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A Sacred History: External Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon, Chapter I, Continued

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Abstract: Uses historical, linguistic, and archaeological evidence to prove the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Basing his facts on research done by noted linguists and archaeologists of the time, the author writes concerning the god Quetzalcoatl, religious customs and ruins of advanced civilizations, comparisons between the Hebrew and Mayan languages, and the Egyptian hieroglyphic writings. Shreeve also tells of similarities in biblical beliefs between early people of both the western and eastern hemispheres and explains why Joseph Smith was incapable of writing the Book of Mormon without divine aid.

A SACRED HISTORY.

External Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon.

BY THOMAS A. SHREEVE.

Chapter I, Continued.

JOSEPH SMITH had neither the time, the money nor the education which would have been necessary to enable him to originate the Book of Mormon. He never came in contact with any person or with any book which could have given him a hint upon which to found a fiction like the Book of Mormon is alleged to be by its opponents. In fact the most learned scientists and antiquarians of America in the year 1827 (when Joseph received the plates), were just beginning to get a hint of the archaeological treasures which existed in Central America and in other portions of the Western Hemisphere. Certainly what the most advanced students of science, history and archaeology had not even anticipated, the untaught farm lad could not have known from any of the worldly sources. I believe that it is not too much to say that not even a newspaper mention had been made anywhere in the United States which could have given him a clue to this subject.

Joseph Smith had not been a student of theology, in a worldly sense. At 14 years of age, as we see by a perusal of his biography, he was attracted to the subject of religion because of the intense revival of feeling at that hour near his home. But before he could unite himself with any one of the sects he was warned by the Divine visitation to withhold himself from an alliance with any of the false creeds of the day. It is shown by his own words, as also by an abundance of corroboratory evidence, that from this moment he ceased to affiliate with the so-called religious people of that locality. Therefore, not having any considerable store of books, not coming into active contact with the country ministers, not having any means of communication with theological writers or thinkers, he certainly was unable to obtain any worldly hints as to the sublime faith which is outlined in the Book of Mormon.

There is another proof quite as positive as all which have preceded; and this proof is furnished by the moral character of the young man Joseph Smith. A person who could have deliberately set to work at the age of 14 years, and have followed his course during the fourteen years next ensuing—to deceive his father and mother, his brothers and sisters, and all those who loved him and with whom he was in daily association; a person who could have developed from his own mind the Book of Mormon and a false system of religion to mislead thousands of his fellow-men, must have been a dark-minded and versatile villain. Was Joseph Smith this kind of a creature? No. Until very recently the worst thing that has been alleged against him was that he was ignorant, indolent and mingled with low company. Even these criticisms are easily disproved, because it is shown incontestibly that no one of them was ever uttered against him until after he had made known to an envious minister of his neighborhood that he had been the recipient of an angelic visitation. The truth is that, so far from being led by evil influences, and so far from his having the aid of Satan in the development of this work, Joseph Smith was one of the brightest and healthiest boys, physically and mentally, which New England ever produced. He had no morbid fancies; he did not nurse any evil intent or

project in solitude; his life was open as the day; his conduct, his circumstances and his character all unite to prove that he was among the last persons who could possibly have been party to any such wicked deception as the Book of Mormon must be, if the allegations of its opponents are true.

After Joseph Smith obtained possession of the plates—after he had endured such persecution as made his longer residence at Manchester unsafe for himself and his sacred charge—he went into Pennsylvania, and there began the translation of the work by the aid of the Urim and Thummim. Who were his assistants? Did he there, early in this work of translation, encounter any man who possessed the ability to originate the Book of Mormon? Such a thing is not even suspected, even by the most sanguine opponents of the work. The person who aided him most, and was most in his company at this time, was Martin Harris; and this man was but a representative of all those who surrounded Joseph: plain, uncultured and comparatively ignorant, so far as books and scholarship were concerned. The first educated person with whom Joseph Smith came into personal contact was Oliver Cowdery; but their first meeting did not take place until Joseph had labored nearly a year and a half in the work of translation, and until he had been possessed of the plates more than that time. Oliver Cowdery, though a school teacher, had no general knowledge such as would have been necessary to fit him for the authorship of the Book of Mormon. His sole duty in his profession was to teach the rudiments of education; and certainly he could not be compared in point of general attainments and diversified knowledge to the average village school-teacher of to-day. And how impossible it would be for any young man or woman, even a graduate of a normal college, to originate a work like the Book of Mormon!

The translation of the Book of Mormon was completed and given to the world long before Joseph Smith encountered Sidney Rigdon; and during the interval of time between his first visit from Oliver Cowdery and the publication of the completed book, it is not shown that he ever met, or had any extensive communication from, any person possessing greater worldly knowledge than Oliver Cowdery possessed. The only communication, direct or indirect, which Joseph Smith had with any scholar during his whole life up to the time that the Book of Mormon was printed and given to the world, came from the visit of Martin Harris to Professors Anthon and Mitchell at New York. And of this visit I shall speak at length in another chapter.

From the foregoing statements, detailed fully, we can deduce a plain and incontrovertible series of facts:

First. The Book of Mormon was given to the world through Joseph Smith.

Second. Joseph Smith had no earthly help in the authorship of the work.

Third. Joseph Smith himself was not its author; and further, his statements of the divine origin of the work must be accepted as true.

So far, this inquiry has related only to Joseph Smith and his connection with the Book of Mormon. To another chapter must be left the question of the history detailed in the Book of Mormon; the plates, and the language with which they were engraved, and the authenticity of that language as a tongue known to ancient inhabitants in these lands.

LET us be watchful against small sins, if we desire to be preserved from greater; for we are trained by sins of weaker evidence to sins of greater guilt.