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Abstract: The process of studying early manuscripts and recommending corrections is called conjectural emendation. It is conjectural because it is based on circumstantial evidence and by its nature is unverifiable since it attempts to go beyond the earliest extant manuscript. A possible need for conjectural emendation in the Book of Mormon arises from its unique origin as a dictated translation. Phonetic similarity may account for Oliver Cowdery's mishearing of some words. Examples of possible errors found in the Book of Mormon manuscripts that were due to either misspelling, miscopying, and/or mishearing are explicated in this article, under the assumption that such faults are always the failings of men.

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Stan Larson

As one looks at the way a book is made, often being dictated, written down, edited, copied, rewritten, and then typeset for printing, he is not surprised that the scribe, copyist, editor, or printer might have misheard one word for another or miscopied from one manuscript to another, or even misspelled a word here or there. No matter how careful one is, errors do creep in. Most often the mistakes can be cleared up in second paintings by checking the printed copy against manuscript copies.

Occasionally, however, the original text is not available and errors exist in the earliest manuscripts. The text must then be carefully studied and proposed textual corrections decided upon that are both "intrinsically suitable" and "such as to account for the corrupt reading [error] . . . in the transmitted text."[1] This process of studying early manuscripts and recommending corrections is called conjectural emendation. It is conjectural because it is based on circumstantial evidence and by its nature is unverifiable since it attempts to go beyond the earliest extant manuscript. Though he does not use the term "conjectural emendation," Robert J. Matthews used this technique convincingly in evaluating a passage in the Inspired Version of the Bible.[2] Conjectural emendation must be judiciously and sparingly applied, however, for in this subjective enterprise one may get carried away and end up in the situation of the classical scholar Richard Bentley, who "in his later work. . . largely disregarded the evidence of manuscripts in determining the correct readings, and depended chiefly upon his own instinctive feeling as to what an author must have written." Thus, rather than propose alterations to a text simply to suit one's fancy, it would seem better to propose some instances in which conjectural emendation appears to be justified.

A possible need for conjectural emendation in the Book of Mormon arises from its unique origin as a dictated translation. An "error of the ear" may occur when a homophone (two words with the same sound such as *straight* and *strait*) or near-homophone is dictated and the wrong comes to the mind of the scribe and is accordingly written in the manuscript. Phonetic similarity may thus account for Oliver Cowdery's mishearing of some words. The presence of such errors in the Original MS of the Book of Mormon actually supports the position that Joseph Smith dictated to his scribe. Such difficulties are a natural product of the dictation process and are evidence that there was no collusion between the dictator and the scribe.

Examples of errors found in the Book of Mormon manuscripts that were due to either misspelling, miscopying, and/or mishearing are the writing of *&* for *an, away* for *a way, bear* for *bare, chaste* for *chased, drugs* for *dregs, forth* for *fourth, hare* for *hair, head* for *heed, holly* for *holy, know* for *now, least* for *lest, life* for *light, loose* for *lose, maid* for *made, new* for *knew, no* for *know, oar* for *ore, of* for *off, read* for *red, reign* for *rain, strait* for *straight, the* for *thee, then* for *than, there* for *their, thou* for *though, tittle* for *title, to* for *too, wedge* for *wage, where* for *were*, and *ye* for *yea.* These were corrected either directly in the Original MS, or while the Printer's MS was being transcribed, or when the text was first printed in 1830. If such errors occurred, were found, and corrected before the book was printed, is it possible that similar errors occurred that have not been corrected? Even though the possibility that such errors have been made in the transcription of the Book of Mormon text has been acknowledged,[3] there has been very little done to specify possible examples of such.

In the following passages, all of the printed edition and the Printer's MS (and also the Original MS, when it exists) have the same text. Although the suggested correction for each of the following is based on conjectural emendation, there is good reason for each suggestion.

