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Two Outstanding Features of Book of Mormon History, Part I

Author(s): Janne M. Sjodahl

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Abstract: Discusses the determination of the people of Ammon not to defend themselves against the Lamanite attack. Some Indian traditions reflect this peaceful approach to war. The united order was practiced among the Nephites after the Savior's visit. Indian traditions hold to many of the principles of the united order.

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Two Outstanding Features of Book of Mormon History

By J. M. Sjodahl

Part I

In the historical portions of the Book of Mormon, there are two outstanding features that deserve special study. One is the determination of the people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi not to defend themselves against the attacking Lamanites, but to meet death as martyrs for the cause of peace. The other is the long era of Millennial harmony that prevailed among the people here after the appearance of our Lord and the establishment of his church.

The Peace Movement. Concerning the first of these features we read in Alma 24:5-18, as follows:

"Now when Ammon and his brethren and all those who had come up with him saw the preparations of the Lamanites to destroy their brethren, they came forth to the land of Midian, and there Ammon met all his brethren; and from thence they came to the land of Ishmael that they might hold a council with Lamoni and also with his brother Anti-Nephi-Lehi, what they should do to defend themselves against the Lamanites.

"Now there was not one soul among all the people who had been converted unto the Lord that would take up arms against their brethren: nay, they would not even make any preparations for war; yea, and also their king commanded them that they should not.

"Now, these are the words which he said unto the people concerning the matter: I thank my God, my beloved people, that our great God has in goodness sent these our brethren, the Nephites, unto us to preach unto us, and to convince us of the traditions of our wicked fathers.

"And behold, I thank my great God that he has given us a portion of his Spirit to soften our hearts, that we have opened a correspondence with these brethren, the Nephites.

"And behold, I also thank my God, that by opening this correspondence we have been convinced of our sins, and of the many murders which we have committed.

"And I also thank my God, yea, my great God, that he hath granted unto us that we might repent of these things, and also that he hath forgiven us of those our many sins and murders which we have committed, and taken away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son.

"And now behold, my brethren, since it has been all that we could do (as we were the most lost of all mankind) to repent of all our sins and the many murders which we have committed, and to get God to take them away from our hearts, for it was all we could do to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stain—

"Now, my best beloved brethren, since God hath taken away our stains, and our swords have become bright, then let us stain our swords no more with the blood of our brethren.

"Behold, I say unto you, Nay, let us retain our swords that they be not stained with the blood of our brethren; for perhaps, if we should stain our swords again they can no more be washed bright through the blood of the Son of our great God which shall be shed for the atonement of our sins.

"And the great God has had mercy on us, and made these things known unto us that we might not perish; yea, and he has made these things known unto us beforehand, because he loveth our souls as well as he loveth our children; therefore, in his mercy he doth visit us by his angels, that the plan of salvation might be made known unto us as well as unto future generations.

"Oh, how merciful is our God! And now behold, since it has been as much as we could do to get our stains taken away from us, and our swords are made bright, let us hide them away that they may be kept bright, as a testimony to our God at the last day, or at the day that we shall be brought to stand before him to be judged, that we have not stained our swords in the blood of our brethren since he imparted his word unto us and has made us clean thereby.

"And now, my brethren, if our brethren seek to destroy us, behold we will hide away our swords, yea, even we will bury them deep in the earth that they may be kept bright, as a testimony that we have never used them, at the last day; and if our brethren destroy us, behold, we shall go to our God and shall be saved.

"And now it came to pass that when the king had made an end of these sayings, and all the people were assembled together they took their swords, and all the weapons which were used for the shedding of man's blood, and they did bury them up deep in the earth.

"And this they did, it being in their view a testimony to God, and also to men, that they never would use weapons again for the shedding of man's blood; and this they did, vouching and covenanting with God, that rather than shed the blood of their brethren they would give up their own lives; and rather than take away from a brother they would give unto him; and rather than spend their days in idleness they would labor abundantly with their hands."

The evident lesson of this remarkable historical incident is this, that the doctrine of non-resistance, which our Lord and his apostles proclaimed;¹ when carried out in practice, even in the

¹Matt. 5:38-42; Rom. 12:17-21.

face of death, is a conquering, regenerating, irresistible force.

