

THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

The Temple ceremony of the Latter-day Saints was not all revealed at one time. The complete ritual was a gradual unfoldment over a period of several years.

Though the full Temple ritual was never given in the Temple at Kirtland, Ohio, that sacred building was definitely connected with the institution which was later established in Nauvoo.

On April 3, 1836, the prophet Elijah appeared in the Kirtland Temple and gave the keys of the sealing power of the priesthood to Joseph Smith. On this same occasion, "Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the Gospel of Abraham, saying, that in us, and our seed, all generations after us should be blessed."

Undoubtedly Elias had held the keys of the priesthood and had stood at the head of the dispensation of the Gospel in the days of Abraham. It is not unlikely that Elias knew much about the sacred ceremonies which were to be instituted in the Temple of Solomon, and that he imparted much of that information to Abraham.

The beginning of the revelation, to Joseph Smith, of the endowment ceremony, however, was before the Kirtland Temple was finished. The first information of this

nature came to him when he began to translate an ancient Egyptian manuscript which came into his hands in 1835.

It is evident that Joseph Smith began to translate this ancient Egyptian document soon after it came into his possession. In fact, the following testimonial of Mr. Chandler, the person from whom it was purchased, shows that he commenced the translation immediately:

Kirtland, July 6, 1835

This is to make known to all who may be desirous, concerning the knowledge of Mr. Joseph Smith, Jun., in deciphering the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic characters in my possession, which I have in many eminent cities, showed to the most learned; and, from the information that I could ever learn, or meet with, I find that of Mr. Joseph Smith, Jun., to correspond in the most minute matters.

Michael H. Chandler,

Traveling with, and proprietor of, Egyptian mummies.¹

Though the Book of Abraham was not published until 1842, the illustrations and explanations dealing with the key words of the Priesthood and Temple work having appeared in print the very day that Joseph Smith became a Mason, it is a fact that the translation was made years before.

Joseph Smith was never very anxious to rush any of his revelations into print. He took his time in telling the world of many of his most miraculous announcements. His remarkable prophecy about the Civil War was revealed on Christmas day, 1832, but was not printed until 1851. It was first published in England, as if the Church leaders had no desire to publicize their Prophet's utterances in his own land where the predicted war was to take place.

The historic revelation concerning the building of the Nauvoo Temple, the purpose and significance of the endowment, and other related subjects was revealed January

¹ *History of the Church*, II, 235.

19, 1841, yet did not appear in print until after the death of Joseph Smith. At the April conference following its reception, it was voted upon by the congregation, but not printed until the next edition of the Doctrine and Covenants came from the press.

The fact that the Book of Abraham was not published as soon as it was translated is certainly no evidence that the knowledge contained therein was not known to Joseph Smith long before its publication. From his diary we learn that much time was spent in the translation of this document soon after it was available, though its publication was delayed for several years. A few weeks before he was admitted to Masonry, he made the significant statement that "The Lord makes manifest to me many things, which it is not wisdom for me to make public, until others can witness the proof of them."

The following journal entries afford conclusive proof that he translated extensively from this document within a year after it came into his possession:

The remainder of this month, July, 1835, I was continually engaged in translating an alphabet to the Book of Abraham, and arranging a grammar of the Egyptian language as practiced by the ancients.

October 1, 1835. This afternoon I labored on the Egyptian alphabet, in company with Brothers Oliver Cowdery and W. W. Phelps, and during the research, the principles of astronomy as understood by Father Abraham and the ancients unfolded to our understanding, the particulars of which will appear hereafter.

November 4. Joseph the Prophet was at home in the morning. He attended school during school hours, the brethren made rapid progress in their studies. In the evening the Prophet lectured on grammar at home.

November 17. Exhibited the alphabet of the ancient records, to Mr. Holmes, and some others. Went with him to Frederick G. Williams', to see the mummies.

November 19. Went, in company with Dr. Williams and my scribe, to see how the workmen prospered in finishing the House

of the Lord. I returned home and spent the day in translating the Egyptian records.

November 20. Joseph the Prophet journalizes as follows:

At home in the morning. Weather warm and rainy. We spent the day in translating, and made rapid progress.

In the evening, President Cowdery returned from New York, bringing with him a quantity of Hebrew books, for the benefit of the school. He presented me with a Hebrew Bible, Lexicon, and Grammar, also a Greek Lexicon, and Webster's English Dictionary.

November 21. Joseph the Prophet continues his journal as follows:

Spent the day at home, in examining my books, and studying the Hebrew alphabet.

November 24. In the afternoon we translated some of the Egyptian records.

