

pages a day—or they would have finished their work. The exact date the translation was entirely completed is not known, at least we have not been able to discover it.

Thus we see between the dates given, Joseph and Oliver had ample time to do the work claimed by and for them, the objection falls to the ground, and the truth is again vindicated.



## CHAPTER X.

### THE THREE WITNESSES.

**I**N the investigation of the genuineness of the Book of Mormon we must consider the nature of the direct evidence that we have with regard to its origin. And in this respect the testimony is strong, clear, complete and unimpeachable. The existence of the plates is testified to in a most solemn and sacred manner by eleven witnesses in addition to Joseph Smith. Eight of these witnesses actually handled, lifted, and carefully examined the plates, satisfying themselves in a manner beyond all dispute that the plates were real and tangible. It is altogether unlikely that Joseph Smith could have imposed upon these eight witnesses by giving into their hands something different from metallic plates. So, at any rate, we have the evidence of eight men that they handled certain plates and that they had the appearance of very ancient workmanship. If these plates were not the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated, what were they? where did Joseph Smith get them? and what did he do with them? are all pertinent inquiries. That he had plates in his possession of the kind and description from which he states he translated the Book of Mormon is strong *prima facie* evidence in favor of his story. And the fact that he only showed them to certain few individuals is another evidence of the truthfulness of his statement; for if he, as is claimed, was an ignorant

impostor, he would have naturally argued that to the more persons he showed his spurious plates, the wider would grow his influence and the greater would be the number of believers in his story. To keep the plates hidden from the multitude would naturally appear in the average mind to be the surest way of retarding his success and blocking his own progress; and assuredly if Joseph Smith had the cunning and dexterity to invent the story of the discovery of the plates and to manufacture a set of plates to agree with the story, he would have had cunning enough to present them to the public, surrounded by so much mystery and glamour that while they saw them they would not be able to examine them critically.

But we have greater and stronger evidence than that of these eight witnesses. We have the testimony of three other men that the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated were shown to them by an angel of the Lord, and not the plates only, but the engravings upon them; and still further they declare that they know that these plates were translated by the gift and power of God, for His voice had declared it unto them. Here, then, we not only have testimony of the existence of the plates, but also to their genuineness and to the truthfulness of the translation, which translation we have in the shape of the Book of Mormon. And it must be remembered that not one of these three witnesses has ever denied his testimony, or contradicted it in the least particular, but under all circumstances and upon every occasion all have in the strongest and most decided language declared that their testimony was true. Again, there is one very note-worthy fact with regard to these three men. They were all severed from the communion of the Church during the life-time of the Prophet Joseph. If Joseph Smith had been an impostor, he was in the power of each of these "three witnesses;" for any one of them, whenever he pleased, could have exposed the conspiracy, if conspiracy there had been, and shown to the world how the testimony had been manufactured; but none of them have ever done so. Although, at certain periods of their lives, they smarted under the denunciations and reproofs they received from the Prophet and entertained towards him the most bitter feelings for the

course he took towards them, going so far as to denounce him as a fallen prophet, yet with all their acrimony and hatred they never once deviated from the testimony that is printed above their names at the commencement of the Book of Mormon. We appeal to all reasonable minds, and ask if it is possible to suppose that, if the Book of Mormon were a fraud, Joseph Smith would have dared to have treated these men in the resolute and uncompromising manner that he did. To use a common expression, he would have been under their thumb and would have had to conciliate them and retain their silence by concessions, by flattery and by trimming his course to their requirements. This the Prophet never did; he was as independent of them as of any other men. He rebuked unrighteousness in them as strongly as he did in others; and when their conduct could no longer be tolerated in the Church of God, he and the Saints withdrew fellowship from them. This is not the way of an impostor, but of an honest, fearless man, who knows his cause is just and puts his trust in God. Neither did any one of the eight witnesses ever turn from his testimony and deny its truthfulness. They ever maintained that their statement was the truth and nothing but the truth. They have all gone beyond the veil now, to receive their reward; and all but one died faithful members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

In considering the nature and value of the testimony of the Prophet Joseph and the three witnesses, the following remarks by Elder Orson Pratt are most pertinent: "No reasonable person will say that these four persons were themselves deceived; the nature of their testimony is such that they must either be bold, daring impostors, or else the Book of Mormon is true. They testify that they saw the angel descend, they heard his voice, they saw the plates in his hand, they saw the engravings upon them as the angel turned them over leaf after leaf, at the same time they heard the voice of the Lord out of the heavens. What greater evidence could they have? They could have had nothing that would have given them greater assurance. If they were deceived there is no certainty in anything. If these four men could be deceived in seeing an angel descend from heaven, on the same

grounds the apostles may have been deceived in seeing the Savior ascend up to heaven.”

Then in answer to the suggestion that it is probable that these four men had conspired together to deceive mankind, Brother Pratt asks:

“Is it probable that four men who were, for the most of their days, strangers to each other, residing in three or four different counties, should combine together to testify that they had seen an angel and heard his voice, and also the voice of God, bearing testimony to the truth of the Book of Mormon, when no such thing had happened? Three of these witnesses, namely, Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer, were young men from twenty to twenty-five years of age; they were men who had been accustomed from their childhood to the peaceful vocations of a farmer’s life. Unacquainted with the deceptions, which are more or less practiced in large towns and cities, they possessed the open honesty and simplicity so generally characteristic of country people. Is it, in the least degree, probable that men so young and inexperienced, accustomed to a country life, and unacquainted with the world at large, would be so utterly abandoned to every thing that was good, so perfectly reckless as to their own future welfare, so heaven-daring and blasphemous as to testify to all nations that which, if false, would forever seal their damnation? \* \* \* We are not aware that there ever were three, or four, or five impostors who originated an imposition, and succeeded in palming it upon the world as a message from God. Such a thing might barely be possible, but such a thing would be highly improbable.” \*

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\*—From “Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon”