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

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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.

An eminent writer has said that "he who reigns within himself, and rules passions, desires and fears, is more than a king," and certainly the noble Sir Isaac Newton proved in more instances than the one here related that not the least among the many God-given qualities he possessed was that of self-command—without the possession of which no person, however intelligent or skillful can become truly great.

After the destruction of his valuable compilations this learned man lived some forty years, but we find no record of his having made any more great discoveries during this time.

An incident somewhat similar to this of Newton occurred in the experience of Edward Livingston who was appointed in the year 1821 by the legislature of Louisiana to revise the entire code of criminal law of the State. For two years he worked almost incessantly upon the allotted task and wrote out the matter in both the French and English languages. It was completed, the finishing touches having been applied and some fifty or sixty pages had been copied and placed in the hands of the printer.

One night the compiler sat up until one o'clock in order to complete the task of comparing the two papers. He retired well satisfied with his labors but had scarcely fallen asleep before a cry of fire was raised. He rushed to his office whence smoke and flames were issuing, and found both the original and copy of his code reduced to ashes. Indescribable was his dismay though his outward appearance indicated no change. His family who were in the greatest distress at the occurrence, he comforted, and the night following sat up until three o'clock commencing a new compilation. Though at the time sixty years of age, he reproduced in two years that which had been destroyed, and soon thereafter had the pleasure of seeing it in print. Such was the excellence of the work that it gained for Livingston from an English jurist the eulogium that he was "the first legal genius of modern times."

Now, these are examples of self-control which it would be well for our young people to imitate. How often we see boys and girls, and older people are not free from the habit, of meeting disappointments with harsh words and unpleasant looks! And how few there are who cheerfully accept the conditions surrounding them and make the best of every situation! Yet this latter is what should always be done. What has happened cannot be repaired by bitter regrets or passionate expressions. The experiences of the past, bitter though many of them may be, should be used as warnings and lessons for the future. Our cheerfulness and energy should not be overcome by reverses or trials, for all these are necessary to our future happiness and progress, and with the true Latter-day Saint there is no circumstance of life but what has some blessing concealed below its unpleasant exterior. Our young people should learn this lesson and acquire in youth the power of self-control, thus when they grow up they will be masters of themselves and will be equally capable of occupying the position God has designed for His faithful Saints as rulers of others.

BEAUTY OF NATURE—Nature has scattered around us, on every side, and for every sense, an inexhaustible profusion of beauty and sweetness, if we will but perceive it. The pleasures we derive from musical sounds, and the forms of trees, are surely not given us in vain; and if we are constantly alive to these, we can never be in want of subjects of agreeable contemplation, and must be habitually cheerful.

A SACRED HISTORY.

External Evidences of the Truth of the Book of Mormon.

BY THOMAS A. SHREEVE.

Chapter III.

THIS Chapter cannot be better opened than by giving two explanations, which are necessary, that my readers may understand what follows:

1st. The Mayas are a race of people with several branches, inhabiting Yucatan. Their race origin is very ancient; and they have preserved much of their early history in legends. Their civilization was once as great as that of any people in this Hemisphere. Their home is within the circle of the highest civilization described in the Book of Mormon.

2nd. Hieratic writing was the method in use anciently among the priests of Egypt. The priests are said to have kept their records and temple writings in this language. It was considered as a rapid mode of writing hieroglyphics, and belonged especially to the priests, and not to the common people.

Two languages are referred to with especial prominence in the Book of Mormon—Egyptian and Hebrew. Are there any external evidences that such languages were anciently used by any people in this Hemisphere? I think the question can be answered with regard to each language affirmatively; and that no reasonable person can find ground for doubt. Space will not permit the presentation of any considerable number of authorities, but I will quote enough to indicate to the readers of the JUVENILE INSTRUCTOR that the point is well settled. Let us consider first the Egyptian. We have in view now the ancient Egyptian, or the language used and known by Nephi; not Reformed Egyptian, which will receive attention in a later chapter.

