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An Interesting Volume

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Abstract: A specific copy of the first edition of the Book of Mormon was used in the conversion process of prominent men such as Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and John P. Green. Describes the format of the first edition and reprints the preface and first page.

THE CONTRIBUTOR.

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

JUNIUS F. WELLS,

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER.

TERMS:

Two Dollars a Year, In Advance.
Single Copy, Twenty Cents.

SALT LAKE CITY, - MAY, 1883.

AN INTERESTING VOLUME.

SOME time since we fortunately came into possession of a copy of the first edition of the Book of Mormon. It is in excellent preservation, the paper being good and but slightly discolored, and the library sheep binding not at all impaired. What makes the copy of particular value, is the fact that it is one of the very first which was distributed after being published. There were a number of copies bound as this one is, taken by some of the Elders, among whom were Hyrum Smith and Samuel H. Smith, brothers of the Prophet, to the villages in western New York for sale. They experienced great difficulty in disposing of them, as the opposition of the religious bigots, who labored so hard to prevent its publication, had led many of the inhabitants in and about Palmyra to engage in a solemn compact not to purchase or read the "Golden Bible," as they called it, or allow any members of their families to do so if it should be issued.

The Elders, therefore, in many instances, left the books to be examined by parties who consented to take them on trial, and called for them again in the course of their travels, perhaps a few weeks after. In this way the copy which converted the Young family was started upon its remarkable proselyting mission.

Elder Samuel H. Smith was sent to Livonia, Livingston County, New York, with a number of the first books that were bound. He was repulsed by the people, and found no sale for the books;

but Mr. John P. Green, a Methodist preacher, consented for him to leave a copy at his house, and said, though he would not purchase it himself, he would take the names of any who might wish to subscribe for it. Samuel writes in his journal the result of this trip, as follows, which he learned on returning several weeks after:

"When I arrived at Mr. Green's, his wife informed me that her husband was absent from home, that there was no prospect of selling my books, and even the one which I had left with them, she expected I would have to take away, as Mr. Green had no disposition to purchase it, although she had read it herself, and was much pleased with it. I then talked with her a short time, and, binding my knapsack upon my shoulders, rose to depart; but, as I bade her farewell, it was impressed upon my mind to leave the book with her. I made her a present of it, and told her that the Spirit forbade my taking it away. She burst into tears, and requested me to pray with her. I did so, and afterwards explained to her the most profitable manner of reading the book which I had left with her; which was, to ask God, when she read it, for a testimony of the truth of what she had read, and she would receive the Spirit of God, which would enable her to discern the things of God. I then left her, and returned home."

The succeeding history of the volume is told by the mother of the Prophet:

"When Mr. Green returned home, his wife requested him to read it, informing him very particularly, with regard to what Samuel had said to her, relative to obtaining a testimony of the truth of it. This, he, for a while, refused to do, but finally yielded to her persuasions, and took the book, and commenced perusing the same, calling upon God for the testimony of His Spirit. The result of which was, that he and Mrs. Green were in a short time baptized. They gave the book to Phineas Young, Mrs. Green's brother, who read it, and commenced preaching it forthwith. It was next handed to Brigham Young, and from

him to Mrs. Murray, his sister, who is also the mother of Heber C. Kimball's wife. They all received the work without hesitancy, and rejoiced in the truth thereof. Joseph Young was at this time in Canada, preaching the Methodist doctrine; but, as soon as Brigham became convinced of the truth of the Gospel, as contained in the Book of Mormon, he went straightway to his brother Joseph, and persuaded him to cease preaching Methodism, and embrace the truth, as set forth in the Book of Mormon, which he carried with him. "Thus was this book the means of convincing this whole family, and bringing them into the Church, where they have continued faithful members. And, through their faithfulness and zeal, some of them have become as great and honorable men as ever stood upon the earth."

A short time before the death of Elder Phineas Young, he met President Joseph F. Smith, and told him that he had something he supposed the latter would be pleased to possess, and soon after presented him with the identical volume described above. It is now in President Smith's library, and is valued very highly by him.

The volume which we have received, through the courtesy of Sister Zina D. H. Young, is a companion volume in style and binding to this historic copy, and was doubtless left in the same manner for perusal, and afterwards purchased by Mr. Chauncy Dresson, of Watertown, New York, from whose family it was purchased by Sister Young.

