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Moroni, A Sketch of the Nephite Republic, X

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Abstract: Roberts discusses Moroni's epistle to Pahoran, accusing the latter of disloyalty and destruction if he did not live up to the obligations of his office. The revolution of Pachus and the monarchists is revealed in Pahoran's response, and Moroni goes to the besieged chief judge's aid, putting down the erstwhile rebellion. Roberts offers thoughts on the seeming harshness of the Nephites' capital punishment of those who rebelled and would not take up arms in defense of their government and their people. Following the defeated insurrection, Moroni is able to send reinforcements to his beleaguered fellows.

Mutual Improvement Associations, President Young gave us the keynote in his remarks wherein he said, "It is mutual improvement for the youth of Zion, the establishment of individual testimony of the truth and of the magnitude of the great latter-day work; the development of the influence within them that has been conferred upon them by the laying on of the hands of the servants of God; the cultivation of that knowledge and the application of the principles of the great science of life."

We may understand its mission and object to be the accomplishment of the greatest amount of good to the greatest number; to effect the reformation deemed necessary among the youth of Zion, and the imparting of such instruction as will fit and qualify them for positions of responsibility in the Church and Kingdom of God upon the earth. Its object is to educate the youth of Zion in the ways of God, and to inspire within their hearts that confidence and that faith that has been exemplified by their parents during the Church's history. The results of the organization of these associations are too apparent to need much comment from me. That they have been beneficial and have created a noble influence among the

young can be testified to by thousands of the Latter-day Saints; that they have been beneficial in the spread of the work of God among the nations can be attested to by hundreds of young men who have been abroad proclaiming the Gospel. And I can truly state that the degree of confidence and faith in the work of God that has been given to me in these associations, I have certainly felt the benefit of in going abroad.

And to-day, on what may fittingly be termed the fifteenth anniversary of the establishment of these associations, we number about fifteen thousand members. The benefits and blessings flowing to the young have not only been felt in our territory, but also in Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada and Idaho, and the organizations have now become a factor and an influence among this people, to those who are engaged in the great work.

It is a great and a noble work, and I feel in a conclusion to pray that God will bless His servants who are interested in this labor, that it may go forth and fulfill its mission in righteousness, the greatest and grandest that has been revealed to mortal man.

Josiah Burrows.

MORONI.

A SKETCH OF THE NEPHITE REPUBLIC.

It was in the commencement of the thirtieth year of the republic that Moroni received the epistle of Helaman, giving the account of the war in the south-west. His heart was made glad with the successes that had been won by the faithfulness of Helaman and his army; but he trembled for his safety, since there was such a disproportion between his forces and the amount of territory he had to guard, and the cities he had to maintain. The tardiness of the government in sending men and supplies, as reported by Helaman, was also a source of anxiety to him. He began to have misgivings as to the integrity of the officials at the head of the government;

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but all he could see his way to do at the time was to send the chief judge an epistle, urging him to send troops and supplies to Helaman, that the valiant labor he and his army had performed might not be in vain, by reason of those cities he had taken falling again into the hands of the enemy.

Having thus provided, as he supposed, for reinforcements to be sent to Helaman, he turned his attention to plans for the expulsion of the enemy from the east. Ere he could go against them, however, news came to him that the city Nephi had been taken by the forces of Ammoron—news which was soon confirmed by fugitive Nephites from that city. This

circumstance further increased his anxiety in relation to the state of affairs at the head of government, as he was under the impression that the authorities had sent a sufficient force of men to maintain the city, and, therefore, had no particular anxiety respecting it. But the government had failed to send the men; because of their neglect an important city had fallen an easy prey to the enemy, who, flushed with success, was massing his forces in that quarter and menacing Moroni's army with destruction—so great was their number.

