

An Examination of B. H. Roberts' SECRET MANUSCRIPT

A BOOK OF MORMON STUDY

Introductory:

I.

LITERATURE AVAILABLE TO JOSEPH SMITH AS A
GROUND-PLAN FOR THE BOOK OF MORMON.

A number of years ago ~~thirteen years ago, in the~~
~~work~~ in my treatise on the Book of Mormon under the general
title ^{of} "New Witnesses for God", I discussed the subject,
"Did the Book of Mormon antedate works in English on
American antiquities, accessible to Joseph Smith and his
associates". The object in considering the question at that
time was to ascertain whether or not the alleged historical
incidents of the Book of Mormon, and its subject matter
generally, were derived from speculations regarding the
origin, migrations, customs, religion, language, or other
lore of the American race, published previous to the coming
forth of the Book of Mormon; or if the Book of Mormon
truly indicated the source of those American Indian tra-
ditions and antiquities. Of course the discussion recognized

Contains an Article by Wesley P. Walters and
Photographs from Roberts' Original Manuscript

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INTRODUCTION

The Mormon historian B. H. Roberts is considered by many to be one of the greatest scholars the Church has ever known. Leonard J. Arrington, who is presently serving as Mormon Church Historian, wrote the following in an article published in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Spring 1969, pp. 22–23:

In preparation for this paper, the writer sent out a questionnaire to some fifty prominent L.D.S. intellectuals—all of them, I think, with Ph.D. degrees or the equivalent. I asked them to list the five most eminent intellectuals in Mormon history. Thirty-eight persons responded. Leading the list of those most frequently nominated was B. H. Roberts. . . . Roberts published eight books of theology and nine of history, including the monumental six-volume *Comprehensive History of the Church* . . . Roberts also wrote two volumes of biography, three of sermons and commentaries, and one novel. A leading Democrat, successful missionary, soldier's chaplain, and high church authority, Roberts seems fully justified in being regarded—to use Davis Bitton's phrase—as the pioneer Utah equivalent of Renaissance Man.

Besides writing the *Comprehensive History of the Church*, B. H. Roberts edited Joseph Smith's *History of the Church* (a seven-volume work). He was also noted for his many works defending the Book of Mormon. Because he was a General Authority and worked in the Church Historical Department, Roberts had access to some of the most secret material in the archives. If anyone was ever in a position to find out the truth about Mormonism it was B. H. Roberts.

While Roberts is held forth by many as the greatest defender of Mormonism, there is another side to the story that has only recently come to light. For years it has been claimed that Roberts had serious misunderstandings with other General Authorities, especially Joseph Fielding Smith. It has also been stated that he prepared a manuscript entitled, "The Truth, The Way, The Life," which was suppressed by the Church. In an article published in *Brigham Young University Studies*, Spring 1975, pp. 259–260, Truman G. Madsen acknowledged that Roberts had written "A 747-page . . . type-written manuscript" which he referred to as "My latest and greatest work." The most important work that I have yet contributed to the Church, the six-volumed *Comprehensive History of the Church* not omitted."

Dr. Madsen goes on to state that when "a committee chaired by Elder David O. McKay" recommended changes be made before publication, "Roberts replied, 'I will not change it if it has to sleep.'"

For many years anti-Mormon writers have claimed that B. H. Roberts became disturbed because of parallels he discovered between *View of the Hebrews* (a book published in the 1820's) and the Book of Mormon. It was discovered that he had prepared a manuscript in which these parallels are listed. Copies

of Roberts' list of parallels were "privately distributed among a restricted group of Mormon scholars," and in January 1956 Mervin B. Hogan had them published in *The Rocky Mountain Mason*. A careful reading of B. H. Roberts' work leads one to believe that he had serious doubts about the Book of Mormon. Roberts listed eighteen parallels between *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon. In his fourth parallel he stated:

It is often represented by Mormon speakers and writers, that the Book of Mormon was the first to represent the American Indians as the descendants of the Hebrews; holding that the Book of Mormon is unique in this. The claim is sometimes still ignorantly made. (p. 18)

Some new evidence concerning B. H. Roberts' interest in *View of the Hebrews* has recently come to light. It has been discovered that Roberts wrote a manuscript of 291 pages entitled, "A Book of Mormon Study." In this manuscript 176 pages were devoted to the relationship of *View of the Hebrews* to the Book of Mormon. The manuscript was never published and remained in the family after his death.

A false rumor concerning this suppressed manuscript has recently been circulated—i.e., that B. H. Roberts tried to answer the objections which he himself had raised in his shorter work of eighteen parallels. This idea is certainly far from the truth. We have recently had the privilege of studying Roberts' work and have found that it not only fails to answer the objections to the Book of Mormon mentioned in the shorter work, but that it raises many new problems as well.

Truman G. Madsen, professor of philosophy at Brigham Young University, concedes that B. H. Roberts did prepare a manuscript entitled, "Book of Mormon Study," but he maintains that Roberts was merely using "the 'Devil's Advocate' approach to stimulate thought":

Later, in March of 1922, Roberts prepared a draft of a written report to the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve. It included a further discussion of the linguistic problems and other points as well. The study of such books as those of Josiah Priest, Ethan Smith, and others led him to examine such questions as: What literary and historical speculations were abroad in the nineteenth century? Could Joseph Smith have absorbed them in his youth and could these influences have provided the ground plan for such a work as the Book of Mormon? Did Joseph Smith have a mind "sufficiently creative" to have written it? And what internal problems and parallels within the Book of Mormon called for explanation? In confronting such questions Roberts prepared a series of "parallels" with Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*; a summary of this analysis excerpted passages from Ethan Smith's work and lined them up in columns with comparable ideas in the Book of Mormon. Examination of such questions was contained in a typewritten manuscript entitled "Book of Mormon Study."

About this particular study, certain points must be kept in mind if it is not to be gravely misunderstood. First, it was not intended for general dissemination but was to be presented to the General Authorities to identify for them certain criticisms that might be made against the Book of Mormon. . . .

Second, the report was not intended to be balanced. A kind of lawyer's brief of one side of a case written to stimulate discussion in preparation of the defense of a work, already accepted as true, the manuscript was anything but a careful presentation of Roberts's thoughts about the Book of Mormon or of his own convictions. . . .

Teachers who have used the "Devil's Advocate" approach to stimulate thought among their students, lawyers who in preparation of their cases have brought up what they consider the points likely to be made by their worthy opponents—all such people will recognize the unfairness of taking such statements out of context and offering them as their own mature, balanced conclusions. For ill-wishers to resurrect Roberts's similar "Devil's Advocate" probings is not a service to scholarship, for they are manifestly dated. And it is a travesty to take such working papers as a fair statement of B. H. Roberts's own appraisal of the Book of Mormon, for, as this paper abundantly demonstrates, his conviction of its truth was unshaken and frequently expressed down to the time of his death. (*Brigham Young University Studies*, Summer 1979, pp. 440–442)

While there is no evidence that B. H. Roberts publicly repudiated the Book of Mormon, a careful reading of his manuscript, "A Book of Mormon Study," leads one to believe that he was in the process of losing faith in its divine origin. Although he may have started out merely playing the part of the "Devil's Advocate," we feel that he played the role so well that he developed grave doubts about the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. In any case, Roberts has done an excellent job of compiling the evidence to show that Joseph Smith could have written the Book of Mormon from the material available to him. Although Roberts' study has not been published, Wesley P. Walters has prepared an article analyzing this manuscript for *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, Vol. III, No. 3. We felt that Walters' article was so important that we reproduced it in its entirety in Part 1 of this booklet. In Part 2 the reader will find some very revealing photographs taken from Roberts' original manuscript.

Jerald and Sandra Tanner
Modern Microfilm Company
December 4, 1979

NOTE: B. H. Roberts' manuscript was published under the title, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*.

PART 1

“The Origin of the Book of Mormon,” by Wesley P. Walters:
originally printed in *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, Vol. III, No. 3

One of the most penetrating studies of the *Book of Mormon* ever made is an unpublished paper by the noted Mormon historian and apologist, B. H. Roberts. In this landmark work Mr. Roberts presents a powerful case for the human origin of the *Book of Mormon*, based on four important observations. (1) The book stands in conflict with what is known about the early American races from scientific investigation. (2) It, however, agrees with the *erroneous* information believed in the nineteenth century to have been true about these early Americans. (3) Joseph Smith, Jr., had sufficient creative and imaginative powers of mind to have taken this nineteenth-century "knowledge" and produced such a book. (4) The book evidences such blunders as would have been made by an unsophisticated nineteenth-century mind that lacked formal education as Joseph Smith, Jr., did. The following article presents and critiques the main lines of evidence gathered by Mr. Roberts in support of these basic points.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

**B. H. Roberts, Mormon Apologist, Historian and General Authority,
Proposes the Book of Mormon is of Human Origin**

Two unpublished manuscripts surfaced recently in Salt Lake City, Utah, written by the noted Mormon historian, Brigham H. Roberts, and surprisingly proposing that Joseph Smith, Jr., could have composed the *Book of Mormon* himself.¹ Written between 1922 and the time of Roberts' death in 1933, they are undoubtedly the most objective look at the origins of the *Book of Mormon* ever made by a General Authority of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.² Mr. Roberts admits that the *Book of Mormon* is in conflict with what is now known about the early inhabitants of America from twentieth-century archeological investigation. He argues that Joseph Smith, Jr., could have produced the book himself, given his highly imaginative mind and the "common knowledge" about the American aborigines current in his day, and he sets forth an abundance of evidence that the book is a product of the early nineteenth-century intellectual climate.

1. The manuscripts have been continuously in the Roberts family since B. H. Roberts' death, and his grandson, Mr. Brigham E. Roberts, had within the past few years granted several scholars (including Dr. Sterling McMurrin, University of Utah) the privilege of reading them. Subsequently, a Xerox copy was obtained and several copies have been derived from it (e.g., a copy in Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, and University of Utah, Salt Lake City). Comparison of the typewriter typeface and the marginal and interlinear handwritten notations with other known manuscripts of B. H. Roberts (including the typed copy of his "A Parallel") further confirms the authenticity of the work as originating with him. Additional confirmation is found in the handwritten notations in his personal copy of Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* (photo-reproduced by Modern Microfilm Co., Salt Lake City, Utah).

2. Roberts was assistant church historian and a president of the First Council of the Seventy and thus one of the church's General Authorities. Copies of letters accompanying the two manuscripts imply that they were first written about 1922. However, since the 1939 letter of his son, Ben E. Roberts (in Ariel Crowley, *About the Book of Mormon*, p. 132) indicates he was still working on some *View of the Hebrews* material in the last years of his life, a few revisions and additions could date from that period.

Whether Mr. Roberts wrote these works to summarize some of the main objections to the *Book of Mormon's* divine origin, or whether he himself had come to doubt the book's divinity seems difficult to determine. The letters that accompany the manuscripts suggest the former, but the manuscripts themselves give the decided impression that Mr. Roberts had come to doubt the book's divine origin. One Mormon professor, after reading the manuscripts, remarked, "B. H. Roberts came about as near calling Joseph Smith, Jr. a fraud and deceit as the polite language of a religious man would permit." Whatever the motive, the manuscripts deserve consideration on their own merit and present one of the strongest statements ever set forth by a recognized Mormon authority questioning the divine origin of the *Book of Mormon*.³

Mr. Roberts' study was begun in response to questions asked by a certain Mr. Couch of Washington, D.C., who saw conflicts between *Book of Mormon* statements and findings of recent scientific investigation. Mr. Couch had raised questions about attributing to the ancient Americans such items as the horse, steel, scimitars and silk, items unknown in ancient America. He further observed that the diverse language stocks of the New World, which show very little relationship with one another, could not all have originated from the highly developed Hebrew language attributed to the *Book of Mormon* people; nor was the time period envisioned in the *Book of Mormon* long enough to allow for such development. Indeed, the "diversity in the nature and grammatical construction of the Indian tongues," Mr. Couch noted, "indicates that the division of the Indians into separate [language] stocks occurred long before their language was developed beyond the most primitive kind of articulations." The *Book of Mormon*, with its short time-span and its claim that the early inhabitants spoke a highly developed form of Hebrew with an accompanying written body of literature, does not provide a sufficient ground to account for the known linguistic developments of the early Americans.

