

"UNKNOWN'S" LAST ATTACK ON THE BOOK OF MORMON.

Editor Tribune:—In reply to my article in The Tribune of Nov. 22, pointing out, in response to his public challenge, some of the great difficulties in the way of accepting Nephi as an ancient prophet of God, and the Book of Mormon as an ancient revelation from God, Elder Roberts begins by finding fault with me for not writing over my full signature. But the reasons he intimates for my not doing so prove altogether too much, and hence, by a logical maxim, prove nothing. For they would prove that those great and high-minded statesmen, Alexander Hamilton, Chief Justice John Jay, and James Madison, acted an unworthy part, and were lacking in courage because, for wise reasons, they conducted those masterly discussions which made up The Fœderalist, over an assumed name.

Then the sarcasm about the rehearsing by more recent writers, of Alexander Campbell's arguments against the Book of Mormon, are "wasted on the desert air," so far as I am concerned, for I have never seen any article or treatise by Campbell on the subject. It would be quite easy to retort and say that if it were not for the writings of Orson Pratt, the more recent defenders of the Book of Mormon would be without ammunition. But that style of arguing amounts to nothing.

Elder Roberts' defense seems to raise new difficulties without really settling any, although it is ingenious and skillful. On general principles, there is no reason why I should not accept the writings of Nephi and the Book of Mormon as readily as my opponent, if they were true. But the reason why I do not, is because of the extent and variety of the evidence against them, only a few points of which can be discussed in a newspaper article. Since my main object is to establish truth, I wish to treat Elder Roberts and his arguments in a fair and candid way.

Let us come now to the main proposition, which is two-fold: Elder Roberts affirms that Nephi was a prophet of God living and writing about 600 B. C., and that the Book of Mormon is a divine revelation.

The evidence compels me to deny both of these propositions and to declare that neither of them is true. Now let us try to find some common ground on which we can stand. As such ground, I offer these two propositions in reference to books in general, which seem to me self-evident: First, any book which professes to be a divine revelation to the people of the present time, and yet reveals nothing which it did not appropriate from some other book or source of knowledge already in the possession of the people, is a spurious book. I use the term "revelation" in its ordinary sense, as referring to divine truth. These are two propositions which I think people of all creeds can stand upon, for I think they contain nothing which is not self-evident. The differences of opinion will begin when we come to apply these two fundamental principles. Still, it is my opponent's privilege to dissent from these propositions, if he thinks they are not self-evident. But I think that careful, reasoning people generally will accept them. Anyhow, I take my stand upon them and proceed to apply them.

THOSE QUOTATIONS.

1. As to the alleged prophet Nephi. If it can be clearly shown that he quoted passages from the Book of Mormon, then the first fundamental principle is violated, and we have demonstrative evidence that Nephi was simply a pretender, and his writings are spurious.

2. In the New Testament writers, taken from Acts iii, 21, John i, 26-27, and Romans xi, 17-24, and found in I Nephi iii, 20, x, 8, and x 12-14. I also, under discussion of the third point, referred to two other quotations from Ephesians v, 18, and Revelations xv, 3. It did not seem necessary to quote other passages, for I deemed these sufficient to establish the point.

The words in Nephi x, 8, "For these standeth one among you whom ye know not; and he is mightier than I, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose," is a clear plagiarism from John i, 26-27, which reads: "But there standeth one among you, whom ye know not, he it is who coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose."

The first part of Nephi x, 8, is: "Yea, even he should go forth and cry in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his path straight." This is quoted from Matthew iii, 3. The reference of Elder Roberts to Isaiah xl, 3, from which he thinks Nephi might have quoted, instead of from Matthew, is irrelevant, because, while the two passages are somewhat similar, the phrasing is different, and the careless Nephi failed to help my opponent out of the difficulty, for he quotes from Matthew and not from Isaiah, demonstrating what a smart fellow he was by quoting from an author that hadn't been born!

So Elder Roberts' reference to the fact that the olive tree is used figuratively by some of the Old Testament prophets, is irrelevant, because Nephi quotes Isaiah's exact phrases, and does not quote from the prophets. Now, in reference to these quotations by Nephi from the New Testament writers, Elder Roberts says: "The gentleman presents very much overstates the difficulty here, by making it appear that the alleged quotations are very numerous, when the fact is that the two or three cases he cites virtually exhaust the alleged quoted passages so far as the New Testament is concerned."

I am not a little surprised at such a statement, as Elder Roberts rather prides himself on his knowledge of the Book of Mormon, and in his article, near the close of his discussion of the fifth point, laments that he is obliged to carry on this discussion with an opponent who does not seem to be much acquainted with the subject. Well, my friend, I don't boast about my knowledge or superiority to other men; I don't assume "to know it all." But I think I know enough about the Book of Mormon to prevent me from making any such careless and utterly inaccurate statements as the above, "that the two or three cases he cites virtually exhaust the alleged quoted passages."

Verily, I begin to wonder whether my friend has ever read the books of Nephi through! If he will now follow me for a little, perhaps he may learn something new about them. Let us see whether "two or three passages exhaust the quotations." In my former article I referred to five quotations from the New Testament writers. Let us go on with the count:

6. In Nephi v, 18, the expression, "all nations, kindreds, tongues and people," is from Revelations xiv, 6.

7. In Nephi x, 17, the words "by the power of the Holy Ghost" are from Romans xv, 13.

8. "For he is the same, yesterday, today and forever," in Nephi x, 18, is taken from Hebrews xiii, 8.

9. The words, "caught away in the Spirit of the Lord," are from Acts viii, 39.

10. In Nephi xi, 21, "Behold the Lamb of God," is from John i, 36.

11. In Nephi xi, 27, the words "and after he was baptized, I beheld the heavens open, and the Holy Ghost came down out of heaven, and abode upon him in the form of a dove," are taken from Matthew iii, 16, and from John i, 32.

12. In Nephi xi, 35, the strange expression, "the twelve apostles of the Lamb," is taken from the only place in the world where it originated, Revelations xxi, 14.

13. In Nephi xi, 22, the words, "Yea, it is the love of God which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men," are taken from Romans v, 5.

14. In Nephi xli, 11, "And the angel said unto me, These are made white in the blood of the Lamb," is from Revelations vii, 14.

15. In Nephi xiv, 1, the repeated expressions, "mother of abominations" and "mother of harlots," are taken from Revelations xvii, 2.

These 15 quotations have been taken from the first 14 chapters of I Nephi, leaving eight chapters more in this book and 33 chapters in II Nephi for other quotations. I have jotted down on the fly-leaf of my copy of the Book of Mormon 44 different quotations from the New Testament writers by this alleged prophet. These quotations are largely in the Sidney Rigdon-Nephi style of inaccuracy. Nephi is just about as inaccurate in quoting Scriptures as an inaccuracy. Then a large percent of the language in the books of Nephi is a mere paraphrase, and often a parody, of the language of the New Testament. I have quoted nothing from III Nephi, whose 39 chapters and 63 pages are largely in the direct language of the New Testament, these whole chapters being quoted, although the New Testament was not written for 50 years afterward. I have not quoted from this book, for I understood Elder Roberts to be referring to the first two books.

The explanation of Elder Roberts that Nephi had a vision of Christ some years before, which made Christ real to him, is no explanation of the fact that there are eight quotations from three New Testament writers in Nephi II, thirty-first chapter.

AS TO SHAKESPEARE.

2. Concerning Nephi's quotation from Shakespeare, Elder Roberts thinks he has shown that the quotation from Job is a fatal blunder. He cites a passage from Job from which he thinks Nephi must have quoted, for he says: "The Spirit had the Jews' Scriptures with them, including the book of Job." But now observe that this suggested escape for this ancient prophet out of a way of escape for the alleged ancient Nephi. For Shakespeare died in 1616, and the King James English version of the Bible was published in 1611. Now, so far as the alleged ancient Nephi is concerned, what difference does it make whether he quoted from Shakespeare or from Job? The only way, therefore, to lift Nephi out of this fatal situation is for Elder Roberts to show that he had, in addition to the Jewish Scriptures, a copy of our English Bible with him back over in the wilderness 600 B. C., or else a copy of Shakespeare. Or else let Mr. Roberts agree with me, according to the evidence, that Mr. Nephi was simply a very modern gentleman, from New York or Pennsylvania, having in his possession both the Bible and Shakespeare, and then the difficulty is solved.

SECOND PROPOSITION.

Now we come to the second proposition which is, that the Book of Mormon is a divine revelation to the people of the present time. A large part of what has been said in proof of the spurious character of the books of Nephi applies to the Book of Mormon as a whole. But there are overwhelming special difficulties in the way of accepting it as a new and divine revelation, only three or four of which I can now briefly touch upon.

1.—The book claims that the plates, from which it was translated by Joseph Smith, were sealed up and hidden in the

hill of Cumorah, N. Y., about 400 A. D. No one upon this continent ever saw these plates prepared by Mormon except himself and his son, Moroni. They were prepared specially for the people of our time, in this country. After being hidden about 1,400 years Joseph Smith claims that the angel Moroni came and disclosed them to him. And the wonderful revelation contained in the plates, about "the restoration to the earth of the everlasting gospel," Elder Roberts says Joseph Smith translated "by means of the inspiration of God and the aid of Urim and Thummim." And behold, when we come to read this wonderful new revelation and this new everlasting gospel which it discloses, we find that it is simply a feeble and diluted imitation of the Bible revelation and the gospel which had already been in the possession of the Christian people of this country for over 200 years, and in the possession of their ancestors for over 1,200 years.

If this duplicate, pretended revelation had been brought out among the enlightened people of China or India, or some other heathen country who were without these Bible teachings, it would not have been such a complete "give away." But, with a great flourish of trumpets to give to the Christian people of this country a weak and poor copy of the revelation and the gospel, whose bright and radiant original had been in their possession for hundreds of years, seems to me so absurd, and so transparent as a deceiving scheme, do not wonder that the overwhelming majority of intelligent people utterly reject it. And just because this book while so loftily pretending to be a new and divine revelation, reveals absolutely nothing which the people did not have before in much better form, how can we avoid concluding that it is a counterfeit book? It will attend presently to the specimens of new truth which Elder Roberts finds in it.

2. There are at least 12 persons, worthy and reliable so far as I can discover, who testify that the substance of this Book of Mormon, with all its queer names of places and persons, its strange history, its battles and slaughters, its continual imitation of Bible phraseology, they had heard read several years prior to the publication of this book, from a religious romance. It was in this romance that the Nephties and Lamanites originated, and also the pretended ancient books of Nephi, Alma, Mosiah, Mormon and the rest. I can find no proof whatever that the above peoples and books ever existed except in the imagination of the writer of the religious romance. And I have never been able to see why the testimony of the above 12 witnesses, who had nothing to gain by their testimony, should be arbitrarily brushed aside, and the testimony of the 11 interested witnesses, who declare that they saw and "hefted" the plates, and when finished, he would say "written," and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place; but if not correctly written it remained until corrected, so that

the translation was just as it was engraved on the plates. Here is the testimony also of David Whitmer, another of the three witnesses. After stating that Joseph put the seer stone into a hat, he says: "A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the translation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to O. Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it were correct, then it would disappear and another character with the interpretation would appear."

Nothing is said by these witnesses about any Urim and Thummim. That was evidently an after thought. Nothing is said about any great mental and spiritual effort on Joseph's part.

Second—The above defense seems to me fatal to Elder Roberts' position, because if Joseph Smith turned aside to quote from our English Bible, as Elder Roberts admits that he did, then what was to prevent him from putting into the Book of Mormon, when it suited him, quotations from other English books, from Shakespeare, from books on geography and history? What prevented him from putting in his own views of Sidney Rigdon, with which the book is saturated? What prevented him from putting in his own views? Undoubtedly, that is just what he did, for the books give abundant evidence of being a modern compilation, and the evidence that it is an ancient book utterly fails. The statement and admission of Elder Roberts give us all the light we need as to its modern origin and spurious character. Just a few words now as to the specimens of new truth from the Book of Mormon, of which Elder Roberts presented six:

First—"Fools mock, but they shall mourn." I see nothing new about that. Everybody mourns sooner or later, and fools with the rest. In Proverbs, xiv, 9, we read: "Fools make a mock at sin."

Second—"Wickedness never was happiness." I think the prophet, Isaiah, expresses this idea far better when he says in lvi, 21: "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

Third—"The Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth." Certainly that is not new truth. The very fact that God gives us commandments, implies that the way will be open for us to keep them. Perhaps it was suggested by 1 Cor. x, 13.

Fourth—"I give unto men weaknesses, that they may be humble, and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me." This idea seems to have been appropriated from II Cor. xii, 9: "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for

my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Fifth—"The Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word." I do not quote the rest of this verse, for I think his first statement is not true. Many nations are in the darkness of heathendom and do not teach the word of God. Sixth—"Adam felt that men might be sinners. Two-thirds of the human race are in heathenish darkness, suffering from cruelty, want, oppression and idolatry and without joy."

In conclusion, I am sorry to spoil my opponent's concluding paragraph, for I admit that it is well written. But it seems to me illogical, for in expressing his regret that I could not have lived in the days of Paul, so that those opposed to Paul and the Christians might have availed themselves of my suggestions, he has to class me with the anti-Christians. In this he is illogical, for I do not belong to that class. Suppose that I should express regret that he did not live in the eighteenth century, so as to help the Indians of that day in their contest with Bishop Butler and the other great Christian scholars of that time. My supposition would be illogical, for my opponent does not belong to the Indian class. Now I have tried to treat my opponent and his arguments with fairness and in a kindly way. I certainly have nothing but good will toward him and to all who are sincere in their opinions. Unless some new phase of the subject should come up I see no reason why I should continue the discussion any further.

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