It is all the more remarkable to find this distinctively Christian

doctrine set forth so forcibly and clearly in the Book of Mormon, as, at the time when this sacred volume was published in its modern dress, there were very few advocates of the cause of the Prince of Peace in the world, and it is a question whether the youthful Prophet Joseph, in his rural home, had even heard of such a thing as disarmed patriotism. If he had heard of the stand taken by the Quakers on that question, he had heard of it as an error of one of the sects, all of whom had gone astray, and not as something pleasing in the sight of God. It is quite certain that he, at that time, knew nothing of the views of Erasmus, of Grotius, of Emanuel Kant, or Henry IV, on peace and arbitration, and as for peace societies, they were unknown at that time. The Prophet Joseph could not have invented that story. Nor could anybody else.

And yet it is a natural, necessary part of the narrative. The Book of Mormon would not have contained "the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ"² if this part of it had been absent; for the problem of which it suggests the solution, is one inseparably connected with the salvation of the world through the gospel.

An Indian Peace Society. To the student of the Book of Mormon the question, Is there in Indian history any evidence that the American aborigines ever were peacefully disposed, as the Anti-Nephi-Lehis are represented to have been? is both interesting and important. Were not the Indians always a cruel, blood-thirsty race?

For a striking answer to that question, let us turn to a leaf of history of the Iroquois.

These, at the time of the first explorations of the country, inhabited the shores of the St. Lawrence river in the vicinity of the present sites of Quebec and Montreal; also the state of New York, except the lower Hudson valley. In this state they were known as the Five Nations. The Cherokees, the Hurons or Wyandots, the Mohawks, the Neutral Nation, the Senecas, the Susquehannas and the Tuscaroras belonged to this famous stock, which, according to Dr. Brinton, is not surpassed, in physical qualities, by any in America, while, at the same time, it stands very high intellectually.

In the 16th century, five tribes of Iroquois Indians formed a league for the purpose of putting an end to bloodshed and establishing lasting peace among men, on the basis of justice and righteousness.³ Where did that idea have its root, if not in the traditions of their fathers?

The Chief Actors in This Drama. Three men and one woman were the leading actors in the events that culminated in

²Doc. and Cov. 20:9.

³*A Constitutional League of Peace in the Stone Age of America*, by J. N. B. Hewitt, Smithsonian Report for 1918, pp. 527-45.

the attempted league for peace. They were Deganawida, Hiawatha, Djigonsasen and Atotarho. Much of what is known of these characters is myth. But the historical facts are none the less clear.

Deganawida's birth was announced to his grandmother in dreams and visions, and was attended by many wonders. But, as the old lady had been told in a dream that the child when grown up would destroy the nation, it was decided to have him done away with at birth. He was, therefore, thrust into the water of a frozen stream and left to perish. But the next morning, the mother and grandmother found the child unharmed between them. The attempt to destroy the child was repeated, but without avail. He was then permitted to live.

When grown up, he informed the women that he must leave them, because he had a great mission to perform in the lands south of the great lakes. So he left and became a prophet, a statesman and a law-maker.

The Hiawatha of this narrative was, at first, according to one tradition, a cannibal. One day he had brought home a human corpse for food, but was struck with the horrible enormity of the habit. Deganawida had climbed to the top of the lodge and was peering through the smoke hole. His face was reflected in the pot, and when Hiawatha saw those noble features, he was struck with remorse. Deganawida then descended, went forward to meet him, and preached his message of peace and righteousness to him. Hiawatha became a loyal and enthusiastic disciple of Deganawida. He undertook several important missions and labored with great success.

Djigonsasen was a chieftainess of the Neutral nation (or tribe), then very powerful and warlike. She was the first convert to the gospel of peace of Deganawida, and became a powerful help to his remarkable cause.

Atotarho (also written Watototarho) is described as a wizard and a sorcerer, he was an Onondaga chief, who was feared far and near. He became the bitter opponent of Deganawida and Hiawatha. He is said to have murdered the children of the latter.

But, thanks to the effects of Deganawida, Hiawatha and Djigonsasen, the league was formed. It was a peaceful revolution in the methods, the scope, the form and the purpose of the governments of the peoples that joined, which might have had great future possibilities.

The description of the construction and scope of this remarkable organization is best given in the words of Mr. Hewitt himself:

"The dominant motive for the establishment of the League of the

Five Iroquois Tribes was the impelling necessity to stop the shedding of human blood by violence, through the making and ratifying of a universal peace by all the known tribes of men, to safeguard human life and health and welfare. Moreover, it was intended to be a type or model of government for all tribes alien to the Iroquois. To meet this pressing need for a durable, universal peace these reformers proposed and advocated a constitutional form of government as the most effective in the attainment of so desirable an end.