BOOK OF MORMON DIFFICULTIES

Mr. Couch's inquiries were turned over by Apostle James E. Talmadge (apparently on behalf of the Presidency and the Apostles) for church apologist and Assistant Church Historian Brigham H. Roberts to deal with. Mr. Roberts' report ran to 141 pages and was entitled, "Book of Mormon Difficulties" (hereafter BMD). Rather than solve Mr. Couch's problems, Mr. Roberts enlarged upon them, commenting that Mr. Couch's inquiry

3. The forcefulness of Roberts' presentation is witnessed by the reaction at the Mormons' Brigham Young University shortly after the work was written. According to a letter from one who was there, "A few of us at BYU got a few fragments of that manuscript back in 1925, but were ordered to destroy them and to 'keep your mouths shut'" (personal letter to this author, Dec. 1978; emphasis as in the original letter).

“understates rather than overstates the Book of Mormon difficulties” (BMD I, pp. 1f.). Only two of the original three chapters Roberts wrote in this report are in the manuscript preserved by the Roberts family (chapters I and III). The missing chapter (II) must have been 35 pages in length and probably dealt with the *Book of Mormon* assertions that the horse, steel, etc., were present in the New World. In effect, Mr. Roberts dropped the matter back into the lap of the higher authorities in a more serious form than he had received it from them, hoping that their “greater learning” could answer the difficulties that his scholarship had merely magnified.

“Linguistics”

In the first chapter of his report B. H. Roberts reviews the *Book of Mormon* material about the linguistic background of the early inhabitants of America. For purposes of analysis Roberts separates the question of linguistic origins from that of racial and cultural origins, the latter being dealt with in chapter III, but in Mr. Roberts’ thinking, as in the *Book of Mormon* itself, the two facets are really interrelated. For example, the first *Book of Mormon* inhabitants of the New World, the Jaredites, are depicted in that book as coming “into that quarter where there never had man been,” that is, to an *uninhabited* land (Ether 2:5; cf. BMD, III, 2f.), and fighting to complete extinction. Therefore any language developments that might be postulated as having taken place among them had no influence on the later races in the New World. In the same manner, the Hebrew-speaking Nephite colony, pictured as leaving for the New World about 600 B.C., is also depicted as coming to an *uninhabited* land “kept from all other nations” (2 Ne. 1:9-11). They were followed about eleven years later by a second Hebrew-speaking colony from Jerusalem led by Mulek. This implies that all the languages on the American continent “originated from two small Hebrew colonies, leaving Jerusalem about 600 years B.C., speaking the highly developed Hebrew language” (BMD I, 8). The Mormon scripture represents the Nephites and the more savage Lamanites as exchanging correspondence until the time of the Nephite destruction (Moro. 6:2f.). Thus they “perpetuated written language as well as the spoken Hebrew” down to A.D. 420, with only such modifications as might occur over their thousand-year history (BMD I, 8). This means, Roberts points out, that all linguistic development, including the *primitive forms* of language found in the Americas, must be accounted for either by a diversification and degeneration during the thousand years between A.D. 420 and the arrival of the white man in America, or by assuming some sort of massive migrations to the New World during that same thousand-year period.

Having summarized the *Book of Mormon’s* picture of American origins,

Mr. Roberts turns to the facts about the early inhabitants of this continent as gathered from scientific investigations of his day. He notes that in the previous century or two a popular theory about the origin of the early inhabitants of America regarded them as being Hebrews from the "ten lost tribes," a view nearly identical with that of the *Book of Mormon*. However, he points out that this theory "is altogether discredited by later writers" (BMD I, 14). Recent scientific studies had concluded that "with the exception of the Basque [language], the structure of all the Old World languages has little in common with the Amerind [= contraction of 'American Indian']" (Id. 18). Indeed, Mr. Roberts points out that all the more recent writers on American linguistics agree that the languages of the Americas form a world-group by themselves, with no known connections with the languages of the Old World (Id. 19f.). Clark Wissler, whose work (1917) is generally regarded as "most excellent," points out that "no evidence has come to hand that would identify a single New World language with an Old World stock," except for the Eskimo spoken also in a small area of Siberia (Id., 21).

Not only is the *Book of Mormon* in conflict with these scientific findings, the book also does not allow sufficient time for all the diversification of languages found in the New World, even if a linkage with a Hebrew base could be discovered. Anthropologists of Roberts' day had identified 56 divergent language stocks in the U.S. and Canada, 29 in Mexico and Central America, and 84 in South America, with each of these stocks containing numerous dialects. How does one derive these 169 stocks with all their varying dialects from a single Nephite form of Hebrew existing in A.D. 420? (BMD I, 26). Hebrew, "the Book of Mormon compels us to believe was the language brought to America . . . and which, so far as we are informed by that record, was the only source of American languages" (Id., 23). Roberts points up the problem with a specific example:

If . . . the difference between the Cakchiquel and Maya dialects could not have arisen in less than 2,000 years, how many thousand years would it require to produce language stocks—which are so much more widely divergent than dialects? And from the Book of Mormon standpoint, it should be remembered, all these stocks came into existence since the Nephite debacle at Cumorah 400 A.D. (MBD I, 36).

Linguistically, then, the conflict between the *Book of Mormon* and the findings of scientific studies is (1) that there are a large number of separate language stocks "that show very little relationship to each other—not more than that between English and German"; (2) that development of such dialects and stocks, if conceived as arising from a common source, would take a much longer time than previously recognized; (3) that "there is no connection" between American languages and those of the Old World; (4) that the time limits in the *Book of Mormon* "which represent

the people of America as speaking and writing one language down to as late a period as 400 A.D.," are not sufficient to allow for such development as actually exists; and (5) one would have to postulate massive migrations in the period following A.D. 400 to account for the existing linguistic developments and diversifications found on the American continent (BMD I, 53f.).

Historian Roberts sees only four possible courses open to Mormons in the face of the dilemma. The first would be to imagine that the *Book of Mormon* people occupied a very much more restricted area than previously supposed, "much more limited, I fear, than the Book of Mormon would admit of our assuming" (BMD I, 56).⁴ This, incidentally, has been the course adopted by a number of Mormon writers who have recently specialized in the field of American archeology and anthropology. To make this position tenable, however, one must move the location of Cumorah from western New York to Central America, and then explain how the gold plates managed to be transported the thousands of miles to western New York. General Authority Roberts at a later point (*Book of Mormon Study*, Pt. II, IV, 10f.) recognizes western New York as the correct identification for Cumorah and quotes the early Mormon authorities in substantiation of this identification.⁵ The weight of this evidence, therefore, is clearly one of the reasons that leads him to reject a more limited geographical area as the setting for the *Book of Mormon* story. A second course would be to insist that the period from A.D. 400 to the coming of Columbus was sufficient to allow for the infusion of many migrants from other lands. Such a stance, Roberts observes, would have to be made in the face of all the authorities and without any evidence for such a large-scale migration. The third course would be defiantly to maintain that all New World languages came from the Nephite Hebrew, despite what the authorities said. This would surely "only excite ridicule" from the educated, Mr. Roberts warns. Finally, one might remain silent on the matter, but this would seem like "a confession of inability to make an effective answer." Apologist Roberts is not satisfied with any of the options, and he concludes his chapter with an appeal that if there is any other answer than those four, he would "hail it with very great satisfaction" (BMD I, 58).

"Races and Their Culture"

Roberts, in chapter III, next turns to issues that had not been raised by

4. Roberts had earlier himself suggested this limited area concept in his *New Witnesses for God*, 1909, vol. III, pp. 499-504, but has come to see its weakness.

5. Scholars such as Prof. John L. Sorenson, who have adopted the limited area approach and sought to correlate *Book of Mormon* references with a geographical setting in Central America, in 1978 received a warning from the LDS Church's *Deseret News* that such an approach was "harmful" and a "challenge" to "the words of the prophets concerning the place" ("Geography problems," Church Section, July 29).

Mr. Couch, but which he sees as related to them—the origin of the American races themselves, and their culture and civilization. He thus adds four new problems to those already raised by Mr. Couch.

First, he notes the growing evidence that demands a great antiquity for man in America, to allow for the complex picture of racial developments seen on this continent. The *Book of Mormon*, on the other hand, has both the Jaredites and Nephites coming rather recently to an *uninhabited* continent. If one were to account for the complexity of races in America by postulating an infusion into the American continent of other peoples not mentioned in the *Book of Mormon*, Roberts observes, “such infusion, so far as the Book of Mormon is concerned, must have been subsequent to 420 A.D.” (BMD III, 6). The possibility of so late an infusion stands in conflict with the body of scholarly material that argues for the great antiquity of man in the New World.

Secondly, B. H. Roberts notes that the culture of both the Jaredites (who purportedly came here directly from the Tower of Babel) and the Nephites (who arrived shortly after 600 B.C.) was that of an Iron Age civilization, and both had a written literature that chronicled their history (BMD III, 3, 5f.). Archeological investigation, on the other hand, had shown that at the time of its discovery by the white man, America was everywhere in the polished Stone Age, and had not reached that of metals (Id. III, 16). Not even the pottery wheel or glazing had yet been employed, while their boats had no oars, sails, or rudders. Historian Roberts points out that on the matter of boats the *Book of Mormon* is in striking conflict with this cultural feature. The book’s figures of speech imply a knowledge of both sails and rudders (Mormon 5:18), and at times they conduct shipbuilding and carry on trade by navigation (BMD III, 17; cf. Hela. 3:10, 14), an accomplishment virtually impossible without a rudder and sail-power. Thus the cultural picture given of the early Americans in the *Book of Mormon* is invalidated by that which emerges from actual archeological investigation. We might add, this is still one of the most frustrating problems today, even for those who try to localize the *Book of Mormon* people to a small portion of Central America. The culture patterns found there still apparently do not harmonize with the advanced state of culture depicted in the *Book of Mormon*. The problem has not eased since Mr. Roberts highlighted it over a half a century ago.⁶ Related to this is still a third problem, namely, that there is no evidence that the New World culture was carried into this continent from the Old (Id. III, 21).⁷ Thus the *Book of Mormon* is in con-

6. Cf. John A. Price, “The Book of Mormon vs Anthropological Prehistory,” *The Indian Historian* (Summer, 1974):35ff.

7. Mormons who depend upon Barry Fell’s *America B.C.* for confirmation of Old World connections should consult the reply by the Department of Anthropology of the Smithsonian Institution in *Biblical Archeologist* (Sept. 1978):85ff.

flict with the situation as it is found to have existed by actual scientific investigation.

The final problem Mr. Roberts discusses is the popular fallacy that in early America there had once existed a "civilized pre-Indian population." This belief, he notes, had been encouraged by a superficial examination of the monumental remains of the Mound Builders of the Mississippi Valley. They were thought to have reached a high stage of culture and to have disappeared completely as a race. This idea, he reports, persisted in spite of the fact that post-Columbian articles of European origin were found in the Mound Builders site (BMD III, 28f.). The existence of such a pre-Indian civilization is precisely the view of the *Book of Mormon*. In the face of such mounting evidence, Roberts asks, "how shall we answer the questions that arise from these considerations of American archeology?" He continues:

Can we successfully overturn the evidences presented by archeologists for the great antiquity of man in America, and his continuous occupancy of it, and the fact of his stone age culture, not an iron and steel culture? Can we successfully maintain the Book of Mormon's comparatively recent advent of man in America and the existence of his iron and steel and domestic animal, and written language stage of culture against the deductions of our late American writers upon these themes? (Id. III, 47f).

