

## ELDER MORRIS'S LECTURE.

Elder Nephi L. Morris lectured in the Assembly hall Wednesday, his subject being the Book of Mormon; True or False? The story of its discovery; how constructed; internal evidences of its truth; the testimony of the three witnesses. The music was furnished by members of the Tabernacle choir under the direction of Prof. Stephens, and the solo Turn Three Unto Me, was nicely rendered by Miss Mabel Cooper. About the usual number was in attendance.

The speaker in beginning referred to Section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants to show what its believers insisted that it was. They believed it was a record of a fallen people—the ancient inhabitants of this great country. New things, continued the speaker, generally met with opposition and it was so with the Book of Mormon. The main objection to it was that it was new. When Columbus made the declaration that the earth was round he was ridiculed and scoffed at and it was not until he had proved his theory that men believed him. There was a tendency innate in mankind to favor old or familiar things and new things received but very little attention. The tragic scenes at Nauvoo and Carthage were cited to show the opposition which the Church of Jesus Christ in its advent encountered. 'Twas so in ages that are past and gone. John Whiteley, the morning star of the reformation had similar difficulties to meet with, but in our day the opposition was much greater in that the inhabitants of the earth denied even the word of God. The foremost objection urged to the Book of Mormon was that it purported to contain revelation, but that leaving this aside and granting that revelations might continue to come, the book was true, because it came with proper credentials in that the revealed word of the latter-days pronounced its divinity.

Elder Morris cited John the Revelator wherein he forbade taking from or adding to his book. John certainly did not have reference to the New Testament for it was not then written, and even if he had referred to that book he brought condemnation upon himself for having made additions to it in due course of time. In the 14th chapter of Revelation John said he saw another angel flying through the midst of heaven having the everlasting Gospel. The speaker also referred to another saying to show that if the book in question had proper credentials it should be accepted.

On the evening of December 21, 1823, Joseph Smith knelt in fervent prayer before the Lord and asked as to his standing with regard to religious matters. In answer to his prayer the angel Moroni appeared giving him assurance that he had made peace with his Maker and that there was hidden on a certain hillside, gold plates from which a history of the ancient inhabitants of this continent would be translated. Joseph was instructed fully with regard to his position before the Lord and was told that the work which was before him was such that would bring him into world-wide prominence.

The angel appeared to the boy three times during that same night reiterating his former remarks each succeeding time. When the day dawned Joseph went out into the field to work with his father, but as he was greatly fatigued for lack of sleep the latter told him to go back to the house and rest himself. As Joseph was climbing a fence to do as his father had bade him, he stumbled and fell when the angel again appeared unto him and gave him a vision in which he saw the Hill Cumorah where the plates spoken of were hidden. Shortly afterwards Joseph went to the hill and upon ascending it saw two stones such as he had seen in the vision. He procured a lever and raised them exposing to view the box in which the plates were enclosed. He was about to take hold of them but the angel who had again appeared told him to leave them alone at the same time giving him instructions to visit the hill once a year where the angel would meet him to give him further instructions from time to time. Joseph yielded strict obedience to these instructions and on Sept. 22, 1827, four years after the first visit to the hill, Joseph was given charge of the plates and told to translate the characters thereon. Thus many prophecies uttered by ancient Apostles with regard to the rise of the Church in the latter days, were verily fulfilled, and the work was afterwards translated, printed and sent out among the people of the earth. The book in its make-up was such as to stamp it as anything but the writings of modern man. It contained no metaphors nor other modern journalistic distinctions, but was an original work of itself, pure, plain and simple in its language.

The speaker then reverted to the testimony of the three witnesses and told how in fervent prayer they sought the Lord for a testimony as to its divinity, and received it, as testified to by themselves and published in the Book of Mormon. To this testimony each of them subscribed his name. Oliver Cowdery, the first to sign the document, first seen the light of day in Vermont. For some time he was a school teacher, but later he took up the translation of the Book of Mormon with Joseph, he writing the words as the Prophet uttered them. When the work was published Oliver took part in the ministry and was ordained a High Priest, while at one time he presided over the Church in Missouri. Later, however, Oliver fell away and was excommunicated on certain charges which were preferred and proved against him. At a conference held years afterwards, Oliver asked for and was granted leave to speak, at which time he testified to having acted as scribe while the Book of Mormon was being translated. In the year 1848 Oliver was re-admitted into the Church and died in full fellowship, bearing testimony to the divinity of the Book of Mormon up to his last moment.

David Whitmer, the next witness to the Book of Mormon, became associated with the Prophet in the year 1829, and was an active man in the Church for several years. Like Oliver, however, David fell away from the body of the Church and was excommunicated on the sustaining of certain

charges against him. For many years Mr. Whitmer lived a private life in the city of Richmond, Ray county, Mo., and as he grew old, in order to refute a certain statement that was current at the time, he published and signed an affidavit reiterating his testimony to the divinity of the Book of Mormon—a statement which was witnessed and attested to by some of the prominent people of that city.

Martin Harris, the other witness to the book, became acquainted with the Prophet about the same time as the others, and assisted materially in the publication of the book. It was he who took characters from the plates to Prof. Anthon for examination, from whom he received a certificate testifying to their being genuine characters. The professor, however, when he learned that Joseph had received the plates from an angel, asked for the return of the certificate, and upon getting it, tore it to pieces stating at the same time that revelation had all been done away with. Martin was firm in his testimony to the last.

Another witness to the book's divinity—one whose character was above reproach and against whom not a word could be said, although he was cruelly assassinated—was Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the latter days. He like the others had given it out to all the world that the work was one which came through God's holy angels, and one which was also testified to by eight others as to its divinity.

Elder Morris showed that the testimony of these men was not given for any mercenary motives. Engaged as they were in the ministry, they gave all their time and attention to the work, as well as putting forth their means to bring it to the public gaze. They were not deluded because it was not within the power of fraudulently inclined persons to call angels from on high as was the case in this instance. But contrary to the rule in cases of fraud and deceit, Joseph was found rebuking them for making their religion a secondary consideration and when stripped of every vestige of authority, they rose up and reiterated the testimony which years before they had appended their signatures to.

As to the internal evidences of its divinity the speaker called attention to the condition which the world had drifted into during the two thousand years in which the Gospel was unknown to the earth. Hundreds of different religious denominations had sprung up, each one interpreting the Scriptures differently; and this condition all brought about through lack of the word of the Lord to mankind upon the earth. The bringing forth of the Book of Mormon cast this shadow aside and opened up to the minds of those who yielded obedience, a true and proper interpretation of the Scriptures. People had gathered from all the nations of the earth and had testified to the divinity of the book in question, and aside from this the promise was contained in the book itself that whosoever should pray unto the Lord for a testimony of its divinity should receive one.

Elder B. H. Roberts was announced as the speaker for next week, his lecture being a continuation of the same subject.