November 26. Spent the day in translating Egyptian characters from the papyrus, though severely afflicted with a cold.

December 16. Elders William E. M'Lellin, Brigham Young, and Jared Carter, called and paid me a visit with which I was much gratified. I exhibited and explained the Egyptian records to them, and explained many things concerning the dealings of God with the ancients, and the formation of the planetary system.

During the following year he devoted much of his spare time to the task of translating from the papyrus record, as numerous entries such as the following reveal:

January 30, 1836. Attended school as usual, and waited upon several visitors, and showed them the record of Abraham. Mr. Seixas, our Hebrew teacher, examined it with deep interest, and pronounced it to be original beyond all doubt. He is a man of excellent understanding, and has a knowledge of many languages which were spoken by the ancients, and he is an honorable man, so far as I can judge, yet.

February 3, 1836. Received many visitors, and showed them the Records of Abraham.

February 11, 1836. Spent the afternoon in reading, and in exhibiting the Egyptian records to those who called to see me, and heaven's blessings have attended me.

The translation was so nearly finished by the close of 1837 that on the second day of November it was "voted by

the Church in Kirtland to sanction the appointment of Brother Phinehas Richards and Reuben Hedlock, by the Presidency, to transact business for the church in procuring means to translate and print the records taken from the Catacombs of Egypt, then in the Temple."

It is significant that in facsimile No. 2 from the Book of Abraham there are said to be so many "Masonic touches," yet this information was known by Joseph Smith as early as 1835. As he translated from that ancient Egyptian document, he became aware of the depth of vision Abraham had possessed concerning the grand key words of the priesthood and other things connected with the Temple ceremony.

One year later, when Elias appeared in the Kirtland Temple and restored the keys of the dispensation of Abraham, the Prophet's mind was further enlightened on this important subject.

THE PUBLICATION OF THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM

The Prophet's time was so occupied with important and pressing matters that he was unable to give every detail the consideration it deserved. For this reason, the Book of Abraham was not published years before it appeared serially in the *Times and Seasons*.

On December 11, 1841, this journal entry was made by Joseph Smith:

Since I have been engaged in laying the foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have been prevented in various ways from continuing my journal and history in a manner satisfactory to myself or in justice to the cause. Long imprisonments, vexatious and long-continued law-suits, the treachery of some of my clerks, and death of others, and the poverty of myself and brethren from continued plunder and driving, have prevented my handing down to posterity a connected memorandum of events desirable to all lovers of truth; yet I have continued to keep up a journal in the best manner my circumstances would allow, and dictate for my history from time to time, as I have had

opportunity so that the labors and suffering of the first Elders and Saints of this last kingdom might not wholly be lost to the world.

This explains why the publication of this ancient document was delayed until 1842. Though the manuscript had likely been in the printer's office for months, the first facsimile was not printed in the *Times and Seasons* until March 1, 1842. Two weeks later the second installment was printed. This is the one in which it is said there are so many "traces of Masonry." We present on the following pages this facsimile, together with Joseph Smith's half cryptic translation or explanation of the strange hieroglyphics.

It is also striking that this was published the very day that Joseph Smith was made a Mason. Surely no one would suggest that in a few hours he could gain enough information from the Masonic fraternity to prepare all this mysterious material and get it into print that same day. The complexity of the situation is increased when we learn that it was "in the evening" that he received the first degree of Masonry. Respecting his initiation, he wrote:

I officiated as grand chaplain at the installation of the Nauvoo Lodge of Free Masons, at the Grove near the Temple. Grand Master Jonas, of Columbus, being present, a large number of people assembled on the occasion. The day was exceedingly fine; all things were done in order, and universal satisfaction was manifested. In the evening I received the first degree in Free Masonry in the Nauvoo Lodge, assembled in my general business office.

In the explanation of the accompanying illustration, frequent mention is made of grand key words of the priesthood and certain "writing that cannot be revealed unto the world, but is to be had in the Holy Temple of God." This information had been made known to Joseph Smith years before his association with Masonry.

EXPLANATION OF CUT SHOWN ON OPPOSITE PAGE

Fig. 1. Kolob, signifying the first creation, nearest to the celestial, or the residence of God. First in government, the last pertaining to the measurement of time. The measurement according to celestial time, which celestial time signifies one day to a cubit. One day in Kolob, is equal to a thousand years, according to the measurement of this earth, which is called by the Egyptians Jah-oh-eh.

Fig. 2. Stands next to Kolob, called by the Egyptians Oliblish, which is the next grand governing creation, near to the celestial or the place where God resides; holding the key of power also, pertaining to other planets; as revealed from God to Abraham, as he offered sacrifice upon an altar, which he had built unto the Lord.

