An Old Slander Revived and Refuted

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Abstract: Sidney Rigdon did not work for publisher Patterson who had the Spaulding manuscript nor did he know Joseph Smith until after the Book of Mormon was published. The manuscript has no significant similarities to the Book of Mormon. The testimonies of the Three Witnesses cannot be refuted as they were reaffirmed in the last years of the witnesses' lives. These final testimonies appear in this article.
AN OLD SLANDER REVIVED AND REFUTED.

Some of the clergy in these parts are circulating an article from an encyclopaedia giving purported particulars of the origin of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or “Mormons” as the term is popularly used, and prominent in the sketch is the oft-repeated, but thoroughly-refuted “fairy-tale” about the Book of Mormon having been copied from a religious romance written by Rev. Solomon Spaulding, but never published. The theory set forth was that Spaulding’s tale, called “The Manuscript Found,” was submitted in 1814 to a Pittsburg publisher by the name of Patterson; that it passed into the hands of Sidney Rigdon, and in some manner unexplained was obtained by the young man, Joseph Smith, born December 23, 1805, who palmed it upon the world as a revelation from God.

The connection between Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith entirely failed, except that after the Book of Mormon had been printed and published and the Church had been organized, two of the Elders traveling in Ohio met with Sidney Rigdon and showed him a copy of the book, and he subsequently joined the Church and became one of its leading ministers. The connection between Patterson, the printer, and Sidney Rigdon, was also a matter of conjecture, but it was stated that Rigdon was a printer in Patterson’s office. That, however, fell to the ground, because Rigdon was not a printer and never worked in the Patterson office. That he knew nothing concerning the Book of Mormon or the Spaulding Story has been demonstrated in the clearest and most positive manner, by affidavits which have been published over and over again, but this seems to have no weight with the reverend gentlemen who circulate the falsehoods, as they need some theory to account for the Book of Mormon other than the truth, and the Spaulding myth seems to suit them better than anything else that could be concocted for that purpose.

The discovery of the original “Manuscript Found” written by Solomon Spaulding, ought to have put a quietus on the widely circulated claim, that it was in any way a foundation for the Book of Mormon. This discovery was made by Professor James H.
Fairchild of Oberlin College, Ohio, U. S. A., and on comparison with the Book of Mormon it was found to be totally different in every particular from that work, and it is now kept in the library of that institution, and has been copied and printed and is offered for sale wherever the Book of Mormon is published. All this has been threshed out so often as to have become monotonous to many people, and we apologize to the readers of the Star for recurring to the subject, but its recent revival gives reason for this reference.

As is well known to everybody who has seen the Book of Mormon, it has for a preface the testimony of Three Witnesses that the plates from which it was translated were shown to them by an angel of God, and of eight witnesses that they had seen and handled the plates by natural means, and had inspected the hieroglyphics engraved thereupon. In the leaflets now distributed, and in the puerile attempt of a Liverpool clergyman to attack this testimony, it is stated that the Three Witnesses spoken of left the "Mormon" Church and denied their former statement. It is for the purpose of showing the utter falsity of this recent fabrication that we take up the matter again. Here is the testimony of the Three Witnesses as it has appeared in every issue of the Book of Mormon from the opening of the year 1830 to the present time:

"Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people, unto whom this work shall come, that we, through the grace of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record, which is a record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken; and we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for His voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety, that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon the plates; and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man. And we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ that we beheld and bear record that these things are true; and it is marvelous in our eyes, nevertheless, the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment seat of Christ and shall dwell with him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen.

Oliver Cowdery,
David Whitmer,
Martin Harris."

It is true that all three of these affiants were afterwards excommunicated from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but it is not true that they or either of them ever denied the testimony we have copied above. On the contrary, each of them maintained it to their last moments on earth. Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris, after being out of the Church for several years, re-
pented of their rebellion and stubbornness and vain ambition, and returned with tears to the Church and sought and were given re-admission. Oliver Cowdery did this when the Church was in one of its bitterest trials, the saints having been driven from the State of Illinois, and the fugitives were on their way through the wilderness to find a home in the Rocky Mountains. Even when he was at discord with the Church authorities he always stood by his former testimony. At a meeting held in Kanesville, Iowa, U.S.A., October 21st, 1848, he rose before a large congregation, gave his name and made this statement:

"I wrote, with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as he translated it by the gift and power of God, by the means of the Urim and Thummim, or as it is called by that book "holy interpreters." I beheld with my eyes and handled with my hands the gold plates from which it was translated. I also saw with my eyes and handled with my hands the holy interpreters. The book is true. Sidney Rigdon did not write it; Mr. Spaulding did not write it; I wrote it myself as it fell from the lips of the Prophet. It contains the everlasting gospel, and came forth to the children of men in fulfillment of the Revelations of John where he says he saw an angel come with the everlasting gospel to preach to every nation, kindred, tongue and people."

Martin Harris also continued to bear testimony to the truth of the Book of Mormon, and as stated, returned to the Church, but it was after its establishment in the Rocky Mountains. He there repeated in public and in private what he had avowed in his published statement, and he died in Clarkston, Utah, July 10th, 1875, after expressing his joy at the news conveyed to him that the Book of Mormon has been translated into the Spanish language.