He then concludes, "The recent accepted authoritative writers leave us, so far as I can at present see, no ground of appeal or defense—the new knowledge seems to be against us" (Id. III, 48). Nevertheless, he submits these unresolved conflicts to the main authorities of the church since "in the meantime there may have occurred to your more enlightened minds a solution to all these problems, that will cause all our difficulties to disappear. Most humbly I pray it may be so . . ." (Id.).

A BOOK OF MORMON STUDY

Historian Roberts' inquiring mind was not content to end the matter with his examination of the conflict between the *Book of Mormon* and the newer scientific information about the early inhabitants of America. During this time he saw further difficulties, and he set them down in a 291-page manuscript, entitled, "A Book of Mormon Study" (hereafter as BMS), collecting such evidence as he could find against the divine origin of the *Book of Mormon*. Although a copy of a letter kept with this manuscript shows that Roberts saw that such an investigation "would very greatly increase our difficulties," he determined to pursue it steadfastly and concluded his letter by pointing out:

It is not necessary for me to suggest that the maintenance of the truth of the Book of Mormon is absolutely essential to the integrity of the whole Mormon movement, for it is inconceivable that the Book of

Mormon should be untrue in its origin or character and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints be a true Church. (Letter to President Heber J. Grant and Council and Quorum of Twelve Apostles, March [date torn off].)

"A GROUND PLAN FOR THE BOOK OF MORMON"

It is truly amazing to see the unrelenting manner in which Mr. Roberts continues to pursue the problems connected with the origin of the *Book of Mormon*. In most of Part I of his study he sets forth the material which the *Book of Mormon* had in common with the supposed "knowledge" of Joseph Smith's day about the early inhabitants of America. Since a good deal of this "knowledge," in the light of more careful investigation, is now known to have been *misinformation*, the *Book of Mormon's* agreement with it argues that the work is simply a nineteenth-century fictional production (what Roberts later speaks of as a "wonder-tale") and not an authentic work from ancient America.

The Same Idea: The Indians Are Really Israelites

Mr. Roberts had previously dismissed the idea of human origin for the *Book of Mormon* when he wrote his *New Witnesses for God* (1909), but he confesses that at the time he had never really looked at Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* (1st ed. 1823, 2nd ed. 1825) and did not know of Josiah Priest's *Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed*, published at Rochester, "some twenty miles" from the Smith home, which present ideas startlingly similar to the *Book of Mormon*. The latter work quotes about 40 writers, "half of whom are Americans, who advocate in one way or another, that the American Indians are Israelites." This led Mr. Roberts to reevaluate Priest's *American Antiquities* (published 1833, three years after the *Book of Mormon*) and to see in it a summary of much material that was available before 1830 (BMS, Pt. I, I, 3ff.). Mr. Roberts further expresses the firm conviction that the works of Josiah Priest and Ethan Smith "were either possessed by Joseph Smith or certainly known by him, for they were surely available to him" (BMS, Pt. I, I, 5f.). At one point Mr. Roberts tries to support Joseph's knowledge of the Ethan Smith book by observing that Ethan had published his book in Vermont, which was Joseph's home. Joseph, however, had left Vermont nearly ten years before Ethan's book was put into print, and Roberts must be charged here with overstating his case. Nevertheless, there is a strong probability that Joseph had access to both books. Oliver Cowdery, a cousin of Joseph's and his associate in the production of the *Book of Mormon*, lived in Poultney, Vermont, at the time the Rev. Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* was published, and his step-mother was a member of the Rev. Smith's congregation. Cowdery could easily have supplied Joseph with the family copy of the work. Furthermore, Priest's *Wonders* was one of the volumes contained in the

Manchester rental library, some five miles from Joseph's home, and the circulation records show it was repeatedly charged out from 1826 to 1828.⁸ This fact shows that the topics in Priest's book were certainly known in Joseph's neighborhood. This reinforces Mr. Roberts' point that even without these works being directly available to Joseph Smith, Jr., the ideas in those books were a part of a fund of "common knowledge," or what was thought to be "knowledge," that circulated at social gatherings, the general store, the post office, and similar public places. We might add that the local Palmyra newspaper, to which the Smiths subscribed, also published articles on the topic of the Hebrew origin of the Indians and employed many of the same arguments to support the idea as those found in "almost hand-book form" in the Rev. Ethan Smith's work.⁹

With this background material on the "common knowledge" available to Joseph Smith, Jr., on the origin of the American aborigines, Mr. Roberts sets forth the prospectus of his ensuing pages.

It will appear in what is to follow that such "common knowledge" did exist in New England; that Joseph Smith was in contact with it; that one book, at least, with which he was most likely acquainted, could well have furnished structural outlines for the Book of Mormon; and that Joseph Smith was possessed of such creative imaginative powers as would make it quite within the lines of possibility that the Book of Mormon could have been produced in that way (BMS, Pt. I, I, 8).

Having made this announcement, Mr. Roberts plunges into a 149-page exposition (chapters II to XIII) of the parallels that exist between *View of the Hebrews* and the *Book of Mormon*. These parallels were later condensed to eighteen typed pages and were listed under eighteen headings with quotations from the two works appearing side-by-side. This latter document, with a few omissions, was finally put into print in 1956.¹⁰ However, the printing of the parallels by themselves without historian Roberts' skilled analysis and reasoned discussion seems quite barren.

The Same Features: The Indians Once Knowledgeable In Literature, Culture and Religion

General Authority Roberts opens his discussion by reiterating the indebtedness the Smith family must have had to the Hebrew origins idea:

This study supposes that it is more than likely that the Smith family possessed a copy of this book by Ethan Smith, that either by reading it, or hearing it read, and its contents frequently discussed, Joseph Smith became acquainted with its contents. The date of the publication of the

8. The material is now housed in the Ontario County Historical Society, Canandaigua, N. Y.

9. Cf., e.g., *Wayne Sentinel*, Oct. 11, 1825.

10. Published in the *Rocky Mountain Mason* (Jan. 1956):17-31. It is reprinted in Modern Microfilm's edition of Roberts' own copy of *View of the Hebrews*.

second edition would even make this possible. . . . Contact with it, and knowledge of its contents, by the Smiths, is in every way a great probability. And even if that were not so, as to this particular book—if the Smiths never owned the book, never read it, or saw it, still its contents—the materials of which it was composed—would be, under all the circumstances, matter of “common knowledge” throughout the whole region where the Smiths lived from the birth of Joseph Smith in 1805, to the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1829–1830.

I say this with great confidence because Ethan Smith’s book is constructed of material that was largely of community knowledge and discussion before collected and published in Ethan’s book (BMS, Pt. I, II, 1ff.).

Mr. Roberts substantiates this last remark by reviewing the contents of the book and noting the printed sources used by the Rev. Smith in compiling his work. Furthermore, the Preface to the second edition shows that the work had circulated throughout New York state, where the Smiths had relocated. Thus, so far as the idea of the Hebrew origin of the American Indians is concerned, “the book by Ethan Smith might readily have supplied that suggestion, and the evidence of it is incontrovertible from the contents of the book itself” (Id., 11). Mr. Roberts correctly points out, however, that if Ethan’s book only suggested the theory of Indian origin, it would scarcely be worthy of consideration. This same idea was set forth in many publications of that day, including the local Palmyra newspaper, as noted above.

but in many ways, and at many points, as we shall see, Book of Mormon traits, in language, culture, the knowledge of and the use of metals, traditions, religion and even in the structure of the Book of Mormon—the material compiled in Ethan Smith’s book, might well be taken as suggesting many things in the Book of Mormon (BMS, Pt. I, II, 12).

Then in a hand-written note to himself Roberts writes, “add also, it would suggest the lost book buried in a Hill, by prophet and High Priest” (Id.). Thus Mr. Roberts indicates that the parallels are not just superficial similarities, but provide material that enters into the very structure of the *Book of Mormon*—its “ground-plan,” to use his term. Given this structural material along with strong imaginative powers of mind, he maintains, one could readily have produced a book such as the *Book of Mormon*.

To illustrate how closely the two works are related he felt it was first essential “to set forth, in outline, the main features of the Book of Mormon in structure and subject matter, in order that the contents of the two books may be better compared” (Id.). He begins by listing (chapter III) six main *Book of Mormon* structural features: the origin of its people, their migration, their divisions after arrival in America, the fate of their civilization, their religion, and finally the future of these people, as set forth in divine promise and prophecies (BMS, Pt. I, III, 1). After sketching briefly the story of the three *Book of Mormon* groups migrating to America (the

Jaredite, Nephite, and colony of Mulek), Mr. Roberts reports that "*the barbarous entirely overcame the civilized, and destroyed them, as we shall have occasion to see later, and which event is very remarkably set forth in Ethan Smith's book as being an event which likely happened among his lost tribes in America*" (BMS, Pt. I, III, 10). Finally, the remaining outstanding features of the *Book of Mormon's* people are set forth briefly as being: a knowledge of their scattering, future restoration and glory; prophetic knowledge of Messiah's coming along with a knowledge of the signs to accompany his coming in the flesh and his resurrection; Christ's visit to this continent and the ensuing era of peace; and the final overthrow and extinction of the Nephites, leaving triumphant only the Lamanites in their savage state (Id., 13). Following this, in the next ten chapters (IV to XIII), the LDS historian develops a detailed comparison of the two works in which he establishes that nearly every one of these features of the *Book of Mormon* has been anticipated in the Rev. Ethan Smith's book on the Hebrew origin of the American Indians.

The Same Emphasis: Isaiah and the Restoration of Israel

In chapter IV Mr. Roberts begins his lengthy comparison (running to ten chapters and 124 pages), intended to demonstrate that *View of the Hebrews* could well have provided "The Ground-Plan of the Book of Mormon." Both Ethan Smith and the *Book of Mormon*, he notices, begin with the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of Israel. He also observes that in the Rev. Smith's second chapter the New England preacher deals with the certainty of the restoration of Judah and Israel, as does the *Book of Mormon* in its opening portion (1 Ne. 10:3, 14; 22:3; 2 Ne. 6:11; 10:6; 25:15).¹¹ Indeed, Roberts draws attention to the lengthy sections devoted to this theme in the *Book of Mormon* as well as to the extended quotations from Isaiah, "twenty one chapters" in the "phraseology of the authorized version of the English Bible!" (BMS, Pt. I, IV, 5),¹² a feature paralleling Ethan Smith's work. Since the Nephites are represented as

11. It should be noted that Ethan's reference to Jerusalem's destruction is that carried out by the Romans in A.D. 70, while the *Book of Mormon* has reference to the destruction by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Also the situation may be slightly more complex than Mr. Roberts envisions. It now seems generally agreed that the opening portion of the *Book of Mormon* (i.e., 1 & 2 Ne., etc.) was the last section to be written, replacing the lost 116 pages. The original 116 pages could have borrowed the same ideas from Ethan Smith as the present text appears to do, but we have no way of establishing this. All that can legitimately be said is that as the text stands the borrowings for the opening portion of the *Book of Mormon* may have been at the end of the borrowing process as well as at its initiation.

12. Roberts states that the Isaiah quotations are "in the exact phraseology" of the Authorized Version. Closer examination, however, shows that there are occasionally slight variations. Cf. *BYU Studies* (Winter 1964):105ff.; William L. Riley, "A Comparison of Passages from Isaiah and Other Old Testament Prophets in Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* and the *Book of Mormon*" BYU thesis, 1971).

having a collection of Old Testament literature “larger in volume than the Old Testament prophetically seen circulating among the Jews and gentiles (1 Nephi 13:20-23),” B. H. Roberts raises the question of why Isaiah should be singled out for quotation by the Nephites rather than other Old Testament passages. He continues,

But may not this be accounted for by the fact that Mr. Ethan Smith practically does the same thing in his “View of the Hebrews”? That is, he quotes chiefly from Isaiah in support of his views concerning Israel, their dispersion, their restoration and their glorification—and the author of the Book of Mormon following him does the same thing (BMS, Pt. I, IV, 6, emphasis Roberts’).