This was a dark day for the commander-in-chief, and for his chief lieutenants, for they shared his anxieties; and they began to fear—because of the wickedness of the people—that they would fall into the hands of their enemies. These anxieties soon turned to anger in the breast of Moroni. His soul was vexed beyond measure at the indifference of the government to the freedom of the country, and in his anger he wrote a stinging epistle to Pahoran, the chief judge, and to all those who had been chosen by the people to manage and govern the affairs of the war. He reminded them that they had been appointed to gather together men and arm them, and to send them wherever they might be needed to beat back the invader. He then referred to the exertions and sufferings of his own and Helaman's armies, and the thousands that had been slain, and did not hesitate to tell them that the blood of these thousands would come upon their heads for vengeance. He demanded to know the reason of their neglect, of their thoughtlessness. "Can you think," said he, "to sit upon your thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor, while your enemies are spreading the work of death around you? Yea, while they are murdering thousands of your brethren? * * * * Could ye suppose that ye could sit upon your thrones and because of the exceeding goodness of God, ye could do nothing, and He would deliver you? Behold, if ye have supposed this, ye have supposed in vain. * * * * Or do ye suppose that the Lord will still deliver us while we sit upon our thrones, and do

not make use of means which the Lord has provided for us?"

I have several times in these chapters spoken of the implicit faith of Moroni; the above quotation shows also that he was one who coupled works with his faith. It was that fact which made his faith so perfect. He evidently believed the doctrine that God helps those who help themselves: that

Who would be free,
Themselves must strike the blow.

But to return to this epistle. Moroni suspected that the king-men—the Monarchist party—were in some way connected with the neglect of the government, and attributed the calamities which had happened during the war to that party; for had it not been for the divisions they created, and the civil war their conduct provoked, the Nephites with united forces could easily have driven back the invaders of their country. "But why should I say much concerning this matter," said Moroni to the authorities, "for we know not but what ye yourselves are seeking for authority? We know not but what ye are traitors to your country. Or is it because ye are in the heart of our country, and ye are surrounded by security?" But whatever might be the cause of their failure to supply soldiers and provisions to carry on the struggle for liberty, he told them except they repented and became active in the cause of freedom—"Behold," said he, "it will be expedient that we contend no more with the Lamanites until we have first cleansed our inward vessel; yea, even the great head of our government." There was no mistaking his language; but if anything was needed to add emphasis to it, surely this direct threat to the government gives it:—

"Except ye grant mine epistle, and come out and show unto me a true spirit of freedom, and strive to strengthen and fortify our armies, and grant unto them food for their support, behold I will leave a part of my freemen to maintain this part of our land; and I will leave the strength and blessings of God upon them, that none other power can operate against them—and this because of their exceed-

ing faith and their patience in their tribulations—and I will come unto you, and if there be any among you that have a desire for freedom, yea, if there be even a spark of freedom remaining, behold I will stir up insurrections among you, even until those who have desires to usurp power and authority will have become extinct. * * * The time is now at hand, that except ye do bestir yourselves in the defense of your country, and your little ones, the sword of justice doth hang over you; yea, and it shall fall upon you and visit you even to your utter destruction.”

He agreed to wait for a season, to give them time to send him men and supplies, but repeated, that if they were not forthcoming in reasonable time, he would be upon them. The closing sentences of this remarkable communication are:—“Behold, I am Moroni, your chief captain. I seek not for power, but to pull it down. I seek not for the honor of the world, but for the glory of my God, and the freedom and welfare of my country.”

It turned out that Moroni was right in his suspicions respecting the Monarchist party being the cause of the failure of the government to support the army; for in an epistle from the chief judge, Pahoran, received in reply to his, he learned that the Monarchists, taking advantage of the troublous times and the absence of so many of the freemen in the army, had risen in rebellion against the government, driven Pahoran from Zarahemla and crowned one Pachus king. Nor was this the worst: these Monarchists had held communication with the enemy, with Ammoron, and had entered into an alliance with him to betray their country, and deliver it into his hands provided—Oh, what a price—provided Pachus should be made king over the Nephites, when that people should have been subdued. That is, the Nephite republic was to be degraded to a subordinate monarchy—tributary to the Lamanite kingdom—with the traitor Pachus for king!