One of the most recent works relating to the antiquities of America is "Sacred Mysteries among the Mayas and Quiches," by Dr. Augustus Le Plongeon, a noted archaeologist and explorer. His book bears date May 20th, 1886. He takes the ground that ancient Egyptian civilization came from Central America. But this is simply a conclusion arising from certain facts, upon which everyone may base his own particular theory. While not admitting Le Plongeon's conclusions, I, with everyone else, must be willing to admit the truth of certain of the unquestioned premises upon which he bases his conclusions. Dr. Le Plongeon claims to have discovered a complete hieratic alphabet of the Mayas, and to have found from the numerous mural inscriptions existing that this alphabet is almost identical with the Egyptian hieratic alphabet, according to the famous scholars Champollion, Le Jeune and Bunsen. In his book he gives a comparison of the two alphabets; with the result that a person is almost startled in the examination.

The Maya hieratic alphabet, according to Le Plongeon, consists of twenty-three sounds, (for the alphabet is phonetic). The Egyptian hieratic alphabet, according to Champollion, Le Jeune and Bunsen, consists of twenty-one sounds, (for this alphabet is also phonetic). A in Maya is represented by three different characters. The three Maya characters are entirely distinct from each other, but each one has its counterpart in the three Egyptian characters for A. B in Maya has two different characters; in Egyptian three. The two Maya charac-

ters are identical with two out of the three Egyptian characters. C in Maya has three characters; in Egyptian one; the one Egyptian is very much like one of the three Maya characters. H in Maya has four characters; in Egyptian three. Two of the three Egyptian characters are identical with two of the Maya characters, and the third Egyptian character is almost identical with one of the remaining two Maya characters. I in Maya has one character; in Egyptian one, they are identical. K in Maya has five characters; in Egyptian six. The five Maya characters are almost identical with five of the six Egyptian characters. L in Maya has two characters; in Egyptian three. The two Maya characters may be said to be identical with two of the three Egyptian. M in Maya has three characters; in Egyptian four. The three Maya characters have their almost exact counterpart in the Egyptian. N in Maya has four characters; in Egyptian two. The two Egyptian characters are exactly like two of the four Mayas. O in each language has but one character—almost identical. P in Maya has three characters; in Egyptian two. The two Egyptian characters are identical with two of the three Mayas. PP in Maya has two characters; in Egyptian two—one pair being identical, and the other bearing close relationship. T has three characters in Maya; in Egyptian three—one pair being identical, and the others bearing some resemblance to each other. TH has one character in each language—identical. U in Maya has three; in Egyptian one. The Egyptian character is the exact counterpart of one of the three Mayas. X in Maya has two; in Egyptian three. The resemblance in this one case, and in this case only, is slight. Y has three characters in Maya; two in Egyptian. The two Egyptian characters are exactly like two of the Mayas. Z and CH in Maya are absent from the Egyptian alphabet. Another form of CH in Maya has one character; in Egyptian two. The one Maya is exactly like one of the two Egyptian. TZ has one character in each—identical. G in Maya has two; in Egyptian one. The one Egyptian is almost the exact counterpart of one of the Maya characters. E in Maya has one; in Egyptian one. The two characters are alike, except that where the Egyptian sign has two strokes the Maya has but one.

Le Plongeon is undoubtedly accepted as authority; but to show that he is not alone in his theory I quote from the famous work, "Atlantis, the Antediluvian World," by Ignatius Donnelly. This work has for some time been recognized as high authority. It will be seen that Donnelly, some years ago, when he wrote, approaches the discovery that Le Plongeon has just completed and given in a perfected state to the world:

"It would appear as if both the Phœnicians and Egyptians drew their alphabet from a common source, of which the Maya is a survival, but did not borrow from one another. They followed out different characteristics in the same original hieroglyph, as, for instance, in the letter B. And yet I have shown that the closest resemblances exist between the Maya alphabet and the Egyptian signs—in the C, H, T, I, K, M, N, O, Q, and S—eleven letters in all; in some cases, as in the N and K, the signs are identical; the K, in both alphabets, is not only a serpent, but a serpent with a protuberance or convolution in the middle. If we add to the above the B and V, referred to in the 'Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society,' we have thirteen letters out of sixteen in the Maya and Egyptian related to each other. Can any theory of accidental coincidences account for this? And it must be remembered that these resemblances are found between *the only two phonetic systems of alphabet in the world.*