Roberts further notes that in the *Book of Mormon* “even the Christ when referring to the Old Testament quotes chiefly from Isaiah.” Is there not significance, he asks, in “the fact that Ethan Smith had a like preference for Isaiah, and quoted him about the same proportion of preponderance as the author of the Book of Mormon does? And many passages quoted by Ethan Smith are identical with passages from Isaiah quoted in the Book of Mormon” (Id., IV, 7).¹³

The Same Viewpoint: Americans Prophetically Called to Evangelize the Indians

In his next chapter (V) the Mormon leader observes that the restoration of Israel, as Ethan Smith understood it, was to involve the American people. Ethan interpreted the reference in Isaiah 18 to the “land shadowing with wings” as having reference to the continents of North and South America. From this viewpoint the passage became for the Rev. Smith a call to the Gentiles in America and particularly the United States to evangelize the American Indians, who are viewed as the Israelites to whom God’s promises were made (BMS, Pt. I, V, 1-7). Although the *Book of Mormon* nowhere quotes Isaiah 18, Roberts regards the Rev. Smith’s exposition of the passage as a call to the American Gentiles as important “because this is the very mission assigned by the *Book of Mormon* prophets to the Christian people of the United States” (Id., 7, emphasis Roberts’), and he cites the *Book of Mormon* Preface as well as Mormon 4:12-15; 2 Ne. 10:7-18; 1 Ne. 21:22, 23; and 3 Ne. 16:8-16 to illustrate his point. In fact, in regard to this topic the *Book of Mormon*, just like Ethan Smith, even raises the question of whether such prophecies of restoration should be

13. It hardly needs mentioning that the *Book of Mormon* does not slavishly follow Ethan Smith in its quotations. Some passages quoted by Ethan Smith from Jeremiah and Ezekiel do not appear, and Isaiah 18 is conspicuously absent (but see the following section above). On the other hand, the *Book of Mormon* puts the words of Micah and Malachi upon the lips of Jesus, a feature not found in the Rev. Smith’s work.

taken spiritually or literally (*View*, p. 64; 1 Ne. 22:2-8), and both books argue for the literal interpretation (BMS, Pt. I, V, 8-10). The only difference which Roberts detects between Ethan Smith and the *Book of Mormon* on the matter of restoration is that the *Book of Mormon* sees the converted Indians in closer union with the Gentile Christians than Ethan Smith contemplates (Id., 12, 15), while the *Book of Mormon* has terrible "judgments denounced against them" if they fail to evangelize the Indians (Id., 14). Those judgments are a threatened overflow and slaughter of the Americans by the Indians. Such a threat seemed a real possibility in the early decades of the nineteenth century, Roberts observes, but "all reasonable expectation of such an event has passed" (Id., 16). The result is that either one must view the Gentiles as having fulfilled their part in evangelizing the red sons of Israel, or that the prophecies "are no true prophecies, and the book containing them no true scripture . . . (Deut.18:22)" (Id., 17).

The Same Migration Route: Long Journey Northward, Encountering "Many Waters"

Continuing the parallels, Mr. Roberts points out (chap. VI) that both books bring their people to the New World by migrations from the Old. Building on a passage from the apocryphal 2 Esdras 13, Ethan Smith notices that, after conferring together, the migration of the lost tribes was northward and across the Bering Strait. Their arrival was into a country "where never man dwelt" (Esdras), and Ethan adds, "since the flood." Similarly, in the *Book of Mormon* the Jaredites, after also conferring together, take off in the same northward direction, cross "the great sea which divideth the lands" and come "into that quarter where there never had man been" (Ether 2:5). Historian Roberts acknowledges that the Jaredites are viewed as departing directly after the division of languages at the Tower of Babel, while Ethan's "lost tribes" do not migrate until the seventh century B.C., and the two situations are not parallel in that respect. "But," he continues, "let us here be reminded that what is sought in this study is not absolute identity of incidents . . . but one thing here and another there, that many suggest another but similar thing in such a way as to make one a product of the other, as in the above parallel between the journey of the Jaredites and Ethan Smith's Israelites" (BMS, Pt. I, VI, 6). Then he concludes:

Where such striking parallels as these obtain, it is not unreasonable to hold that where one account precedes the other, and if the one constructing the later account has had opportunity of contact with the first account, then it is not impossible that the first account could have suggested the second; and if the points of resemblance and possible suggestion are frequent and striking, then it would have to be con-

ceded that the first might even have supplied the ground plan of the second (Id., 6f.).

The Same Fate: Division into Civilized and Savage Groups, with the Civilized Finally Annihilated

Once the migratory groups reached the New World, both books view them as having separated into two groups—the civilized and the barbarous. The Rev. Smith adopts this position to account for the uncivilized state in which the Indians were found at the time of the white man's arrival. He writes (as quoted by Mr. Roberts), "*the savage tribes prevailed; and in process of time their savage jealousies and rage annihilated their more civilized brethren. . . . This accounts for their loss of the knowledge of letters, of the art of navigation, and of the use of iron*" (BMS, Pt. I, VII, 3, emphasis Roberts'). The New England clergyman furthermore interpreted the whole process of the degeneration of the one group and the annihilation of the other as an action of vindictive Providence to fulfill God's predicted denunciation that those tribes would be left "in an 'outcast' savage state." This degeneracy, as Mr. Smith expressed it, "took place under a *vindictive Providence . . . to accomplish divine judgments denounced against the idolatrous ten tribes of Israel*" (Id., emphasis Roberts'). The civilized part, according to the Rev. Smith, "*became wholly separated from the hunting and savage tribes of their brethren . . . the more civilized part continued for many centuries; . . . tremendous wars were frequent between them and their savage brethren till the former became extinct*" (View, pp. 171ff., emphasis Roberts'). The Rev. Smith draws support for the existence of such a civilized segment from the ruins of mounds in Ohio, with their extensive fortifications and "no small degree of refinement in the knowledge of the mechanic arts." Historian Roberts observes that "One acquainted with Book of Mormon historical events, will recognize in all this an outline of Book of Mormon 'history,' what else there is would be merely detail" (BMS, Pt. I, VII, 2).

To illustrate his point he traces this outline in the *Book of Mormon*. Lehi's two sons, Nephi and Laman, divide the colony into opposing groups, separate and become two great nations. The Nephites preserve the mechanical and literary arts, while the Lamanites become "an idle people" given to a life of hunting, just as in Ethan's description. The Lamanites, Nephi was informed, should become a "scourge" to the Nephites if ever the latter group forsook the Lord, and they would "*scourge them even unto destruction*" (2 Ne. 5:25, emphasis Roberts'). After frequent and devastating wars the Lamanites do just that, recalling Ethan's vindictive Providence fulfilling God's threats. "Could an investigator of the Book of Mormon be much blamed," Roberts asks, "if he were to decide that Ethan Smith's book . . . led to the fashioning of these same chief things in the Book of Mormon?" (Id., 9f.).

The Same Culture: Ancient Americans Supposedly an Iron Age People

Unfortunately Ethan Smith's theory runs into serious trouble with the more recent "skilled research" regarding the cultural items attributed to the "civilized" part of the ancient Americans. Roberts emphasizes that no features among modern scholars "are more unanimously agreed upon than the matter of the absence of the knowledge of, and hence the non-use of, iron or steel among the natives of America" (BMS, Pt. I, VIII, 7). To find, along with iron and steel, the same cultural elements enumerated by Ethan Smith (navigation, metalurgy, swords with their "hilts," breast plates, numerous cities with thousands of inhabitants—*View*, pp. 195-199) incorporated into the *Book of Mormon* leads Mr. Roberts to ask, "Could it be that the author of the Book of Mormon . . . proceeded arbitrarily to thrust into his alleged history the mention of these materials and the art of using them among his Nephites in order to comply with the supposed knowledge outlined in Ethan Smith's book?" (Id., 6f.). The Mormon historian uses the word "thrust" because he senses just that nature about the mention of such items in Alma 63:6-9; Hela. 2:10f.; 2 Ne. 5:15f.; Jarom 1:8; Alma 1:29; Hela. 6:29; and Ether 10:22f. "They are just intruded into the narrative, and do not seem to rise from it." In fact, since the Jaredite and Nephite use of "iron and steel" (2 Ne. 5:15; Jarom 1:8; Ether 10:23-27) seems to reflect the same error Ethan Smith made (*View*, pp. 190, 196), Mr. Roberts remarks, "Could it be that Ethan Smith, influenced and misled by the reported discovery of the evidence of iron and its use among the native Americans in ancient times, was innocently followed into this error by the author of the Book of Mormon?" (BMS, Pt. I, VIII, 7, emphasis mine). Since Ethan Smith catalogues his list of artifacts in two or three pages of descriptive matter about ancient mounds, and this included the suggestion that the abundance of bones found with some of these were "supposed to be the remains of men slain in some great battle" (*View*, p. 195), Mr. Roberts further wonders whether those very pages may have inspired the description of Mosiah 8:8-11, where the same features appear. The whole affair leaves him reflecting, "did the author of the Book of Mormon innocently followed Ethan Smith into the error of supposing that the civilized part of the ancient inhabitants of America had an 'iron and steel culture' . . . and emphasize both its existence and its extent?" (emphasis Roberts'). Indeed, did the author "innocently follow Ethan Smith in relation to the whole category of civilized traits" attributed by Ethan Smith to the early Americans? (BMS, Pt. I, VIII, 12).

The Same Origin: All Races from One Family; All Languages Corrupted from Hebrew

Not only does the *Book of Mormon* structure follow Ethan Smith's book in its main outline, but even in its "particulars" there is parallelism. Gen-

eral Authority Roberts lists the eleven points of Ethan Smith's arguments given on page 85 of his book, mainly "to call attention to the fact that from eight to five years before the Book of Mormon was published, there was in existence a book that contained an *enumeration of particulars* that enter into the Book of Mormon, and *become its peculiar characteristics*" (BMS, Pt. I, IX, 2, emphasis mine). The first of these points is that "the American natives have one origin." By this the Rev. Smith meant that all the natives of both North and South America are really "the children of one father and mother" (*View*, p. 88). In addition, they were viewed by him as having "the same language prevailing throughout, and that colored largely by the Hebrew, from which it sprang originally." However, the language had now greatly changed due to the lack of written materials and the lapse of time; by which suggestion Mr. Smith accounted for the diverse languages found throughout the native races of America. Historian Roberts finds all this "so in consonance with the Book of Mormon structural features that it may be said to be the very fabric of it." Furthermore, "since it is all found in Mr. Smith's book, published before the Book of Mormon was, it may well be thought to have suggested these features of the Book of Mormon" (BMS, Pt. I, IX, 5).

In demonstration of his point, Mr. Roberts focuses on two features of the *Book of Mormon* which correspond with the above-mentioned details of Ethan Smith's book. First, the *Book of Mormon* represents the Nephites as populating the entire continent of North and South America (Hela. 3:8)—at least this is the understanding of "the land northward" and "southward" as set forth by Orson Pratt,¹⁴ which Roberts defends as "the general understanding of the Mormon people" (Id., 6). The Nephites, therefore, were the source of all the inhabitants of the Americas in the same way as Ethan's "ten tribes" were regarded as America's progenitors. Secondly, Ethan Smith, in maintaining the Hebrew base of all North American Indian languages, accounts for the scarcity of words in their present languages that even remotely resemble Hebrew by stressing that the languages, *through lack of writing*, have become *considerably altered*. Mr. Roberts summarizes the Rev. Smith's words on this point:

Any language in a savage state, destitute of all aid from *letters, must roll and change*. It is strange that after the lapse of 2,500 years, *a single word should, among such people, be preserved the same* (*View*, pp. 90, 93, emphasis Roberts').