Pahoran, when compelled to leave Zarahemla, raised his standard at the

city of Gideon, and there the freemen were gathering to him on the receipt of Moroni's epistle. Under the circumstances existing when it was received, it is scarcely necessary to say that its severity, its censure, and its threats gave no offense to Pahoran; rather did it make him glad. It had been a question in his mind whether it would be proper for him to take up arms against the Monarchists and suppress by such violent methods their rebellion. But Moroni's statement—or shall I say the dictators revelation, for through him the word of the Lord came, and throughout this whole business Moroni seems to possess superior authority to Pahoran—Moroni's “Behold the Lord saith unto me, if those whom ye have appointed your governors do not repent of their sins and iniquities, ye shall go up to battle against them”—decided the question for him; and he sent word for Moroni to come to him with such assistance as he could bring with him or raise en route. He suggested the leaving of Lehi and Teancum in command of the army of the east, with authority to carry on the war during his absence. “In your epistle,” said the chief judge, “you have censured me, but it mattereth not, I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart. I, Pahoran, do not seek for power save only to retain my judgment seat, that I may preserve the rights and liberty of my people. My soul standeth fast in that liberty, in the which God hath made us free. * * * * * And we will go speedily against those dissenters in the strength of our God, according to the faith which is in us.”

No sooner did Moroni learn the true state of affairs than he hastened to correct them. To place Lehi and Teancum in charge of the eastern army and give them instructions how to conduct the pending campaign was the work of but a short time; then taking a few followers he started on his way to join Pahoran. Everywhere he raised the standard of liberty and everywhere men flocked to the constantly increasing forces of the patriot, until as he approached Gideon,

they began to swell to the proportions of an army.

He united his forces to those of the chief judge, and then together they started for Zarahemla. The rebellion, however, was not suppressed without the shedding of blood. Pachus, the would-be king, gathered his forces and gave battle to the patriot army at Zarahemla; but victory perched on the banners of Moroni, and the Monarchists were again defeated. Pachus was slain in the battle; and those of his party who survived the battle were tried for treason, and those of them who refused to take up arms in the defence of their country but would fight against it, were executed. At this time also those Monarchists who had been cast into prison at the beginning of the war, to await a more convenient time for their trial, for rebellion—were tried and executed.

"It became expedient," says the Nephite historian, "that this law [doubtless the law against treason] should be strictly observed for the safety of their country; yea, and whosoever was found denying their freedom, was speedily executed according to the law." It may be thought at first sight that this latter clause gives evidence of the existence of a very cruel law, and one that was an infringement on liberty itself. Executed for denying their freedom! Is not a man at liberty to deny his freedom if he so elects? In the Nephite republic, in times of war and rebellion at least, he possessed no such liberty; and it is doubtful if he did at any time. Treating of this matter in a general way, in his excellent work on liberty, John Stewart Mill says, in speaking of one selling himself, or allowing himself to be sold as a slave—"An engagement by which a person should sell himself or allow himself to be sold as a slave would be null and void; [in a free country] neither enforced by law nor by opinion. * * * The reason for not interfering, unless for the sake of others, with a person's voluntary acts, is consideration for his liberty. His voluntary choice is evidence that what he chooses is desirable, or at least endurable to him, and his good is on the whole best

provided for by allowing him to take his own means of pursuing it. But by selling himself for a slave, he abdicates his liberty; he foregoes any future use of it beyond that single act. He therefore defeats, in his own case, the very purpose which is the justification of allowing him to dispose of himself—he is no longer free." He then adds these remarks, in which I heartily concur: "The principle of freedom cannot require that he should be free not to be free. It is not freedom, to be allowed to alienate his freedom."

If this view of liberty be taken, the law in the Nephite Republic, which forbade men denying their freedom, was not harsh or destructive of liberty, though the penalty of death may seem severe. But this occurred in a time of war, and may not have been the penalty in a normal state of affairs. Most likely by the Nephite constitution,* as in our own, slavery was made an impossible condition.† And if one sold himself as a slave such a contract was void, it could not be enforced. Under the circumstances in which the Nephites were then placed, too, for a man to abdicate his liberty was a species of treason, and as such, in that time of war, merited the severest punishment.

No sooner had this treasonable insurrection in Zarahemla been suppressed than the commander-in-chief's thoughts turned to the armies on the frontier. He mustered into service twelve thousand men, six thousand of whom with provisions and arms he sent to strengthen Lehi and Teancum; and the remainder, in like manner equipped, he sent to the support of Helaman. *B. H. Roberts.*

*In referring to the Nephite constitution I would not be understood as referring to a written document, such as the Constitution of the United States, but to those laws and customs which obtained among the Nephites, and which taken collectively formed their constitution.

†"Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or in any place subject to their jurisdiction."—XIII. Amendment U. S. Constitution.