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Chapter LVIII

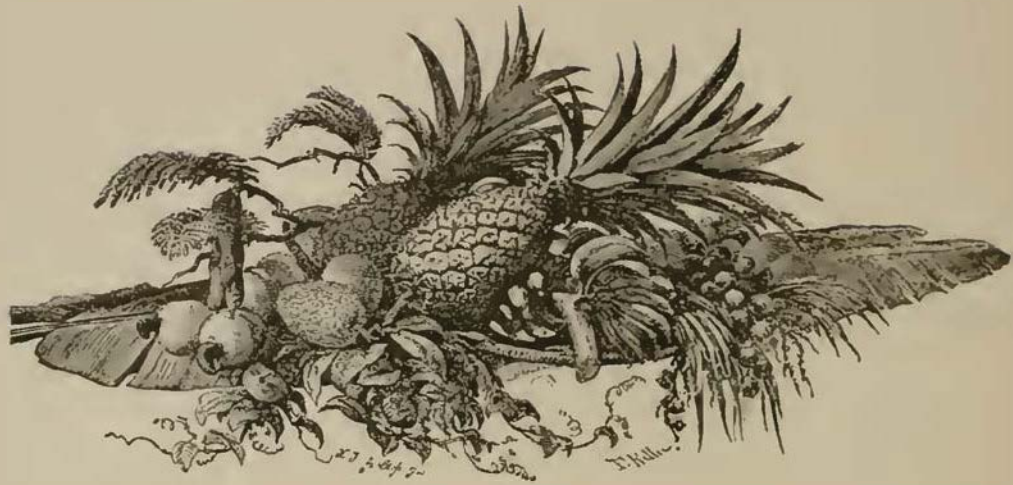
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Abstract: Agriculture Among the Nephites—Grains—Stock Raising—Irrigation



CHAPTER LVIII.

AGRICULTURE AMONG THE NEPHITES—GRAINS—STOCK RAISING—IRRIGATION.

NO SOONER had Lehi and his little colony arrived on the promised land than they commenced the cultivation of the soil, planting therein the seeds they had brought with them from the land of Judea, which, to their great joy, yielded abundantly. The grains and fruits of the Asiatic continent were found to flourish as luxuriantly in the soil of America as in their native land. This not only held good in the land of the Nephites' first inheritance, but also in the lands of their later possession—Nephi, Zarahemla, etc., as all through the Book of Mormon we have occasional references (incidental to the story of their history) to the success that attended their farming operations. Nor must it be imagined that their business was carried on in the primitive manner that characterizes the labors of Laman's degenerate descendants to-day. Agricul-

tural machinery, and all manner of tools of every kind to till the ground, are mentioned by more than one writer.

Of cereals, corn, wheat and barley appear to have been, as in the land of their forefathers, the staple crops. If we mistake not, oats are never mentioned in the Bible, nor is rye spoken of more than once or twice. In the Book of Mormon we have no recollection of the mention of either of these grains. On the other hand they appear to have cultivated grains with which we are unacquainted, known to them by the names of neas and sheum. Had there been any English equivalents to these words, we should doubtless have had them as in other cases, instead of the original Nephite names.

All kinds of fruit flourished under their careful cultivation. Special reference is several times made to vineyards and grape culture, as well as to the manufacture of wine. Like the moderns, they understood the secret of fortifying or strengthening it with liquor or alcohol, of which knowledge they took advantage when paying tribute to the Lamanites, in cases when they intended to escape from their taskmasters while the latter were under the influence of this intoxicating drink.

It is evident from the sacred record that the Nephites carried on their farming very much in the same manner, and for very much the same reasons, as the early settlers in Utah. When a new colony was planted, a town or village was built in a suitable location, somewhat after the style of our early forts. This city or settlement was generally named after the founder or the leader of the colony. The farming land

contiguous was called by the same name. The land was tilled in every convenient place around the city, and when the Lamanites appeared, or other danger threatened, the people retreated into their place of refuge, in the center of their lands. As an example, we will cite the case of the followers of Alma, in the land of Helam. When the army of the Lamanites made their unwelcome appearance, the people were mostly engaged in tilling the soil. At the coming of the dreaded foe they gathered with all haste into the city to await developments and to receive the counsel their wise, brave and good leader might give them. By his advice, the men went out of the city in a body, and made a treaty with the Lamanites, which the latter, as soon as their purpose was accomplished, failed to keep.

It is probable that in many parts of the continent some system of irrigation was adopted to raise the crops. But this was not necessary in all portions of the Nephite possessions; we are inclined to think it was not so in the cultivated portions of the valley of the Sidon. Certain it is that when the righteous Nephi (the father of one of the Twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus from among the Israel of this western continent) called upon the Lord, at his request a famine desolated the land. The sacred historian records: For the earth was smitten that it was dry, and did not yield forth grain in the season of grain. But when the people had repented and Nephi had pleaded in their behalf, it is written, And it came to pass in the seventy-sixth year (B. C. 16), the Lord did turn away his anger from the people, and caused that rain should fall upon the earth, insomuch that it did bring forth her fruit in the season of her fruit. . And it came to pass that it

did bring forth her grain in the season of her grain. We judge from this that in those days the Nephite agriculturist depended on the direct rains from heaven; for it appears that in the same year that they fell, the grain harvest was reaped, and the fruit harvest gathered. But it is unsafe to form positive theories on these points, until we fully understand the great changes that took place on the face of the land, with consequent alterations of climate, etc., at the time of the awful convulsions that attended the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior.

Except in the days of their excessive pride and ungodly arrogance, the calling of the agriculturist among the Nephites was a most honorable one, as in truth it should be among all people. King Mosiah, the beloved, reminded the people that, to prevent their taxes being grievous, he himself did till the earth for his support, and to maintain the expenses of the monarchy. With this royal example, it is no wonder that the farmer and the horticulturist were esteemed among the greatest of nature's noblemen.

The Nephites were also successful stock-raisers; their flocks and herds formed no inconsiderable portion of their wealth. The abundance of their horned stock, sheep, goats, wild goats, horses, fatlings, etc., is frequently referred to. To this industry the Lamanites, who were great meat-eaters, also gave considerable attention. It was a business that suited their semi-civilization. It did not tie them down so completely to one spot, as did agriculture and manufacture. But it is a notable fact that whenever any bodies of Lamanites passed over to the Nephites, they not only adopted the latter's religion and faith, but also their mode of living,

and became skilled in the pursuits of industry. As an example, we read, in the days of the Judges, of many of these people joining the people of Ammon (their former brethren), when they did begin to labor exceedingly, tilling the ground, raising all manner of grain, and flocks and herds of every kind.

CHAPTER LIX.

SCIENCE AND LITERATURE AMONG THE NEPHITES—THEIR
ASTRONOMY AND GEOGRAPHY—THE LEARNING OF
EGYPT.

THE NEPHITES were unusually happy in having, as the founders of their nation, men who were not only wise in the ways of the Lord, but also learned in the knowledge of the world. Most races that have made a mark in history have had to grope their way for centuries from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge. Little by little such races have advanced in the path of civilization, falling into manifold errors, and committing grievous blunders. With Lehi and his posterity it was not so. They were taken from the midst of a people who were surrounded by the most powerful and refined nations of antiquity, with whose wisdom and learning Lehi was undoubtedly well acquainted. We can readily conceive that the Lord, in planting this mighty and vigorous offshoot of the house of Joseph, on the richest and most favored land of all the world, would not only choose one of his most faith-