This is the same outlook and accompanying circumstances which obtain in the *Book of Mormon*, Mr. Roberts observes. The community led by

14. Pratt's notes giving *Book of Mormon* identifications first appeared in the 1879 Salt Lake edition. Roberts here, and mainly throughout, uses the 1914 edition. By 1921 Pratt's identifications had been removed.

Mulek, leaving Jerusalem only a few years after Nephi and speaking therefore the same Hebrew, but lacking written records, completely deteriorates in language. The result is that some 200 to 250 years later, when discovered by the Nephites here in America, their language had "become so corrupted" that the Nephites could not understand them. Going even beyond this, the *Book of Mormon* maintains that a change took place in language even where "letters" were present. The Nephites, in spite of preserving the art of writing, are depicted as having altered the Hebrew as well as modifying Egyptian into Reformed Egyptian (Mormon 9:31-34). All this leads Mr. Roberts to comment:

if the purpose of the author of the Book of Mormon . . . was to place beyond the reach of modern knowledge the ancient language in which this book is said to have been written, and thereby place its translation . . . beyond the possibility of criticism, or detection of fraud, then no more adroit scheme could have been invented by the wit of man . . . (BMS, Pt. I, IX, 10).

He concludes the chapter by noticing a further parallel to Ethan's work. *View of the Hebrews* spends several pages trying to establish a connection between the dress of the Indian's chief holy man and that of the Old Testament high priest. In this regard the Vermont clergyman cites evidence of a priestly garment like the ephod, and a breast plate reminiscent, the Rev. Smith says, of the ancient Urim. A burial site reported in his book yielded a "curious stone" joined to a "breast plate." Since Joseph Smith's account of finding the plates of the *Book of Mormon* has two stones "set in the rim of a bow fastened to a breast plate" (emphasis mine), and this "curious instrument" Joseph called "Urim and Thummim," the Mormon historian remarks:

Can there be any doubt, but what the things said in Ethan Smith's book, on the matter of "Urim and Thummim," "Breast Plates" and "curious stones" and "attachments to breast plates"—all published from eight to five years before the Book of Mormon was, are sufficient to suggest the Urim and Thummim as described by Joseph Smith? (Id., 13).

The Same Religion: Indians' Ancestors Virtuous, Worshiped the Great Spirit but Degenerated into Idolatry

B. H. Roberts next turns to the concept of God as set forth in the Rev. Smith's work. In order to help establish the Hebrew origin of the Indian tribes, Mr. Smith asserted that the Indians long before the coming of the white man worshiped only one God, whom they called the Great Spirit (*View*, p. 98). The subsequent worship of idols by them, accompanied by human sacrifice of prisoners taken in war, is regarded by the Rev. Smith as due to a "degeneracy" of recent years (Id., pp. 102-104). The learned Mormon historian corrects Mr. Smith's misunderstanding on this matter by

noting that “it is now known that idolatry together with the sacrificing of prisoners taken in war by them existed among many divisions of the American race” (BMS, Pt. I, X, 3). Paralleling Ethan Smith’s error, however, Mr. Roberts points out that the *Book of Mormon* attributes knowledge of the “Great Spirit” to the Nephites, and attributes a degeneration into idolatry to the Lamanites (Alma 17:15; 31:1), who “did take many prisoners, both women and children, and did offer them up as sacrifices unto their idol gods” (Mormon 4:14f., 21). Did Ethan Smith’s book “suggest to the author of the Book of Mormon these traits of idolatry and human sacrifice among its peoples?” Roberts asks.

Mr. Roberts raises the same question about the other traits of the early Americans common to *View of the Hebrew* and the *Book of Mormon*. These traits included a concern for the poor as well as warnings against pride and riches (*View*, p. 104; 2 Ne. 9:30, 42; Jacob 2:19; Mos. 4:13, 16; Alma 1:30; 2 Ne. 28:12-16). Also the native Americans’ regard for the sanctity of marriage and the accompanying endorsement of monogamy are common to both books (*View*, p. 104; Jacob 2:22-28). Ethan Smith reports the Indians to be generally more virtuous than the white man of his day, being loving to their wives and children (*View*, p. 175), and in the same way the *Book of Mormon* reports that the Lamanites are better in their marriage fidelity and loving treatment of their wives and children than the Nephites (Jacob 3:5-7).¹⁵ Because of their commitment to this monogamous relationship, the Lord will not destroy these godless Lamanites, a guarantee he does not make to the Nephites (BMS, Pt. I, X, 7f.). “Can it be that it is a mere coincidence,” asks B. H. Roberts, “that these special virtues of Jacob’s Lamanites, and Ethan Smith’s Indians should run so closely parallel in such a relationship?” (Id., 8).

The Same Scriptures: An Indian Lost “Book of God,” Buried in “Indian Hill”

Mr. Roberts next introduces two structural details from *View of the Hebrews*, which he grants may not seem as important as some of the others he points out, but may, nevertheless, have been woven into the total fabric of the *Book of Mormon*. The first is the matter of an Indian lost “Book of God,” which reportedly had been preserved among them for a long time. While they had this book they prospered, but they eventually lost favor with the Great Spirit and consequently suffered greatly at the hands of neighboring nations. God, however, took pity on them and brought them to the

15. Mr. David Persuitte in a yet unpublished manuscript, “The Peepstone Prophet,” independently noticed the same parallel but carried it further than Mr. Roberts did. He found that three random statements (they love their families, can hate their enemies and are not really as bad as others) on two pages in *View* (pp. 175f.) occur in the same order in Jacob 3:7.

New World. The book was eventually lost or more likely was buried with some "high priest" or "keeper of the tradition." This book at some time they will have again and they will then be happy. The Rev. Smith seems to link this "Book of God" with certain Hebrew parchments reportedly found buried in "Indian Hill" near Pittsfield. Mr. Roberts finds a number of suggestions here that might have yielded material for the *Book of Mormon*. The *Book of Mormon* similarly claims that the Nephites brought the Scriptures to America with them (1 Ne. 13:20-42; 2 Ne. 29:1-14; chap. 30), and these records were kept and transmitted by their prophets ("the keepers of their traditions"?). Their descendants would again have these Scriptures, which for years had laid buried in an "Indian Hill" called Cumorah. This, incidentally, implies that the art of writing was known among the ancient inhabitants, and some passages from Ethan's book even suggest that such writing was hieroglyphical in nature, like "Egyptian hieroglyphics." "Is there not enough suggestion here," asks Mr. Roberts, "to have Nephite records made in reformed Egyptian characters?" (BMS, Pt. I, XI, 6).

According to the statement of Montezuma, their written records informed them that they had migrated from a great distance. This migration theme is the second of the less important structural items which Mr. Roberts finds similar to the Mormon scripture. According to Ethan Smith, the migrating ancestors all originally "were one color," and they had migrated "eastward" to the New World. The Mormon leader reflects, "did this passage suggest also *more than one color*?" (emphasis Roberts'), that is, did it call forth the idea of the Lamanites being cursed with dark skin to account for the Indians' russet color, while the Nephites retained their original white color. Did Ethan's speculations also suggest the eastward direction of the *Book of Mormon* migration and their ultimately crossing "great waters" (Id., 8f.)? Mr. Roberts concludes that "if one was free from the notion that the Book of Mormon was of divine origin . . . he would say that these ocean migrations were conceived and worked out by one deeply ignorant of the problems involved in such a passage from the Old World to the New."¹⁶

The Same Civil Arrangements: Military and Sacred Towers; Monarchy to Republican Government

Mr. Roberts, among further "particulars," notices (chap. XII) that the *Book of Mormon* mentions military defense towers (Mos. 11:12f.; 20:7f.;

16. Roberts adds "as would be the case of a man living throughout his boyhood and young manhood" entirely inland in Vermont, western New York and Pennsylvania, referring to young Joseph Smith's experience. According to Joseph's mother, as a lad he had had a brief stay with his uncle at Salem. However, it is doubtful that such a stay would have given him much working knowledge of ocean crossing.

Alma 50:1-6), as well as sacred towers and "High Places" (Mos. 11:12f.; Omni 1:12f.; Hela 7:10-14). Ethan Smith surprisingly mentions the same type of towers (*View*, pp. 190ff.). Mr. Roberts ponders just what this fact would mean to proponents of the *Book of Mormon* if the situation were reversed. Suppose that *View of the Hebrews* were written and published five years after the *Book of Mormon*. Surely this would be seized by Mormons as evidence and "confirmation of 'towers'—military and sacred —, mentioned in the Book of Mormon!" Since the Rev. Smith's book pre-dates the *Book of Mormon*, why then should the case not be just as strong for having "the material in Ethan Smith's book suggesting what we now find in the Book of Mormon?" Roberts asks (BMS, Pt. I, XII, 6).

Mr. Roberts points out that in civil affairs both books see the early Americans as moving from a monarchy to a republic in their form of government. We might note in passing that the *Book of Mormon* reflects the pride of early nineteenth-century Americans in their republican form of government, and it should be conceded that the emphasis might easily have come from that source. Nevertheless, there are some striking features common to both Ethan Smith's and Joseph Smith's books in this area. The Rev. Smith, to prove his point that the early inhabitants of America were once a civilized people, quoted von Humbolt's observations about South America. They once had "theocratic forms of government" which allowed for despotism to prevail. However, some Mexican colonies "weary of tyranny, gave themselves republican constitutions" (*View*, pp. 181f.). Yet there was often a "union of the civil and ecclesiastical power in the same persons." Remarkable as it may seem, this same type of political structure is present in the *Book of Mormon*. The Nephites start their residence in the New World with a monarchy, but after 500 years change to a republican form, with judges chosen to rule "by the voice of the people." Yet these judges often combined ecclesiastical powers with their political ones. Alma was both "Chief Judge" and "High Priest" (Mos. 29:42), as were others (Hela. 3:37; 4:14; 5:1-11; 3 Ne. 3). Still another feature of their political life is also of interest. Ethan Smith points out that the change to "free constitutions" came "only after long popular struggles" (*View*, pp. 181f.). Mormon historian Roberts wonders whether this may have been "the reason the Nephite republic . . . was given so stormy a career." Since Ethan believed that the native Americans "were descendants of a people who had experienced great vicissitudes in their social state," then perhaps "the experience given the Nephite republic demonstrates the truth of his [Ethan's] statement" (BMS, Pt. I, XII, 9f.). Roberts also wonders in passing whether the early Central American concept of "the struggle between . . . the good and bad principle by which the world is governed" (*View*, p. 185) might have suggested the speech in 2 Nephi 2:10-13, which stresses the necessity of there being "an opposition in all

things." However, it is equally possible that Joseph picked up this idea during his early teens, when he joined the Palmyra debating society.¹⁷ Even if some of Ethan Smith's parallels are mere coincidences, it is difficult to dismiss them *all* as such, and as their numbers grow it becomes increasingly difficult to ignore Ethan's book as a likely structural source for the *Book of Mormon*.

