

THE MYTH OF THE MANU- SCRIPT FOUND.

CHAPTER I.

THE HISTORY OF THE MANUSCRIPT.

TIME and again, at recurring intervals of unequal length, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is assailed with a rehash of the notorious "Spaulding story," which from frequent repetition has become as familiar in the mouths of many of the Saints as household words. True, the story in its details is not always identical, it is altered, re-arranged, or "cooked" to suit the necessities of the story teller, but in its essential particulars it remains the same. Its burden is that a certain "reverend" gentleman of Conneaut, Ohio, named Solomon Spaulding, in the early part of the present century, wrote a historical romance which he entitled the "Manuscript Found," that in some unexplained and unexplainable way, but generally imagined to have been through Sidney Rigdon, the youthful Joseph Smith obtained access to this manuscript and from its scanty pages elaborated the Book of Mormon, which he afterwards palmed upon the world as a divine revelation.

This is the substance of the "Spaulding story." It is a frantic effort to prove the Book of Mormon a forgery and a fraud, for it is very evident that if the Book of Mormon is not of God then the whole superstructure of "Mormonism is of nec

essity a gross imposture, the cruelest of religious deception that for many centuries has misled humanity. All other theories advanced to prove this record false having long since failed, the "Spaulding story" is the last and only resort of those who oppose the divine mission of Joseph Smith, and though many a time refuted and proved an impossibility, yet, it is that or nothing; and the malignant hatred of the wicked not permitting the Book of Mormon to stand on its own intrinsic merits, or be judged by its own internal evidences, this story has to be again and again revamped as the last hope of a hopeless cause which perceives in the triumph of "Mormonism" the seal of its own destruction. To consider this story, its origination and history, its claims on the credulity of mankind, and the weight of evidence for and against it, will be topic of the following pages.

Attention has been drawn and interest created anew in Mr. Spaulding and his unpublished romance by the appearance in the public prints of articles and affidavits by members of his family, in which the story of the "Manuscript Found" is given, and efforts made to connect it with the Book of Mormon. Among the most important of these papers is an affidavit of Mrs. McKinstry the daughter of Mr. Spaulding, which gives a history of the manuscript from the time it was written until it passed out of the hands of the family. We will first draw attention to the various points made by Mrs. McKinstry from her actual knowledge, leaving out those reflections, suppositions and vain imaginings in which she indulges when she wanders from the path of her actual knowledge; but lest it should be asserted that we have not fairly represented her statements, we insert the affidavit in full as an appendix to this little volume.

According to Mrs. McKinstry's affidavit she resided with her father, Mr. Solomon Spaulding, at Conneaut, Ohio, in 1812, she then being a child in her sixth year.

About this time her father was very much interested in the antiquities of this continent, and wrote a romance on the subject, which he called the "Manuscript Found," in which she believes the names of Mormon, Moroni, Nephi and Lamanite appear.

This was not the only work of Mr. Spaulding, he was a man of literary tastes and wrote a number of tales. etc., which he was in the habit of reading to his family, to his little daughter, now Mrs. McKinstry, among the rest.

From Conneaut the family removed to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, where they had a friend named Patterson, a bookseller. To this gentleman, her mother states, the "Manuscript Found" was loaned and by him read, admired and returned to the author.

The stay of the family in Pittsburg was very brief, for they shortly removed to Amity, Pennsylvania, where Mr. Spaulding died in 1816. Immediately afterwards she and her widowed mother paid a visit to the latter's brother Mr. William H. Sabine, at Onondaga Valley, Onondaga Co., New York. A trunk containing all the writings of the deceased clergyman was taken with them and in this trunk was the "Manuscript Found." While here Mrs. McKinstry saw and handled the manuscript and describes it as closely written and about an inch thick.

Afterwards her mother went to reside with her father (Mrs. McKinstry's grandfather) at Pomfret, Connecticut, but she did not take the trunk of manuscript with her. In 1820 she again married and became the wife of a Mr. Davison, of Hardwicks, near Coopertown, New York. After her marriage she sent for her things left at her brother's, among the rest the old trunk of manuscript. These reached her in safety.

In 1828, Mrs. McKinstry was herself married, and resided in Monson, Hampton Co., Mass. Very soon after her marriage her mother joined her there, and was with her most of the time until the latter's death, which took place in 1844.

Mrs. Davison when she went to reside with her daughter left the trunk of manuscript at Hardwicks, in care of Mr. Jerome Clark.

In 1834, one Hurlburt visited her. He bore a letter from her brother, Mr. Sabine, and requested the loan of the "Manuscript Found." She reluctantly gave him a letter addressed to Mr. Clark, at Hardwicks, to deliver him the manuscript; Hurlburt having made repeated promises to return it.

The family afterwards heard that Hurlburt received the manuscript from Mr. Clark, but from that time the Spaulding family never again had it in their possession, though they repeatedly wrote to Hurlburt about the matter.

In the above we have the history of the notorious manuscript from the time it was written until it fell into the hands of D. P. Hurlburt, who was the first man who endeavored to connect it with the Book of Mormon. Its history may be thus summed up:

Written in 1812 at Conneaut, Ohio.

Taken to Pittsburg shortly after. (1814.)

Thence to Amity, where it was in the possession of its author when he died in 1816.

In 1816 taken to Onondaga Valley, New York.

In 1820 removed to Hardwicks, New York, where it remained until 1834, when it was handed to Hurlburt.

Here we have an unbroken history of its wanderings until years after the Book of Mormon was published.

How then is it presumed that Joseph Smith obtained possession of it? This is an unanswered question. Was Joseph in any of those places at the time the manuscript was there? No, there is not the least proof that he ever was, all the testimony and evidence is directly to the contrary. Was Sidney Rigdon ever in these places? Not at the same time as the "Manuscript Found," as we shall presently show.

The Prophet Joseph Smith was born in Vermont, December 23rd, 1805, and was consequently in his sixth year when the romance was written. He was only fifteen when it was taken to Hardwicks. It would be preposterous to imagine that before that age any such labor as the changing of the "Manuscript Found" into the Book of Mormon could be accomplished by one so young, so inexperienced, and withal so ignorant. For all admit, both friend and foe, that his education at that time was very limited. In 1820, he received his first vision, and began his prophetic work, being then a resident of Manchester, New York.

In 1823 he still resided with his parents at Manchester, and it was in that year that he first began bearing testimony with

regard to the coming forth of what we now call the Book of Mormon, and that he had seen the plates from which it would be translated. Manchester is from 80 to 100 miles from Hardwicks in a direct line, and in the last-named place the "Manuscript" still remained hidden in an old trunk in a garret, no one knowing or expecting that recourse would be had to it for such a base purpose.

Joseph continued to live with his father's family. It is not until 1825, that we have any account of his leaving home for any length of time; until then, when not employed on the farm, he hired out by the day to his neighbors in Manchester and vicinity.

CHAPTER II.

THE ORIGINATOR OF THE SPAULDING STORY.

DOCTOR PHILASTUS HURLBURT was the originator or inventor of the "Spaulding Story."

He was not a doctor by profession, but his mother gave him that name because he was the seventh son, a very common custom in some parts at the time he was born.

Those who adopt his fabrication with regard to the authorship of the Book of Mormon would have people believe that he really was a doctor. It gives an air of respectability to their tale, and tends to make the public think that he must have been a man of good education, though he really was not.

We will now give some statements with regard to his life, and the causes that led to the invention of the desperate lie, regarding the Book of Mormon, which has tended to deceive so many people. These statements are, for the most part, abridged from the writings of one who was intimately acquainted with him.