David Whitmer did not return to the Church, but after being excommunicated in 1838 repeatedly reiterated his published testimony until his latest breath, having lived until he was over eighty years of age at Richmond, Mo., U.S.A., where he died January 25th, 1888. Here is a statement among many that he made to newspaper reporters and visitors from different points, who, thinking he would recant, urged him to tell the truth concerning the Book of Mormon:

"The fact is it was just as though Joseph, Oliver and I were sitting just here on a log, when we were overshadowed by a light. It was not like the light of the sun, nor like that of a fire, but more glorious and beautiful. It extended away round us, I cannot tell how far, but in the midst of this light, about as far off as he sits (pointing to John C. Whitmer sitting a few feet from him) there appeared as it were a table with many records or plates upon it, besides the plates of the Book of Mormon, also the sword of Laban, the directors (i.e., the ball which Lehi had) and the interpreters. I saw them just as plain as I see this bed (striking the bed beside him with his hand), and I heard the voice of the Lord as distinctly as I ever heard anything in my life declaring that the records of the plates of the Book of Mormon were translated by the gift and power of God."

The story having been circulated that David Whitmer had denied his former testimony, he became much exercised over
the falsehood, and he had a leaflet printed and distributed in March 1881, from which we take the annexed paragraphs:

"It having been represented by one John Murphy of Polo, Caldwell County, Mo., that I in a conversation with him last summer, denied my testimony as one of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon; to the end therefore that he may understand me now, if he did not then; and that the world may know the truth, I wish now, standing as it were in the very sunset of life, and in the fear of God once for all to make this public statement:

"That I have never at any time denied that testimony or any part thereof, which has so long since been published with that Book as one of the Three Witnesses. Those who know me best well know that I have always adhered to that testimony. And that no man may be misled or doubt my present views in regard to the same I do again affirm the truth of all my statements as then made and published."

To this affirmation was appended the signatures of twenty-two of the most prominent citizens of Richmond, Ray Co., certifying that "David Whitmer had resided there since the year 1831, and they were intimately acquainted with him and knew him to be a man of the highest integrity and of undoubted truth and veracity." They consisted of generals, judges, bank presidents, attorneys, merchants, etc., all non-Mormons. Later on David Whitmer, having learned of the falsehood published in certain encyclopaedias, published a further affirmation, which is here inserted:

"It is recorded in the American Cyclopaedia and in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, that I, David Whitmer, have denied my testimony as one of the three witnesses to the divinity of the Book of Mormon; and that the other two witnesses, Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris, denied their testimony to that Book. I will say once more to all mankind, that I have never at any time denied that testimony or any part thereof. I also testify to the world, that neither Oliver Cowdery or Martin Harris ever at any time denied their testimony. They both died reaffirming the truth of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. I was present at the death bed of Oliver Cowdery, and his last words were, "Brother David, be true to your testimony to the Book of Mormon." He died here in Richmond, Mo., on March 3rd, 1856. Many witnesses yet live in Richmond, who will testify to the truth of these facts, as well as to the good character of Oliver Cowdery. The very powers of darkness have combined against the Book of Mormon, to prove that it is not the word of God, and this should go to prove to men of spiritual understanding, that the Book is true."

Three days before his death, David Whitmer called his family and relatives together, and with the gates of eternity opening to his view, he there in the most solemn and fervent manner testified to the truth of his statement as published as a preface to the Book of Mormon, leaving no doubt in their minds as to his sincerity, and making an impression that cannot be obliterated. This ought to stand against all the calumnies that have been circulated on this subject, and religious ministers certainly ought to cease their repetitions of the slander, which is not rendered any more truthful or reliable because it has been copied into an English encyclopedia.

Nor should it be considered an argument against the Book of Mormon that the Three Witnesses were cut off the Church for transgression. Logically it is an argument in favor of the position
occupied by the Prophet Joseph Smith. If the Book of Mormon had been a fraud concocted by him and persons associated with him, he would not have dared to raise his hand against the three men who had given their testimony in support of his deception. The manifestation which they received from God was for the purpose it discloses; it gave them no authority to dictate to the Church or to the prophet of God; it should have made them humble instead of arrogant, and brought submission instead of rebellion, and this should prove a lesson to all members of the Church of Christ, and teach them that no matter how many revelations God may give to them, His gifts are for their benefit in the sphere which they occupy, and clothes them with no right to seek control over their fellows or to administer in the name of the Lord in anything to which they are not appointed.

The Book of Mormon stands unimpeached as a sacred record of the dealings of God with the ancient inhabitants of the American continent, and of the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed to them by the Savior in person. It is published to all the world as a witness that Jesus of Nazareth was and is the Christ, the veritable Son of the Eternal God, and thus is a bulwark against the shafts of false theology, the attacks of modern scepticism and the theories of vain philosophy miscalled science. Its truth is affirmed by thousands of living witnesses, and it will go forth in power to every nation.

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C. W. P.

THE TRUE IDEAL.

It is a fact, though not generally accepted, that there is but one perfect Standard by which we can measure our lives, but one Perfect Model for us to pattern our lives after—the Lord Jesus Christ. History records the lives of many noble and great men, lives in which have shone forth almost all the Christian virtues, and these are pointed to by those who refuse to accept the Messiah as the Son of God as examples quite sufficient for our emulation. But we who believe in the divinity of the Redeemer point to Him as the great Exemplar, for all other lives fall far short of perfection.

Socrates, who lived before the advent of the Savior, and who is almost worshiped to-day by a certain class of people, did not pose as a perfect example for mankind, but said that "we must of necessity wait till someone from Him who careth for us all shall come and instruct us how to live towards God and man."

By others the life and philosophy of Plato is considered to equal, if not to excel, the life and teachings of Christ. But Plato, like Socrates, longed "to see a Lawgiver from heaven who could rightly instruct us." (Plato's Republic.)

And if we were to examine the lives of all the other great men of the earth we would find that, without exception, they fall far