A possible case of an error of the ear is 3 Nephi 25:2: "But unto you that fear my name, shall the Son of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall." The phrase "the Son of Righteousness" occurs instead of the suggested emendation "the Sun of Righteousness." In 1959 Sidney B. Sperry discussed this passage in some detail and pointed out that although in English sun and son are homophones, the Hebrew of Malachi 4:2 (which is being quoted) has *shemesh* meaning "sun," and not *ben* which is the word for "son." Also, the Hebrew text says literally "the sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in *her* wings," the feminine pronoun agreeing with the feminine gender of *shemesh*.[4] He concluded that due to this "compelling evidence" from the Hebrew text, one is "driven inevitably to the view that 'Sun of Righteousness' is the correct reading."[5] While proposing this correction to the text, Dr. Sperry adds that "*the meaning is not changed at all*, because most conservative scholars through the centuries have agreed that 'Sun of Righteousness' refers to the Savior."[6]

Other homophones that have created difficulties are *right* and *rite*, and while the context usually makes the necessary meaning clear there are some situations that are potentially ambiguous. *Right(s)* occurs seventy times, but *rites* only twice, and it seems that these occurrences of *rites* at Alma

43:45 and 44:5 are wrong. There are several reasons for this conclusion. Of the six passages where the Original MS is in existence and is legible, three of them have the spelling *rites*, but by the time they were printed in the first edition they appeared as *rights*.[7] Sometimes the stages of revision can be seen, as in the case of Alma 43:47, which has *rites* in the Original MS, *rites* corrected to *rights* in the Printer's MS, and *rights* in all printed editions. Most of the occurrences of *rights* cluster together in the "war chapters" of Alma, in which the Nephites are fighting to preserve their civil and religious rights, not defending the rituals of their church worship. In Alma 43:45 and 44:5, the conjectural emendation *rights* seems more consistent with the context, which refers to the freedom to worship as they desired.[8]

The phrase "the remnant of those that are slain" in 2 Nephi 24:19 seems to be self-contradictory since the ones who are slain would not have anyone left to represent them. This is a quotation of Isaiah 14:19, and here the King James Version has *raiment*, which translates *lebush* meaning "garment, clothing, raiment."[9] Brother Sperry seems to favor raiment for this verse in the Book of Mormon and suggests that the meaning is: "Clad with the slain, i.e., his corpse is surrounded by other dead bodies." It seems likely that the scribe understood the word as *remnant* when *raiment* was dictated.

In both 2 Nephi 29:4 and Alma 18:37, the *travel(s)* of the printed text and the Printer's MS might have been dictated as *travail(s)*, or might have been misspelled by Oliver Cowdery. Most words misspelled in the Printer's MS were corrected by John H. Gilbert, the major typesetter for the first edition, who said:

> In one instance he [Oliver Cowdery] was looking over the manuscript, when the word "travail" occurred twice in the form but spelled in the manuscript, travel Mr. Grandin when reading the proof pronounced the word correctly, but Cowdery did not seem to know the difference . . .[10]

The "form" (or pages of a book intended to be printed on one side of a sheet) Gilbert referred to comprised pages 209–24 in the 1830 edition, and though the word is indeed misspelled as *travel* in the Printer's MS, it is correctly printed as *travail* at Mosiah 27:33 and 29:33. It should be noted that though the pronunciation of *travail* and *travel* are quite distinct in present-day English, this was not the case in the nineteenth century.[11] The fascinating aspect of this problem is that travail (always with the manuscript spelling travel) also occurs four other times in the Printer's MS, but in only two of these (Mosiah 14:11 and 3 Nephi 22:1) was its spelling corrected to travail in the printed text. The other two cases (2 Nephi 29:4 and Alma 18:37) remain in their manuscript misspelling, and it would seem that they also should have been rendered travail.