"The founders of the league, therefore, proposed and expounded as the requisite basis of all good government three broad 'double' doctrines or principles. The names of these principles in the native tongues vary dialectically, but the three notable terms expressed in Onondaga mean: First (a) sanity of mind and the health of the body; and, (b) peace between individuals and between organized bodies or groups of persons. Second (a) righteousness in conduct and its advocacy in thought and in speech; and (b) equity or justice, the adjustment of rights and obligations. Third (a) physical strength or power, as military force or civil authority; and (b) the orenda or magic power of the people or of their institutions and rituals, having mythic and religious implications. Six principles in all. The constructive results of the control and guidance of human thinking and conduct in the private, the public, and the foreign relations of the peoples so leagued by these six principles, the reformers maintained, are the establishment and the conservation of what is reverently called the Great Commonwealth, the Law of Equity and Righteousness and Well-being, of all known men. It is thus seen that the mental grasp and outlook of these prophet-statesmen and states-women of the Iroquois looked out beyond the limits of tribal boundaries to a vast sisterhood and brotherhood of all the tribes of men, dwelling in harmony and happiness. This indeed was a notable vision for the Stone Age of America.

"Some of the practical measures that were put in force were the checking of murder and bloodshed in the ferocious blood-feud by the legal tender of the prescribed price of the life of a man or a woman—the tender by the homicide and his clan for accidentally killing such a person was 20 strings of wampum, 10 for the dead man and 10 for the forfeited life of the homicide; but if the dead person were a woman, the legal tender was 30 strings of wampum, because the value of a woman's life to the community was regarded as double that of a man. And cannibalism, or the eating of human flesh, was legally prohibited. Even Hiawatha forswore this abominable practice before taking up the work of forming the league.

"The institution of the condoling and installation council was important and most essential to the maintenance of the integrity of their state, for the ordinances of the league constitution required that the number of the chiefs in the federal council should be kept intact. So to the orenda, or magic power, believed to emanate and flow from the words, the chants and songs, and the acts of this council, did the statesmen and the ancients of the Iroquois peoples look for the conservation of their political integrity and for the promotion of their welfare.

"So potent and terrible was the orenda of the ritual of the mourning installation council regarded, that it was thought imperative to hold this council only during the autumn or winter months. Since its orenda dealt solely with the effects of death and with the restoration and preservation of the living from death, it was believed that it would be ruinous and destructive to the growing seeds, plants, and fruits, were this council held during the days of birth and growth in spring and in summer. To overcome the power of death, to repair his destructive work, and to restore to its normal potency the orenda or magic power of the stricken

father side or mother side of the league, and so making the entire league whole, were some of its motives.⁴

"In eulogizing their completed labors the founders of the league represented and described it as a great human tree of flesh and blood, noted for size and length of leaf, which was also represented as being set up on a great white mat—that is to say, on a broad foundation of peace, and whose top pierced the visible sky. It was conceived as having four great white roots composed of living men and women, extending respectively eastward, southward, westward, and northward, among the tribes of men who were urgently invited to unite with the league by laying their heads on the great white root nearest to them. It was further declared that should some enemy of this great tree of flesh and blood approach it and should drive his hatchet into one of its roots, blood indeed would flow from the wound, but it was said further that this strange tree through its orenda would cause that assailant to vomit blood before he could escape very far. In certain laws the federal chiefs are denominated standing trees, who as essential components of the great tree of the league are absorbed in it, symbolically, and who are thus said to have one head, one heart, one mind, one blood, and one dish of food."

The Spirit of Indian Culture. This Iroquois peace league was an embodiment of the very spirit of the highest Indian culture all over the American continents, before it was quenched by the European invasion. Had this not been so, there would have been no conquest of Mexico by Cortez and no overthrow of the Incas of Peru by the Pizarros. Even the terrible Indians who inhabited Tuzulutlan, "the Land of War" north of Guatemala and bordering upon Yucatan, were conquered without bloodshed, by the missionaries under Las Casas, who came to them with the story of the life and death of Christ, in prose and verse.

Hills

By Blanche Burr

Wide plains with winding, clustered trails
 Make traveling easy for the stranger.
 Tall hills half-hid in purple veils
 Are scaled in toil and fraught with danger.

But peaks are goals like guiding stars,
 They're heights of lofty aspiration,
 While plains so level bear no scars
 To guide one to a destination.

And those who only plains traverse
 Will never find themselves rise higher,
 While he who dares the hills adverse
 Will to the peaks draw ever nigher.

⁴See Mr. Hewitt's article on this subject in Holmes Anniversary Volume, Washington, 1916.