptian midnight than is the character of Moroni

with that of Amalickiah. The first had implicit faith, and reverence for God; the latter was an unbeliever in God, and a reckless blasphemer of his holy name. This strain of sweet religious faith and trust, begets a gentleness in the character of the stern war-like young Nephite that is as admirable as the coarseness which absence of it begets in Amalickiah is repulsive. Moroni was a patriot; Amalickiah, a traitor. The former loved his country and was delighted in seeing the happiness of his fellow men; the latter loved himself, regarded his fellows as so many puppets that he might use to accomplish his selfish ends. Moroni was wise; Amalickiah, cunning; the first was courageous, the second, recklessly daring. The one is as patient in affliction and under reverses, as merciful, humble and temperate in the hour of victory, as the other is petulant, cruel, arrogant and wickedly vicious. Indeed, I know of no two men that ever lived in the same times and confronted each other, that are so completely antithetical in their disposition as are these two men—the friend of the republic and its deadly enemy.

However wild with rage at the failure of the expedition he had sent against the Nephites, Amalickiah was too cunning a leader to undertake at once another invasion of the lands of fortified cities. By delay his own soldiers would forget much of their fearfulness, and the Nephites, intoxicated by their success, might become careless in their fancied security; and besides, time was necessary to fill the hearts of the Lamanites with that bitterness which rankled in his own breast; hence Amalickiah resolved to wait for a season, before again risking his fortunes in another war.

Moroni was not the man to be careless or unguarded while such an enemy to the republic as Amalickiah was at large. It was not enough that he had repulsed repeatedly, the Lamanite forces until they returned disheartened to their own lands. He knew too well the character of his enemy to permit himself or his people to relapse into a fancied security. No patriot ever guarded his country with more caution than did Moroni in these days.

No patriot ever sensed more thoroughly the truism, "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." He continued the work of erecting fortifications in all parts of the land, especially on his frontiers.

I have already observed that a strip of wilderness, inhabited by the Lamanites, extended up the eastern coast as far as the land Jershon. Moroni had determined to extend his frontiers in a straight line from the head-waters of the Sidon—south of Zarahemla—to the east sea; and that he might accomplish his purpose he sent an army into that region to drive out the Lamanites.

No sooner had he cleared the wilderness of their enemies than he invited the Nephites, and especially those of Zarahemla, to go in and possess the land. In this newly acquired territory a number of cities were founded. One on the southern frontier and by the sea coast, they called Moroni, after their young commander-in-chief. This formed the south-east extremity of the Nephite possessions. A short distance northward they founded another city, which they named after the chief judge of the republic, Nephiah, while one that was erected in the extreme north-east of their possessions, bordering on the sea-coast, they called Lehi, after one of Moroni's able generals, and most likely the second in command in the army. Besides these three notable cities there were a number of others founded in various parts of the land, though principally in the north.

Each of these new cities and most of the old ones were provided with elaborate fortifications. They were surrounded by huge embankments of earth, on the top of which were built breast works of heavy timber, surmounted by high, strong pickets. In addition to this, high towers were erected at intervals along the walls, so contrived that while they gave ample protection to those occupying them from the rude weapons of their assailants, they also enabled them to harrass the enemy by casting upon them huge stones and other missiles. Such is all the information to be gleaned from the Book of Mormon in respect to these fortifications, and it is with regret we turn from a sub-

ject so full of interest. But beyond all reasonable doubt, Moroni's fortifications formed the basis of the plan on which the Nephites continued to construct their forts and walls about their cities; and some of the ruins of ancient fortifications, found within the territory of the United States, would seem to indicate that whoever constructed them, though they may have been made some centuries later than Moroni's time, followed pretty closely his style of defensive architecture. I append, here, brief descriptions of the ruins of ancient fortifications found in Ohio, built perhaps by the Nephites some centuries after Moroni's day, but of a character which suggests that their builders knew something of Moroni's system of fortification-building. I quote from Marcus Wilson's History of the United States—a work unfortunately becoming too rare in our libraries:—

"At Marietta, Ohio, on an elevated plain above the present bank of the Muskingum, were a few years since, some extraordinary remains of ancient works which appear to have been fortifications. They consisted, principally, of two large, oblong inclosures, the one containing an area of forty, and the other of twenty, acres, together with several mounds and terraces, the largest mound being one hundred and fifteen feet in diameter at the base and thirty feet in altitude. The fortresses were encompassed by walls of earth, from six to ten feet high, and thirty feet in breadth. On each side of the larger inclosure were three entrances, at equal distance apart, the middle being the largest, especially on the side of Muskingum. This entrance was guarded by two parallel walls of earth, two hundred and thirty feet apart and three hundred and sixty feet in length, and extending down to the former bank of the Muskingum.