The first edition of the Book of Mormon presents quite a different appearance to that of the last. Many improvements in the mechanical make-up and typographical features of the work have been made in the succeeding editions. Notably among these is the division of paragraphs into verses, by Apostle Orson Pratt, and the introduction of marginal references. However, whatever changes have been made in the size of type, weight of paper and style of make-up, it is manifest that they have been with an eye single to the employment of the

book in the missionary field, for the size of the book has been diminished, and no English or American edition that has been published since is printed with as large, plain type, or upon as large a sheet as the first, which was issued under the immediate supervision of the Prophet. That the permanent location of so many of the Saints in homes which they expect to forever occupy and their children after them, would justify the publication of a large family edition, say a quarto volume, with copious references, we have no hesitation in predicting, and feel assured that the expression will be reiterated by hundreds throughout the Territory.

As many may not have the pleasure of seeing a copy of the first edition, we shall attempt to give a brief description of the features which distinguish it. The people are familiar with the customary account of its coming forth, as taken from the History of the Prophet Joseph, but from the time when the translation of the plates was finished, the progress of the publication is not so well known.

A few days after the translation was completed, and after the witnesses had received their evidence and testimony, which was at Waterloo, Seneca County, the Prophet and party went to Palmyra, and made arrangements with Egbert B. Grandin, of that town, to print an edition of five thousand copies, the compensation to be three thousand dollars, which was to be paid, one half by Martin Harris and the other half by Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Joseph procured the copyright, and the work of printing progressed with slight interruptions, and some quite malignant annoyances from certain enemies, until it was finally completed.

The first page of this edition contains the title, which, in the language of the Prophet: "Is a literal translation, taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection, or book of plates, which contained the record which has been translated, the language of the whole running the same as all Hebrew writing in general; and said title page is not by any means a modern composi-

tion, either of mine or any other man's who has lived or does live in this generation."

The only words which are modern on this page were:

BY JOSEPH SMITH, JUNIOR,
AUTHOR AND PROPRIETOR.

PALMYRA:

PRINTED BY E. B. GRANDIN, FOR THE AUTHOR.
1830.

On the opposite side of the title page is a transcript of the copyright in full, signed by R. R. Lansing, clerk of the Northern District of New York.

The next two pages contain the following:

PREFACE.

TO THE READER—

As many false reports have been circulated respecting the following work, and also many unlawful measures taken by evil designing persons to destroy me, and also the work, I would inform you that I translated, by the gift and power of God, and caused to be written, one hundred and sixteen pages, the which I took from the Book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon; which said account, some person or persons have stolen and kept from me, notwithstanding my utmost exertions to recover it again—and being commanded of the Lord that I should not translate the same over again, for Satan had put it into their hearts to tempt the Lord their God by altering the words, that they did

read contrary from that which I translated and caused to be written; and if I should bring forth the same words again, or, in other words, if I should translate the same over again, they would publish that which they had stolen, and Satan would stir up the hearts of this generation, that they might not receive this work; but behold, the Lord said unto me, I will not suffer that Satan shall accomplish his evil design in this thing: therefore thou shalt translate from the plates of Nephi, until ye come to that which ye have retained; and behold ye shall publish it as the record of Nephi; and thus I will confound those who have altered my words; I will not suffer that they shall destroy my work; yea, I will shew unto them that my wisdom is greater than the cunning of the Devil. Wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, I have, through his grace and mercy, accomplished that which he hath commanded me respecting this thing. I would also inform you that the plates of which hath been spoken, were found in the township of Manchester, Ontario county, New-York.

THE AUTHOR.

On the opposite page commences the First Book of Nephi. The body of the work contains five hundred and eighty-eight pages, and is followed by the Testimony of the Witnesses, printed on two additional pages with the same sized type. This is the last thing in the volume.

THE INDIAN EMPIRE.

THE reader already knows that the great peninsula of Hindostan, in Southern Asia, with its two hundred millions of souls, and its vast sources of wealth, is ruled absolutely by the English crown. Hindostan has come into English hands as the result of a series of conquests, extending over the past two centuries.

Up to 1868, India (as Hindostan is usually called) was governed by a great

commercial corporation, known as the East India Company. This company established itself there for purposes of trade, more than two hundred years ago. As it grew in wealth, the company began to make military conquests, and to govern the native races thus subjected to its sway, until finally the company found itself the absolute ruler over nearly the entire peninsula. In 1868, however, the government of India was