The Book of Ether is structurally organized so that it begins with a genealogical table from the prophet Ether back through the generations to his forefather Jared, and then the story is told in chronological order from that time down to the time of Ether. Each of the individuals listed in the genealogy is mentioned in the following chapters, with the exception in Ether 1:11–12 of *Shiblon,* whose name does not precisely match with the *Shiblom* of the corresponding passages in Ether 11:4, 5, 7, 9. Brother Sperry, noting this difference of spelling, suggests that we are probably "dealing with one original and not two distinct names."[12] This is supported by the implication of Ether 11:9 that Seth was the son of *Shiblom* (cf. Ether 1:11), and not the brother of Shiblom as some have advocated. Since the form Shiblom occurs six times in Ether and the alternate form only twice, and since Jaredite names tended to favor mimation,[13] it appears that Ether 1:11–12 should correctly be *Shiblom.* The Original MS is in the original, or whether the difficulty arose from mishearing or simply miscopying on the part of the scribe.

That Helaman 3:3 has *yea* instead of *year* stems back to the Original MS and was due either to faulty transcription or to mishearing of what was dictated. This particular kind of error is not unknown,[14] and the conjectural emendation year is supported by the occurrences of "forty and third year" twice in verse one, and "forty and fourth year" and "forty and fifth year" in verse two, leading up to the emended phrase about the "forty and sixth year" in verse three.

The text of 2 Nephi 8:15 seems to have a few words missing since it attributes roaring waves to the Lord himself! What was probably intended is "I am the Lord thy God, that divided the sea whose waves roared" (as found in the King James Version of Isaiah 51:15), with the logical order that it is the Lord that divides or stirs up the sea and that it is the waves of the sea that are making the roaring sound. The Hebrew underlying this phrase is *roga' hayyam,* which means "who is disturbing the sea."[15] Although there is indeed a gap of four words in our present Book of Mormon text and the Original MS for this verse is not extant, it is *possible* that the phrase now missing in 2 Nephi 8:15 was actually written in the Original MS and is an example of a transcription error in which a phrase was accidentally omitted when the Printer's MS was copied.[16]

When the passage at 2 Nephi 23:8 is compared with the parallel at Isaiah 13:8 in the King James Version, it becomes apparent that the Book of Mormon text is different in that the latter does not have the following clause: "they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth." This difference between the Book of Mormon and the Bible could be accounted for by asserting either that the clause was added to the Bible account or deleted from the Book of Mormon account. Since the words "they shall be" begin the missing part as well as the immediately following clause, it may indicate that someone's eye skipped from one set of words to the other and thus account for their absence in the Book of Mormon. As in the previous passage examined, the words under consideration may have been lost when the Printer's MS was made from the Original MS, though the Original MS is unavailable to substantiate the situation one way or another. Notice that when the arrangement and punctuation of the Revised Standard Version, the fine balance of the characteristic poetic parallelism would be lost if the second line were omitted:

> Pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them;
> they shall be pain as a woman that travaileth.
> They shall be amazed one at one another;
> their faces shall be as flames.

Unlike many other Biblical passages revised in the Book of Mormon, the text at this point in the Inspired Revision simply follows the King James Version, which may indicate that the phrase was not supposed to be missing from the Book of Mormon.

Deserting in the phrase "deserting away into the land of Nephi, among the Lamanites" of Helaman 4:12 has appeared in every printed edition of the Book of Mormon. The word *deserting* would normally be found in a context indicating an abandoning of military service. However, the Printer's MS has *desenting.* This could be taken either as *deserting* or *dissenting.* A consideration in favor of the latter is the association of the same preposition, *away,* found in 3 Nephi 3:11 where it talks about *dissenting away.* Also Oliver Cowdery's spelling habits in the Book of Mormon manuscript should be considered: there are ten other places where *dissent* (or related forms) are spelled as *desent,* which certainly pushes in favor that *dissenting* was the intent of the Printer's MS at this point. Thus, by a not-too-far-fetched conjectural emendation the text becomes *dissenting.*

Helaman's letter to Moroni is introduced with the statement: "these are the words which he wrote" (Alma 56:2); then from this verse through Alma 58:41 the letter is quoted, evidently verbatim. Throughout these 133 verses all references to Helaman are consistently in the first person,[17] except in Alma 56:52 where the third person reference to Helaman and his warriors breaks this consistency.[18] The crossed-out part in the Printer's MS in verse 52 of Helaman came upon their rear hints that the Original MS (which is not extant for these words) might have read "I Helaman." A reasonable reconstruction for this verse is: ". . . when I Helaman came upon their rear with my two thousand, and began to slay them exceedingly, insomuch that the whole army of the Lamanites halted and turned upon *me.*"[19]