"Within the inclosed area, * * * * near the centre, was a circular mound, thirty feet in diameter, and five feet high; and at the southwest corner a semi-circular parapet, to guard the entrance at that quarter. The smaller fort had entrances on each side and at each corner; most of the entrances being defended by circular mounds within. The conical mound, near the smaller fort, was surrounded by a ditch and an embankment, through which was an opening towards the fortifications, twenty feet in width. This mound was protected, in addition, by surrounding parapets, and mounds, and outworks of various forms."

* * *

What makes these ancient ruined fortifications appear as being fashioned after those erected by Moroni, is the breadth of the earth embankments—thirty feet; and only from six to ten feet in height, leaving plenty of room on the top for the erection of breast-works of timber, surmounted by pickets, which must have rotted away before the ruins were discovered by Europeans. The addition of the breast-work of timber and pickets would be quite necessary to make these embankments serviceable as fortifications. Without such addition they would not be very secure defenses. One other thing in these fortifications is also suggestive of their having been constructed after Moroni's plans; that is, the mounds near and guarding the entrances. These mounds are probably the foundations on which were erected towns as in the fortifications built by Moroni.

Works of like character to those at Marietta were very plentiful in Ohio, and they are admirably described by Wilson, but our space will not permit further description.

During the time Moroni was engaged in putting his country in a good defensive condition, by erecting fortifications and founding new cities, it was a very prosperous and happy time for the Nephites. It was also a time of general righteousness throughout the republic; and that beyond all questioning was the cause of the happiness. The sacred historian, Mormon, commenting on this period says:

"Behold, there never was a happier time among the people of Nephi, since the days of Nephi, than in the days of Moroni; yea, even in this time, in the twenty and first year of the reign of the judges"—or in other words, of the republic. So passed away also the three succeeding years, with the exception that in the twenty and fourth year there was a rather serious misunderstanding arose between the people of the city Morianton and the citizens of Lehi. Morianton and the people of the city of that name, claimed a portion of the land owned by the people of the city of Lehi. The contention over the disputed lands was bitter, and Morianton and his people:

flew to arms to enforce their claims; but the people in the city of Lehi fled to the camp of Moroni. "They were not in the wrong," says Mormon; and as Moroni was truly a terror to evil doers, Morianton put it into the hearts of those who sided with him, to flee out of the land and take possession of North America, a plan they would have executed had it not been for the rashness of Morianton's temper. In a sudden fit of anger he struck one of his maid servants, and she, for revenge, made her way to the camp of Moroni and revealed the designs of her former master.

It had ever been the policy of the Nephites, situated as they were in the northern part of South America, to keep open the country north of the isthmus, or "narrow pass" as the Nephites invariably called it, as a convenient place into which they might retreat should the time ever come when they should be too hard pressed by the Lamanites. Moroni, therefore, was determined that no dissenters from the Nephites should gain a foothold there, and dispatched one of his most able lieutenants—Teancum, of whom

more presently—to intercept Morianton and his followers.

This indeed Teancum did, but not until they had reached the "narrow pass." Morianton was a stubborn man, and would not yield to Teancum's demand to surrender. A battle was the result, in which the two leaders fought hand to hand, and Morianton was slain. His followers were captured and taken back to their city, but given their freedom on entering into a covenant of peace.

This twenty-fourth year of the republic was also burdened with another unhappy event. Nephiah, the chief judge, died. He was the second who had held that high office, and during his presidency the laws had been administered in justice. He filled the judgment seat, according to Mormon, "with perfect uprightness before God"—a higher encomium cannot be written, a prouder monument cannot be erected for a ruler in this world—he filled his high office with perfect uprightness before God!

His son Pahoran was elected to fill his place.

B. H. Roberts.

LESSONS IN LIFE.

AMONG the many grand lessons in life, to be learned by association with our fellows, by the labors we have to perform, and by the trials we have to endure, is patience to endure whatever is cast to our lot. With this we may also class, a determination to succeed with the help of God, diligence to do to the best of our ability all that is required of us by our circumstances and capabilities, and a resolution not to be satisfied with what will pass with only a careless and indifferent effort on our part. Whatever our position, or trade, or labor, let them be done in earnest. When one gets to the top round of the ladder, for which a struggle should always be made, there be prepared to battle against the envy and jealousy of meaner minds, or be fortified against their petty spites.

Secondly, learn to do good, not for fame, nor praise, nor any reward that

you expect to get in this life, but for the consciousness of having done right and for the approval of our Heavenly Father. If good deeds meet with ingratitude, the consciousness of having done deeds of kindness with unselfish motives, with loving hearts and willing hands, is reward enough, even if the doer's motives are misjudged. When little demons are whispering all around, seeking to fill the mind with sad and gloomy thoughts, with selfish and envious thoughts, with slanderous, uncharitable thoughts, drive them forth, command them to depart. They come from the same source as the accusers of the brethren, and are continually seeking to sow discord and strife. Give them no room to dwell within the mind and heart. Banish them with your own will, seeking aid from above. Go with faith, in all humility, and implore that such influences and whisperings may