The Same Christianity: The Gospel and the Christ Known in Ancient America

Mr. Roberts reaches the climax of his structural similarities between the two books when he turns to the question: "Did the ancient American Indians know of the Christ?" Ethan Smith had suggested as much when he quoted von Humbolt's report concerning the early Catholic missionaries' observations about the natives of Mexico. These natives persuaded the Spanish missionaries "*that the Gospel had, in very remote times, been already preached in America*" (*View*, p. 187, emphasis Roberts'). The Rev. Smith then added his own comment that "there is a far greater analogy between much of the religion of the Indians, and Christianity, than between that of any other heathen nation on earth and Christianity." Historian Roberts sees that this "might well have suggested to the author of the *Book of Mormon* the introduction of the Christ and of the Gospel among the ancient Americans" (BMS, Pt. I, XIII, 2). Ethan had additional material, however, which elaborated on this idea and "may have acted—in connection with incidents from the New Testament—as suggestions to the creation of the *Book of Mormon* Messiah" (Id., 3). Principally Mr. Roberts refers to Quetzalcoatl, the "Mexican Messiah." This "most mysterious being," Ethan reported, "was a bearded *White* man" (Id., 4, emphasis Roberts'), and the Mormon leader wonders whether this might not have influenced the *Book of Mormon's* description of the virgin Mary as "*exceeding fair and white*" (emphasis Roberts'). "If Quetzalcoatl suggested a 'white' Messiah, it was of course fitting that his mother should be a virgin 'exceedingly fair and white'" (Id.).

Quetzalcoatl was also reportedly a "high priest," a "legislator," and a leader of a religious sect who "inflicted upon themselves the most cruel penance." Interestingly, B. H. Roberts notes that the *Book of Mormon* Messiah is also a "high priest" and head of a religious order of priests (Alma 13), (though this could also have been developed from the priesthood of Christ taught in the New Testament's book of Hebrews¹⁸). In

17. Orasmus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase*, 1851. Turner, an apprentice printer in Palmyra until 1822, was a member of that society and wrote that Joseph "helped to solve some portentous questions of moral or political ethics in our juvenile debating club" (p. 214).

18. Cf. H. Michael Marquardt, "The Use of the Bible in the *Book of Mormon*," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* II, 2 (1978):98.

reality, Quetzalcoatl is now believed to have lived about A.D. 1000, too late to have any relationship with an alleged visit of Christ to America shortly after his resurrection. Nevertheless, since Ethan Smith does not report this detail, it would be quite easy for one to seize upon Ethan Smith's references and expand them into the figure of the New World Messiah presented in the *Book of Mormon*. Mr. Roberts finds that, like the "Mexican Messiah," the Mormon Messiah is also a legislator, delivering "all that body of Christian legislation found in Matthew 5th, 6th and 7th chapters" (3 Ne., chaps. 12-14). The Mormon Messiah insists that the church be called after him, and even this somewhat parallels the Mexican Messiah in "being the Chief of a religious sect." Roberts may here be overdrawing the parallels, and he admits that the infliction of penance is "out of character" with the *Book of Mormon*. Mr. Roberts may also be pressing too hard in paralleling Quetzalcoatl's drinking of a beverage which stimulated a desire to travel, with Jesus having "drunk out of that bitter cup" (3 Ne. 11:10f.) and desiring to visit other lands to gather his other sheep (3 Ne. 15:1-3). In our view, such references seem better accounted for as an expansion upon New Testament material. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the Rev. Smith reports that the "reign of Quetzalcoatl was a golden age," and a similar golden age follows the visit of the Mormon Messiah to America (4 Ne. 1:3-17). Furthermore, the Rev. Ethan Smith informed his readers that Quetzalcoatl, after abolishing sacrifice (except for vegetable offerings), disappeared mysteriously but promised to return and govern the people again. The Mormon Messiah similarly, after abolishing blood sacrifice (3 Ne. 15:4f.), promised likewise to return to "be in the midst" of them (3 Ne. 21:22-25; BMS, Pt. I, XIII, 12).

Mr. Roberts, in summarizing his case, does not think it necessary for the parallel material to be laid out in the same sequence in *View of the Hebrews* as in the *Book of Mormon*. He only regards it as necessary that (1) the book be available a sufficient time before the *Book of Mormon*, (2) there be a great likelihood of the author being in contact with such material, and (3) that there be sufficient resemblance to the earlier material. The first is absolutely certain, the second "amounts to a very close certainty." It is, in fact, "little short of miraculous if they did not know of Ethan Smith's book," Roberts observes. The third point is left for the reader to judge for himself (BMS, Pt. I, XIII, 13). For his part, Mr. Roberts submits that the numerous similarities to Quetzalcoatl "supplies subject matter overwhelmingly sufficient to suggest the visit of the Christ to the Book of Mormon people and his career among them" (Id., 14).

Some Biblical Borrowings

Furthermore, historian Roberts holds that not everything need be supplied from *View of the Hebrews*. "There are other sources whence might

come suggestions." Such a source is the Bible, from which the author could have obtained, for example, the *Book of Mormon* signs accompanying Christ's birth. The appearance of the "new star" could easily be borrowed from Matthew 2:1-12, and the "day and a night, and a day as if it were one day, and there were no night" could have been suggested by Zechariah 14:6f., where "at evening time it shall be light." Similarly, the *Book of Mormon* events surrounding the death and resurrection of Christ—"the germ of it"—could well be found in the New Testament itself (BMS, Pt. I, XIII, 16). "The items of the Book of Mormon story are practically all here . . . it becomes a matter of expanding the several items to the required limits of the Book of Mormon story" (Id., 17).¹⁹ Thus, "with these things as suggestions . . . and one of conceded vivid, and strong and constructive imaginative powers to work them all out, [it] need not be regarded as an unthinkable procedure and achievement" (Id.).

Several other apparent borrowings of biblical material "of like character" are set forth by Mr. Roberts, incidents that need only a "kind of elaboration, or enlargement." Such an incident is the promise to the three Nephites that they would never see death (3 Ne. 28), which is easily expanded from John 21:20, 23. Mr. Roberts believes that "it is quite possible that the New Testament incident suggested the larger one in the Book of Mormon" (BMS, Pt. I, XIII, 18). The literal removal of a mountain (Ether 12:30) could be directly suggested by Matthew 17:20. Again, the mysterious departures of Moses and Elijah could have suggested similar *Book of Mormon* departures of Alma (Alma 45:19) and of Nephi (3 Ne. 1:2f.).

Summarizing the Parallels

B. H. Roberts finally summarized on three typed pages the parallels of the "many major things" he had observed. "Not a few things merely, one or two, or half dozen, but many; and it is this fact of many things of similarity and the cumulative force of them, that makes them so serious a menace to Joseph Smith's story of the Book of Mormon's origin" (BMS, Pt. I, XIII, 19f.). Even if one takes issue with some of the details (the "particulars" that Roberts singles out), the broad outlines, the "ground-plan," of the work is clearly there in Ethan Smith's book. Ethan's book pleads for the Israelite origin of the American Indians. They are traced to the New World by a migration that took a long time, beginning northward and then eastward, crossing "many waters." They divide into a civilized group and a savage group, with the savage completely destroying the civilized part after long and terrible wars. The civilized portion is described as having the same cultural features as those attributed to the civil-

19. Cf. further M. Marquardt, *ibid.*, pp. 102-106.

ized portion in the *Book of Mormon*, including the error of making them partakers of an Iron Age culture. They are regarded as once having a Book of God, portions of which were buried in an Indian Hill to come to light again in the nineteenth century. The gospel was viewed as having been preached to them and a messianic figure was thought to have been among them, a "bearded White man." They were reported to have had high priests, breast plates, curious stones, prophets, military and sacred towers, and a number of other features that also mark the *Book of Mormon* people in America. The Gentiles are seen as singled out by prophecy to reach these red sons of Israel and to restore them to their rightful inheritance. These and a number of other features and traits that form the basic structure of the *Book of Mormon* story are reviewed by Mr. Roberts in his summary of parallels between the two works. Then he hauntingly asks, "Can such numerous and startling points of resemblance and suggestive contact, be merely coincidental?" It is apparent that Mr. Roberts does not think they can be dismissed as coincidence, for he continues to build the case for the human origin of the *Book of Mormon* by two further basic considerations.

Joseph Smith's Highly Imaginative Mind

Did Joseph Smith, Jr., have sufficient imaginative powers of mind to take the material either from Ethan's book or from community knowledge and weave it into the *Book of Mormon*? It is one thing to show that the *Book of Mormon's* picture of the ancient inhabitants of this continent is not in harmony with the picture that emerges from current archeology and that on the other hand it agrees with the erroneous ideas and misinformation presented in Ethan Smith's book, but it is yet another matter to show that Joseph Smith was capable of taking that material and producing the book himself. This Mr. Roberts proceeds to do, using only Mormon sources.

Joseph's mother records that Joseph, before he ever claimed to have translated the gold plates, would sit with his family and describe the ancient inhabitants of America—their dress, animals, cities, warfare, and religious worship. Since Joseph described these "with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life among them" (as Mother Smith states it), Mr. Roberts rightly asks how he got this information without the *Book of Mormon* from which to draw such descriptions—"unless he had caught suggestions from such common knowledge, or that which was taken for 'knowledge,' as existed in the community concerning ancient American civilization, and built by imagination from this and possible contact with Ethan Smith's 'View of the Hebrews.'" Whence came these descriptions?, the Mormon historian reiterates. "Not from the Book of Mormon, which is, as yet, a sealed book to him. . . . These evening recitals could come from no other source, than the vivid, constructive imagination of Joseph Smith,

a remarkable power which attended him through all his life. It was as strong and varied as Shakespeare's and no more to be accounted for than the English Bard's" (BMS, Pt. I, XIV, 3).

As a further evidence of Joseph's imaginative powers he cites Orson Pratt's description of how the prophet could hold and sway an audience. Mr. Roberts recognizes this as merely an expansion to the public forum of his old "fireside exercises of those powers of imagination." Another illustration historian Roberts finds in the boyhood follies to which, Joseph confessed, his mind was prone to run. This folly Roberts regards as due simply to "the over strong faculty of imagination." Furthermore, Joseph's vivid description of the West and the valleys and streams of the Rockies, which he had never visited, recorded in the recollections of Anson Call, is but another aspect of his vivid powers of imagination. Finally, as a sampling of the creative and imaginative powers of Smith's mind, Mr. Roberts selects some eloquent passages from his "Epistle from Liberty Jail" (1839, *History of the Church*, III, 288-305), which demonstrate the prophet's unique ability to employ highly descriptive language for both his own defense and comfort and the encouragement of his suffering people. Such expression, Mr. Roberts concludes, could only come from a fertile, "creative imagination," an imagination

it could with good reason be urged, which, given the suggestions that are to be found in the "common knowledge" of accepted American Antiquities of the time, supplemented by such a work as Ethan Smith's "View of the Hebrews," would make it possible for him to create a book such as the Book of Mormon is (BMS, Pt. I, XIV, 13).

"INTERNAL EVIDENCE THAT THE BOOK OF MORMON IS OF HUMAN ORIGIN—CONSIDERED"

Having demonstrated that Joseph Smith had imaginative powers of mind not generally recognized by most Mormons, the Mormon historian turns to one final basic consideration to complete the case for the human origin of the *Book of Mormon*. As highly imaginative as Joseph's mind was, it was still largely lacking in formal education and as such likely to fall prey to thoughtless errors. It is such tell-tale inconsistencies that Mr. Roberts collects in Part 2 of his "Book of Mormon Study," and the consideration runs to 115 pages of carefully researched and reasoned discussion.

Evidence of an Undeveloped Mind

First of all, the seasoned LDS historian finds that "there is a certain lack of perspective in the things the book relates as history, that *points quite clearly to an undeveloped mind* as their origin. The narrative proceeds in characteristic disregard of conditions necessary to its reasonableness, as if it were a tale told by a child, with utter disregard for consistency" (BMS,

Pt. II, I, 1, emphasis mine). In illustration of this he cites the three days' journey from Jerusalem which brought Lehi's party to the shores of the Red Sea (1 Ne. 2:4-6). This journey of 170 miles, with children and supplies along, "could scarcely be covered in three days" (Id., 2). Along this same line is the question of whether the migrating party had any livestock and beasts of burden with them. If so, did they take them along on their curious vessel? It would seem questionable that they did. Yet when they arrive in the New World, a land "kept from all other nations" (2 Né. 1:9ff.), the *Book of Mormon* off-handedly mentions the presence of *domesticated* animals—"the cow and the ox, and the ass and the horse, and the goat and the wild goat" (1 Ne. 18:25).