Although the textual difficulties discussed above show that some errors have crept into the Book of Mormon right from the beginning, it must be remembered that such faults are the failings of men. The Book of Mormon is a marvelously consistent volume, and it is a wonder that with so many chances for mishearing, misspelling, or miscopying, there are so few instances where one must appeal to the process of conjectural emendation.

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1. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration,* 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 182.

2. Robert J. Matthews, *A Plainer Translation: Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible—A History and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), pp. 202–04, convincingly proposes a new reading for the Inspired Revision of Luke 6:33 in spite of the consistent evidence of the original manuscript (NT 2), the Bernhisel manuscript, and all printed editions.

3. *Scriptures of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Supplement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1968), p. 55.

4. Another biblical quotation within the Book of Mormon that speaks of the sun rising is found at 3 Nephi 12:45. Here, too, the Printer's MS has *son,* but fortunately in this case the Printer's MS was corrected to *sun* and it was correctly printed in the first edition.

5. Sidney B. Sperry, "The Book of Mormon and Textual Criticism," in *Book of Mormon Institute,* Brigham Young University Extension Publications, 5 December 1959, p. 5.

6. *Ibid.* Emphasis in the original. Ironically, when Brother Sperry's talk was printed the phrase "Sun of Righteousness" in this quote was misprinted as "Son of Righteousness."

7. There is even one case (Mosiah 29:32) where the Printer's MS has *wrights* and this too is corrected to *rights* in the printed editions.

8. It is made clear in Alma 43:9 that they were fighting to preserve their rights and freedoms in order to be able to "worship God according to their desires."

9. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexion,* p. 528.

10. John H. Gilbert to James Cobb, 10 February 1879, New York Public Library, as quoted in Larry Porter, "A Study of the Origins of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the States of New York and Pennsylvania, 1816–1831" (Ph.D. diss, Brigham Young University, 1971), p. 89. Emphasis in the original.

11. Both words were pronounced with the stress on the first syllable. See Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828, s.v. *travail* and *travel.* Orson Pratt's pronunciation of *travail* (*s)*can be checked in his 1869 edition of the Deseret Alphabet Book of Mormon (New York: Russel Bros, 1869) on pages 141 (Mosiah 14:11), 162 (Mosiah 27:33), 166 (Mosiah 29:33), and 377 (3 Nephi 22:1).

12. Sperry, *Compendium,* p. 474n.

13. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), pp. 236–37.

14. A similar difficulty occurred in Alma 48:21 where the Original MS has "nineteenth year," the Printer's MS has "ninetheeth yea," the 1830 edition has "nineteenth; yea," and the 1840 editions have "nineteeth year; yea." It can be seen that the original rendition as written at the dictation of Joseph Smith was correct, and that when the

Printer's MS was made the problem arose due to the incomplete transcription of *year* as *yea.* This was copied in the editions until 1849 when the difficulty was sensed, however, because the solution was not based on the reading of the Original MS but simply on the requirements of the context, it did not correct the *yea* back to *year,* but merely added a *year* before the *yea.* Obviously, the original intent was to have *year* without *yea.*

15. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexion,* p. 920. The same phrase is found in Jeremiah 31:35.

16. There are other places like this where there are gaps in the Printer's MS and the printed editions, and where the Original MS is missing. An example would be verse 15 of the Words of Mormon which should be read "and they *had been* punished according to their crimes."

17. Compare especially Alma 56:9; 57:36; and 58:41.

18. There is a parallel instance in Helaman 13:25 where a third person reference needed to be changed to first person and this was done to the passage in 1837.

19. Though it is a little awkward, it would require less emendation to have "me Helaman," which would be like the style found in 1 Nephi 7:6, 14:5 and Jacob 1:1, 1; and 7:22.