"Let us suppose that two men agree that each shall construct apart from the other a phonetic alphabet of sixteen letters: that they shall employ only simple forms—combinations of straight or curved lines—and that their signs shall not in anywise resemble the letters now in use. They go to work apart: they have a multitudinous array of forms to draw from—the thousand possible combinations of lines, angles, circles and curves; when they have finished, they bring their alphabets together for comparison. Under such circumstances it is possible that out of the sixteen signs one sign might appear in both alphabets; there is one chance in one hundred that such might be the case; but there is not one chance in five hundred that this sign should in both cases represent the same sound. It is barely possible that two men working thus apart should hit upon two or three identical forms, but altogether impossible that these forms should have the same significance; *and by no stretch of the imagination can it be supposed that in these alphabets so created, without correspondence, thirteen out of sixteen signs should be the same in form and the same in meaning.*"

Having incontestably, as I think, proved that the Egyptian method of writing was once known and used for inscriptions upon this continent; I would like to have some opponent of this work tell me what he thinks of the coincidence that Joseph Smith should have selected Egyptian as the original form of writing, in which a part of the Book of Mormon is engraved, out of the countless languages which have been used since the earth was first inhabited. The answer which I have heard, that it was only an accident, is scarcely fit to be offered by a reasonable man, or to be entertained for an instant. In the first place, Joseph Smith knew nothing about languages except his own, and comparatively little about that, when he first saw the plates upon which the Book of Mormon was engraved. But if he had known as much as the wisest philologist then living, he could not have known that Egyptian would be the language proper to select for this purpose, because no antiquarian, however deeply versed in the hidden things pertaining to ancient civilization in these lands, knew anything definite concerning the inscriptions existing in Central America. Long after 1827, the world was still in complete ignorance on this subject; and it is clearly proven from the works that I have referred to that the question was not definitely and fully settled until May, 1886. We have seen that Donnelly is on the verge of the discovery made and given to the world by Le Plongeon. The copy which I have of "Atlantis" was copyrighted in 1882—fifty-five years after Joseph Smith received the plates; and Donnelly had not even then discovered the entire truth. I do not understand how anything more convincing could be offered on this point.

The main fact being proved, one of the details suggests itself, and may be of interest. According to the Book of Mormon the Egyptian language, which was known to Nephi and which was transmitted undoubtedly by him to those who succeeded him as leaders and historians among his people, answered for them very much the same purpose which Latin answered to the English and French people of two centuries ago. It was a very common practice in the 17th century, and even later in England and France, to make inscriptions on public structures, churches, courts of law, hospitals, monuments, etc., in the Latin language; and this practice is not entirely obsolete even in this day. According to archaeologists, where are traces of the Egyptian language found in this Hemisphere? Upon the ruins of temples, and other public buildings. Just as Latin is unknown to the majority of the people of England

or France to-day, so is it more than possible that this Egyptian hieratic was not the common language of the people who inhabited Central America when those inscriptions were made. It was probably the language known only to a priesthood, or to the governing powers.

Now we proceed to the other language—Hebrew. Again I quote from "Atlantis:"

"One of the most ancient races of Central America is the Chiapenec, a branch of the Mayas. They claim to be the first settlers of the country. They came, their legends tell us, from the East, from beyond the sea.

"And even after the lapse of so many thousand years most remarkable resemblances have been found to exist between the Chiapenec language and the Hebrew."