Repeating the Same Themes

Furthermore, Mr. Roberts keenly observes that the earlier Jaredite migration is attended with similar problems, only this time elephants as well as large creatures called "coreloms" and "cumons" are involved. The narrative emphasizes the smallness and lightness of the Jaredite barges. Could these accommodate elephants, and further, how could all these creatures be sustained in a 344-day sea voyage? To render matters even more suspect, the story of the Jaredite migration seems to be a rerun of the Nephite account. "Both Nephite and Jaredite colonies are brought through a wilderness to the seashore, where a residence of considerable time is had before embarking for the New World. Both colonies had a long sea voyage; and both, strangely enough, seem to have been almost prohibited use of fire. . . ." To carry the parallel further, Roberts notes that "The prophet leaders of both colonies had clear vision of Christ; and both had an equal prevision of his life and mission as the savior of the world. Both came to an empty America, and both people had remarkable wars of extermination" (BMS, Pt. II, I, 5f.). From these circumstances historian Roberts feels it only natural for intelligent people to ask:

Do we have here a great historical document, or only a wonder tale, told by an undeveloped mind, living in a period and in an environment [*sic*] where the miraculous in "history" is accepted without limitations. . . ? (Id., 14).

What does such parallelism amount to for opponents of the *Book of Mormon*, Mr. Roberts asks. "It supplies the evidence that the *Book of Mormon* is the product of *one mind*, and that a very limited mind, unconsciously reproducing with only slight variation its visions" (Id., Pt. II, II, 1), and he adds that "the answer will be accepted as significant at least, if not conclusive" (Id.).

Similarly a "disregard for consistency" is found by Mr. Roberts in the matter of Nephi building a temple like unto Solomon's with not more than a hundred persons to do the work. In addition Nephi had to teach these

people to work in wood, iron, copper, brass, steel, gold, silver, and precious ores, and they became so skilled that the "workmanship thereof was exceeding fine." Yet it took Solomon seven years and over 150,000 workmen to accomplish the same feat. Mr. Roberts is moved to ask, "is this the statement of a great historical document, by one [Nephi] who knew Solomon's temple through all his boyhood and young manhood, or is it the reckless statement of an undeveloped mind that knew not what he was saying?" It seems to us that the author of the *Book of Mormon* sensed some of the tension at this point, for he seems to back off somewhat from his boast that it was "after the manner of the temple of Solomon" by adding "save it were not built of so many precious things" (1 Ne. 5:16). This might have eased the situation had the author not added that these precious things "were not to be found upon the land," after just stating that all the precious ores "were in great abundance," a conflict that Roberts is careful to underline.

Continuing the parallel in plot between the Nephite and Jaredite colonies, Mormon Authority Roberts observes that just as the Nephite colony chose Nephi to be their king and he reluctantly agreed, so the equally small Jaredite colony chose its reluctant king. A final illustration of the parallelism in the two accounts Mr. Roberts finds in their similar concept of the sovereign power of God. Among the Nephites this evidences itself in the belief that God could give man the power to dry up an entire ocean (1 Ne. 17:50), and among the Jaredites it is seen in the claim to have literally removed a mountain (Ether 12:30). The Mormon historian speaks of these super-miracles in terms similar to those which non-Mormons have often used: "This faith in the sovereign power of God results in the miracles of the Book of Mormon surpassing the miracles in the Bible" (Id., 7).

The Same Villains Repeated

Having alerted the reader to the repetitious nature of the themes of the *Book of Mormon*, B. H. Roberts continues to illustrate this further in his next chapter (chap. III). This means, although the Mormon leader does not spell it out specifically, that the *Book of Mormon* owes its lengthiness to a repetition of the same events and themes over and over, with only the characters changed. A clear example of this is found in the *Book of Mormon* narratives dealing with the "anti-Christ," the opponents of the Nephite prophets. Mr. Roberts reports what is said about the anti-Christ Sharem (Jacob 7:1-23) and Korihor (Alma chap. 30), and focuses on "how alike they are!" Both villains have the same content to their denials of Christ; both have the same demand for a sign from God; both receive the same type of afflicting judgment for their opposition to the Lord, make a vain effort at repentance and receive an ignominious death (III, 12). In

addition to this parallelism “with the strong implication that they have their origin in one mind,” Roberts notes the “amateurishness” which characterizes the handling of the whole argument about the existence of God. He indicates that the “vindictive miracle” that fell upon the anti-Christians seems more like wishful thinking—“the dream of a pious young man . . . rather than a matter of actual experience” (Id., 13). Then Mr. Roberts, who spent his whole career absorbed in historical affairs, concludes:

The evidence, I sorrowfully submit, points some will contend to Joseph Smith as their creator. It is difficult to believe that they are the product of history, that they come upon the scene separated by long periods of time, and among a race which was the ancestral race of the red men of America (Id., 13f.).

Battles All Cast from the Same Mold

Mr. Roberts finds further evidence of this repetitiousness in the parallelism of the numerous battles recorded throughout the book, “The whole matter of war seems to be treated from the amateurish notion that the wicked are invariably punished, the righteous always victorious” (IV, 1). He also finds the same super-miraculous element that strains credulity in the 2,060 “striplings” who fought wars over a 13-year period without one being killed. This is attributed to their mothers’ teaching that “if they did not doubt, God would deliver them” (Alma chaps. 56-58). Mr. Roberts comments: “Beautiful story of faith! Beautiful story of mother-assurance! Is it history? Or is it a wonder-tale of a pious but immature mind?” Reinforcing this feeling of an immature mind behind the work are such “blundering expressions” as “*all those who were not slain (!) came forth and threw down their weapons . . .*” (Alma 52:38; cf. also Ether 15:12, emphasis Roberts’), and again, the whole society removed all their property “*save it were their land*” (3 Ne. 3:13, emphasis Roberts’).

Mr. Roberts reminds us that his “allusions to absurdities of expression” are not made to ridicule or cast aspersion on the *Book of Mormon*, “but they are made to indicate what may be fairly regarded as just objects of criticism under the assumption that the *Book of Mormon* is of human origin.” These “lapses of mind and speech lapses” are “just such absurdities and lapses as would be looked for” if Joseph Smith had authored such a work (Id., 10).

Before leaving the military matters of the book, Mr. Roberts draws one more set of parallels between the final battle of the Jaredites and that of the Nephites. It seems that in the *Book of Mormon* battles the whole society participates, removing all their property to one place—in both instances to Cumorah, near the Smith home. The battle in both cases brought the death of thousands until only one witness of the scene is left to write the record (Ether and Moroni respectively). Finally, both recorders take leave

of their readers, look confidently to the Lord and say Amen. The Mormon historian concludes:

Is all this sober history . . . Or is it a wonder-tale of an immature mind, unconscious of what a test he is laying on human credulity when asking men to accept his narrative as solemn history? (Id., 17).

Conversion Scenes Typical of Nineteenth-Century Conversions

In the final chapters (chaps. V and VI), Mormon General Authority Roberts notices how strikingly the same are the conversion scenes throughout the *Book of Mormon*.

. . . these conversions . . . and also religious experiences after conversion, I would add, are alluded [to] throughout the various periods of the Book of Mormon by the same emotional phenomena [*sic*]—faintings, or swoonings, “the falling power,” unconsciousness, and usually attended by visions or extacies [*sic*] of supposed highly spiritual experiences (BMS, Pt. II, V, 2).

He cites examples of this throughout the *Book of Mormon*—Lehi (in the very opening chapter of the work)—Nephi (2 Ne. 33:6f.), Enos (En. 1:2-8), Alma (Mos. 27), Ammon (Alma 18:41-43), and Aaron (Alma 22). He types in full these lengthy extracts because they are so typical of what accompanied the conversions of Joseph Smith’s day in “the early decades of the 19th century when the Book of Mormon was incubated” (Id., 3). Roberts carries his citations into the New Testament period of the *Book of Mormon* so it will be clear “that this trait of emotional conversion continues throughout the Book of Mormon” (Id., 13). He notes also that the *Book of Mormon* depicts the ancient Americans as being given on this continent signs that Christ had been born, and in the reaction to these heavenly displays it “represents a whole continent of people—millions of them at the same time—prostrate under the ‘falling power,’ lying felled to the earth ‘as if they were dead!’” (Id., 14). This is certainly a spectacle unlike anything experienced in the history of the world, he observes. The skeptic will surely ask whether this really occurred, “or is it one more wonder-tale from an over wrought enthusiast’s mind, lost to all sense of the proportion of things?” (Id.). The “falling power” on this occasion also is followed by the same “characteristic Nephite, hysterical joy” (3 Ne. 4:31-33).

This same “falling” shows up in Joseph’s own first vision story (J.S.2:20). as well as at other points in the early history of the Latter-day Saints Church (*History of the Church*, I, 85, 188f.). More important yet, it was a phenomenon which characterized later eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America. Historian Roberts cites examples from Jonathan Edwards’ *Works* (esp. pp. c, ci, civ) that describe the sinking and swooning that began in New England just before the mid-eighteenth century. J. B. Turner, in his

work on the Mormons (1842), supplies similar descriptions of the phenomenon which broke out afresh at the opening of the nineteenth century. Mr. Roberts pointedly remarks:

I think it cannot be questioned but what there is sufficient resemblance between the Book of Mormon instances of religious emotionalism and those cited in the foregoing quotations from the works of Edwards *et al*, to justify the thought that the latter might well have suggested, and indeed become the source of the former (Id., 43).

He sees the principle characteristic of this "ultra Protestantism" as being a self-accusation with an accompanying exaltation of free grace and mercy. These same features Mr. Roberts finds in the *Book of Mormon*, but the chapter breaks off before he develops this any further. There is only a handwritten notation to himself to add examples from Finney's revivals to "bring examples nearer home," that is, closer to the doorstep of the Smiths.

Having been led so skillfully through this study, we are left with a feeling of regret that Mr. Roberts, with his unique grasp of themes common to the *Book of Mormon* and the early nineteenth century, has not shared more of his findings with us. But he has given us ample material to make one conclusion certain: No one can any longer say that the *Book of Mormon* could not possibly have been composed by Joseph Smith, Jr. On the contrary, Mr. Roberts has given abundant evidence that it is a production of a rather unsophisticated mind in the early nineteenth century.—W.P.W.

PART 2

Photographs from Roberts' Original Manuscript,
"A Book of Mormon Study"

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A BOOK OF MORMON STUDY

Introductory: I.

LITERATURE AVAILABLE TO JOSEPH SMITH AS A
GROUND-PLAN FOR THE BOOK OF MORMON.

A number of years ago ~~thirteen years ago, to be~~
~~exact~~ in my treatise on the Book of Mormon under the general
title ^{of} "New Witnesses for God", I discussed the subject,
"Did the Book of Mormon antedate works in English on
American antiquities, accessible to Joseph Smith and his
associates". The object in considering the question at that
time was to ascertain whether or not the alleged historical
incidents of the Book of Mormon, and its subject matter
generally, were derived from speculations regarding the
origin, migrations, customs, religion, language, or other
lore of the American race, published previous to the coming
forth of the Book of Mormon; or if the Book of Mormon
truly indicated the source of those American Indian tra-
ditions and antiquities. Of course the discussion recognized
the fact that such publications must not only exist before
the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, but must also be
accessible to Joseph Smith or his associates, in order
to be of any force in the supposition that such publications
might have furnished the material from which the Book
of Mormon was constructed, or its general outlines suggested.