In "North Americans of Antiquity," one Senor Melgar, a Mexican scholar, gives a number of words from the Chiapenec and the Hebrew, with their English equivalent. I quote it as follows:

ENGLISH:	CHIAPENEC:	HEBREW:
Son,	Been,	Ben.
Daughter,	Batz,	Bath.
Father,	Abagh,	Abba.
Star in Zodiac,	Chimax,	Chimah.
King,	Molo,	Maloe.
Name applied to Adam.	Abagh,	Abah.
Afflicted,	Chanam,	Chanan.
God,	Elab,	Elab.
September,	Tsiquin,	Tischiri.
More,	Chic,	Chi.
Rich,	Chabin,	Chabic.
Son of Seth,	Enot.	Enos.
To give,	Votan,	Votan.

If this identity of words does not show clearly that the Maya people must at one time have known Hebrew as well as Egyptian, then there is nothing in the science of philology. I go further and assert that, from the similar names applied to Father and Adam, the Chiapenec race not only once used the Hebrew language but once knew the Hebrew religion and the Hebrew history.

Having incontestibly proved, as I think, that the Hebrew language must have been known and used by the Maya people, or a branch of that people; I would like to have some opponent of this work tell me what he thinks of the coincidence that Joseph Smith should have selected Hebrew as the common language of the people about whom he was writing.

Again the answer which I have heard, that it was only an accident, I consider ridiculous. If Joseph Smith had made Hebrew the language of the priests, in which inscriptions would likely be made, and Egyptian the common tongue of the people; even then the coincidence would be startling. But when the Book of Mormon states that Egyptian was the learned language and that Hebrew was the mother tongue of the people, nothing can be said but that it is conclusive. Sectarian ministers and people of the world scoff at the miraculous manner in which we claim the Book of Mormon was brought forth. But when they believe for a moment that such a series of accidents could occur as that an unlearned youth could produce a work developing such wondrous truths, they swallow a greater miracle than all that is recorded in holy history since the days of Adam.

From the foregoing proofs we can summarize three conclusions:

1st. The Book of Mormon speaks of two languages which were known to the people of Nephi—Egyptian, the learned tongue, not in common use; and Hebrew, the mother tongue of that people, used in their daily intercourse with each other.

2nd. Archaeologists and philologists have proved that Egyptian and Hebrew were once used by an ancient people or peoples in this Hemisphere—Egyptian as the learned language, in which inscriptions were made; and Hebrew as the common language of the people.

3rd. The scientific discoveries developing the fact last stated had not been made at the time that Joseph Smith gave to the world his translation of the Book of Mormon. Therefore, he could not, of his own knowledge, or by the aid of all the human learning in the earth, have originated any such statements; for there was not a mortal man on the face of the globe who knew these facts.

TOPICS OF THE TIMES.

BY THE EDITOR.

IT is a remarkable feature in the experience of the Latter-day Saints that, though they have had their troubles and their misfortunes, and been made the victims of plots, they have always come out of their difficulties stronger and more influential than they were when they entered upon them. In the language of common life, they would be called a lucky people, and are successful in whatever they undertake—that is, they reach the point, sooner or later, for which they start.

This seemed to be a characteristic of the Jews; and I am very forcibly reminded of the parallel between our position now and the position of the Jews under Ahasuerus, in the days of Esther.

There was a man in those days by the name of Haman, who had conceived a violent antipathy to the Jews, and who gave them the same character, in speaking of them to Ahasuerus, that the enemies of the "Mormons" now give them.

He said: "Their laws are diverse from all people: neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them."

He advocated their destruction, and proposed to give a large sum of money himself to the king's treasury in order to accomplish that end. The edict which he desired was issued, and he took care to arrange for the plunder that would follow their destruction. He doubtless expected to get a good share of that, besides having the money that he had offered the king, and which the king refused to take. I have no doubt that he counted with entire certainty on accomplishing his end—with as much certainty as the authors and advocates of the Edmunds-Tucker law from this Territory did as to the results they would achieve by its passage.

By a remarkable interposition of Providence the blow which was aimed at the destruction of the Jews was averted, and the principal object of Haman's enmity—Mordecai—became the most honored man in the kingdom. Then Haman's wise men and his wife told him that.

"If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him."

It seems that the Jews had the credit then of being a fortunate people, and even their enemies recognized the fact that the plots which were framed against them did not succeed.