A photograph of the first page of B. H. Roberts' manuscript, "A Book of Mormon Study." The reader will note Roberts' corrections in the manuscript and the word "proofed" at the top of the page. A second typed copy of the first chapter is also included in the manuscript.

of the American Indians, including "The ten lost tribes" theory of Hebrew infusion into the American race, together with frequent mention of cultural traits favorable to this supposed Hebrew infusion—all this was matter of common speculation in the literature of America, before the publication of either Priest's "Antiquities" or the Book of Mormon. Priest himself, indeed, published a book in which some of these matters were discussed, before the publication of his "Antiquities", viz, "The Wonders of Nature and Providence"; copy righted by him June 2nd, 1824, and printed soon afterwards in Rochester, New York, only some twenty miles distant from Palmyra, near which place the Smith family then began to reside. It will be observed that this book preceded the publication of the Book of Mormon by about six years. At the time I made for my "New Witnesses" the survey of the literature on American Antiquities, traditions, origins, etc., available to Joseph Smith and his associates, this work of Priest's was unknown to me; as was also the work by Ethan Smith, "View of the Hebrews" [^] except by report of it, and as being in my hands but a few minutes.

In his book "The wonders of Nature and Providence", at Page 228, Mr. Priest ^{lays out} argues at length that the Indians may be descendants of the Israelites. He quotes from Clavigero, a Catholic missionary, who advocated the idea in the 17th Century; from William Penn, who advocated the same theory as early as 1774 from a sermon by Dr. Jarvis,

preached before the "American Historical Society" in 1811. Jarvis quotes from Rev. Samuel Sewell, fellow of Harvard College; and Samuel Willard, Vice-president of the same institution; and several New England historians; from Dr. Boudinot, and Dr. Johathan Edwards; from Charlevoix; from Dr. Pratz's History of Louisiana; and, in brief, he quotes in all about forty writers, half of whom are Americans, who advocated in one way or another, that the American Indians are Israelites. Most of these writers, one critic of the Book of Mormon urges, "lived and wrote" before Joseph Smith was born. Priest proves, he continues, that it was the almost universal opinion of the ministers of New England and the Middle States, that the Indians were descendants of the Hebrews. It should be held in mind that the book containing all this was published in 1824, six years before the Book of Mormon was printed, and within twenty miles from where the Smith family resided from about 1815 to 1830.

It is not, and could not be urged, of course, that such works as Adair's Von Humbolt's or the "Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society", would be in the hands of Joseph Smith or his family, years before the publication of the Book of Mormon; but it is altogether probable that these two books, Priest's "Wonders of Nature and Providence", 1824; and Ethan Smith's "View of the Hebrews" ~~1825~~ ^{about 1820} edition ~~1825~~ 2nd edition, 1825-were either possessed by Joseph Smith

decades of the nineteenth century, respecting the Indian race of America. And with the existence of such a body of knowledge, or that which was accepted as "knowledge", and a person of vivid and constructive imaginative power in contact with it, there is little room for doubt but that it might be possible for Joseph Smith to construct "a theory of origin" for his Book of Mormon, ^{in harmony with} ~~akin to~~ these prevailing notions; and more especially since this "common knowledge" is set forth in almost hand-book form in the little work of Ethan Smith, ^{"View of the Hebrews"} and published from eight to five years before the Book of Mormon was published.

The question to be considered here, then, is: did such "common knowledge", supplemented by Ethan Smith's book respecting theories of "origin", and of "history" obtain in the vicinity where Joseph Smith spent his early youth and manhood, and was he a person of sufficiently vivid and creative imagination as to produce such a work as the Book of Mormon from such materials. It will appear in what is to follow that such "common knowledge" did exist in New England; that Joseph Smith was in contact with it; that one book, at least, with which he was most likely acquainted, could well have furnished structural outlines for the Book of Mormon; and that Joseph Smith was possessed of such creative imaginative powers as would make it quite within the lines of possibility that the Book of Mormon could have been produced in that way.

where both circumstances come into existence. (Second), where the likelihood is very great that the person producing the later circumstance- incident or book-has been in contact with the earlier circumstance-incident or book. And (third), where the earlier circumstance-incident or book-has subject matter within it of sufficient resemblance to suggest the later product-incident or book.

As to the first consideration, in this case, priority of production of Ethan Smith's book, and priority of sufficient duration for it to become generally known in the vicinity where both books were produced-there is absolute certainty. For Ethan Smith's book ran through two editions in New England before the Book of Mormon was published. As to the second consideration, in this case, the likelihood of Joseph Smith coming in contact with Ethan Smith's book is not only very great, but amounts to a very close certainty. For being published in an adjoining county to the one in which their home had been for so long, and the interest in the subject being very general, not only in New England but in New York also, it would be little short of miraculous if they did not know of Ethan Smith's book.

As to the third consideration, viz, had the Ethan Smith book subject matter of sufficient resemblance to Book of Mormon Messiah incidents to suggest the latter. Of this each may judge for himself, for the matter is before him from the two books.

There is in Ethan Smith's book, for instance, the question that was put to the Delaware Indian Chief-"What did he know of the Christ". It so happened that he knew nothing. But the question suggested the possibility of the Indians knowing something of the Christ, and that was reason for the question being

close of his mission in Israel. He was taken into heaven in a whirl-wind, according to the Bible (II Kings 2). The Book of Mormon also has this element of mystery about the departures of some of its prophets. Of Alma, the prophet-about three quarters of a century B. C.- it is written: after blessing the Church:

"He departed out of of Zarahemla, as if to go into the land of Melek. And it came to pass that he was never heard of more; as to his death or burial we know not of. Behold, this we know, that he was a righteous man; and the saying went abroad in the church, that he was taken up by the Spirit, or buried by the hand of the Lord, even as Moses. But behold, the scriptures saith the Lord took Moses unto himself; and we suppose that he has also received Alma in the Spirit, unto himself; therefore, for this cause, we know nothing concerning his death and burial! So also another prophet-Nephi, son of Helaman-about the time of the birth of Messiah strangely departed from his people. He gave the sacred records of which he had been made custodian unto his son-"Then he departed out of the land, and whether he went, no man knoweth". (III Nephi 1:2,3). Were these departures of Book of Mormon holy men suggested by the similar incidents of the Bible? Really in imitations of the Bible incidents?

But now to return from this momentary divergence to the main theme of this writing-viz, did Ethan Smith's "View of the Hebrews" furnish structural material for Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon? It has been pointed out in these pages that there are many things in the former book that might well have suggested many major things in the other. Not a few things merely, one or two, or a half dozen, but many; and it is this fact of many

things of similarity and the cumulative force of them, that makes them so serious a menace to Joseph Smith's story of the Book of Mormon's origin. Let us consider in summary the chief things pointed out in this study.

The priority of publication by several years of Ethan Smith's View of the Hebrews is established, and referred to many times.

The likelihood of Joseph Smith and his family's contact with Ethan Smith's book and other books dealing with American antiquities, has been insisted upon.

The material in Ethan Smith's book is of a character and quantity to make a ground plan for the Book of Mormon: It supplies a large amount of material respecting American antiquities-leading to the belief that civilized or semi-civilized nations in ancient times occupied the American continents.

It not only suggests, but pleads on every page for Israelitish origin of the American Indians.

It deals with the destruction of Jerusalem and the scattering of Israel, as the Book of Mormon does.

It deals with the future gathering of Israel, and the restoration of the Ten Tribes, as the Book of Mormon does.

It emphasizes and uses much of the material from the prophecies of Isaiah, including whole chapters, as the Book of Mormon does.

It makes a special appeal to the Gentiles of the New World-having in mind more especially the people of the United States-to become the nursing fathers and mothers unto Israel in the New World-even as the Book of Mormon does, holding out

XIV.

THE IMAGINATIVE MIND OF PROPHET JOSEPH SMITH: EVIDENCE OF ITS EXISTENCE-EXAMPLES OF ITS FORCE.

One other subject remains to be considered in this division of the "study" here conducted, viz-was Joseph Smith possessed of a sufficiently vivid and creative imagination as to produce such a work as the Book of Mormon from such materials as have been indicated in the preceding chapters-from such common knowledge as was extant in the communities where he lived in his boyhood and young manhood; from the Bible, and more especially from the "View of the Hebrews", by Ethan Smith? That such power of imagination would have to be of a high order is conceded; that Joseph Smith possessed such a gift of mind there can be no question.

The fact of it is first established by the testimony of the mother who bore him, Lucy Smith. Speaking of the days immediately following the revelation making known the existence of the Book of Mormon to her son-the ever memorable 23rd day of September, 1823, Lucy Smith in her "History of the Prophet Joseph Smith", recounts how in the evening of that day, the young prophet sat up late detailing to the family the wonderful conversations he had with the angel; until the elder brother, Alvin, noting how exhausted the youthful prophet was suggested an adjournment of the story being related until the following evening. And this was done. This seems to have been the inauguration of a long series of such evenings according to the History by "Mother Lucy Smith" for she writes:

shielded from the burning rays of the sun." (Id. 304)

In the light of this evidence, there can be no doubt as to the possession of a vividly strong, creative imagination by Joseph Smith, the Prophet. An imagination, it could with reason be urged, which, given the suggestions that are to be found in the "common knowledge" of accepted American Antiquities of the times, supplemented by such a work as Ethan Smith's "View of the Hebrews", would make it possible for him to create a book such as the Book of Mormon is.

PART II.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE THAT THE BOOK OF MORMON IS OF HUMAN ORIGIN- CONSIDERED.

I.

THE WANT OF PERSPECTIVE AND CONSISTENCY IN THE ALLEGED HISTORICAL INCIDENTS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON. PARALLEL BETWEEN NEPHITE AND JAREDITE MIGRATIONS. SPECIAL DIFFICULTIES OF THE JAREDITE SEA VOYAGE.

IF from all that has gone before ⁱⁿ part I, the view be taken that the Book of Mormon is merely of human origin; that a person of Joseph Smith's limitations in experience and in education; who was of the vicinage and of the period that produced the book- if it be assumed that he is the author of it, then it could be said that there is much internal evidence in the book itself to sustain such a view.

In the first place there is a certain lack of perspective in the things the book relates as history that points quite clearly to an undeveloped mind as their origin. The narrative proceeds in characteristic disregard of conditions necessary to its reasonableness, as if it were a tale told by a child, with utter disregard for consistency. For example, there is the story of Lehi's departure from Jerusalem with his small colony; its landing in America, and its early movements in that land of promise. Let us note a few of its difficulties:

The first part of the journey is a three day's travel from Jerusalem to "near the shores of the Red Sea", (1 Nephi 2:4-6) It may be thought a small matter but the nearest point from Jerusalem to the Red Sea is about one hundred and seventy miles, and even if allowance is made for some change in the

they were all converted again unto the Lord."

But in addition to the striking parallilism in these incidents of Anti-Christ's of the Book of Mormon, with the strong implication that they have their origin in one mind, I call attention again to the fact of "rawness" in dealing with this question of unbelief, the evidence of "amateurishness" increasingly evident in this story of Korihor. Does it not carry with it ^{evidence} ~~the proof~~ that it is the work of a pious youth dealing with the very common place stock arguments clumsily put together for the belief in the existence of God, with an awkward turning from the request for a special miracle, in proof of God's existence, to the standing miracle of the creation and an orderly universe for that truth, rather than an adly appeal and argument on the great questions involved? And is not the vindication of God and his truth by a vindictive miracle on the person of the ranting blasphemer, rather the dream of a ^{young man} pious boy of what might very well have happened, rather than a matter of actual experience?

There were other anti-Christ's among the Nephites, but they were more military leaders than religious innovators, yet much of the same ^{character} kidney in spirit with these dissenters here passed in review; but I shall hold that what is here presented illustrates sufficiently the matter taken in hand by referring to them, namely that they are all of oge breed and brand; so nearly alike that one mind is the author of them, and that a young and undeveloped, but piously inclined mind. The evidence, ^{some will contend} I sorrowfully submit, points to Joseph Smith as their creator. It is difficult to believe that they are the product of history,