Fig. 3. Is made to represent God, sitting upon his throne, clothed with power and authority; with a crown of eternal light upon his head; representing, also, the grand Key-Words of the Holy Priesthood, as revealed to Adam in the Garden of Eden, as also to Seth, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, and all to whom the priesthood was revealed.

Fig. 4. Answers to the Hebrew word raukeeyang, signifying expanse, or the firmament of the heavens; also a numerical figure, in Egyptian, signifying one thousand; answering to the measuring of the time of Oliblish, which is equal with Kolob in its revolution and in its measuring of time.

Fig. 5. Is called in Egyptian Enish-go-on-dosh; this is one of the governing planets also, and is said by the Egyptian to be the Sun, and to borrow its light from Kolob through the medium of Kae-evanrash, which is the grand Key, or, in other words the governing power, which governs fifteen other fixed planets or stars, as also Floese or the Moon, the Earth and the Sun in their annual revolutions. This planet receives its power through the medium of Kli-flos-is-es, or Hah-ko-kau-beam, the Stars represented by numbers 22 and 23, receiving light from the revolutions of Kolob.

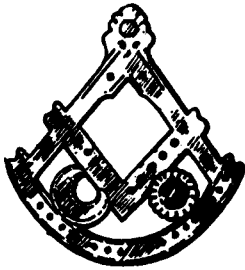
Fig. 6. Represents the earth in its four quarters.

Fig. 7. Represents God sitting upon His throne revealing through the heavens, the grand Key-Words of the priesthood; as, also, the sign of the Holy Ghost unto Abraham, in the form of a dove.

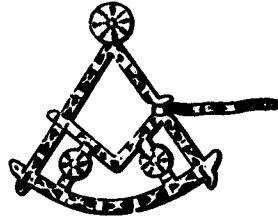
Fig. 8. Contains writing that cannot be revealed unto the world; but is to be had in the Holy Temple of God.



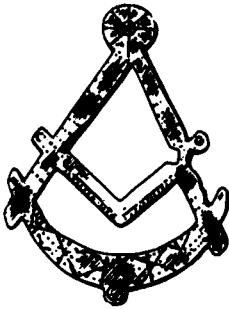
Facsimile of Egyptian plate



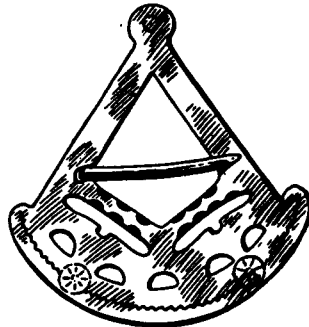
a



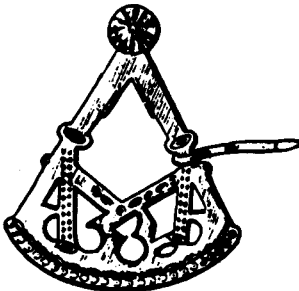
b



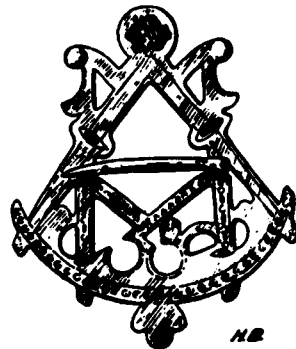
c



d



e



f

Forms of ceremonial and decorative brooches of silver, used by the Seneca Indians. Red Jacket wore the brooch marked a.

Fig. 9. Ought not to be revealed at the present time.

Fig. 10. Also.

Fig. 11. Also. If the world can find out these numbers, so let it be. Amen.

Figs. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20, will be given in the own due time of the Lord.

The above translation is given as far as we have any right to give at the present time.

Especially in figures 7 and 8 Masons should recognize "Masonic traces and touches," which they cannot explain away by saying they were learned by Joseph Smith and rushed into print that same day.

On the night of March 15, 1842, Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon were initiated as Entered Apprentice Masons. The following morning, they were advanced to the second degree of a Fellow Craft Mason. In the afternoon of that day, Joseph Smith was advanced to the sublime degree of a Master Mason.

Furthermore, the journal entries made by Joseph Smith or his secretary show clearly that the "cuts" for the Book of Abraham had been prepared weeks before they were used.

On March 15, 1842, Joseph Smith assumed the task of editing the *Times and Seasons*. His direct contact with the paper at that date is likely the reason that the Book of Abraham was being published at that time.

The following notations show that Masonry did not have the slightest influence on this ancient document:

March 1, 1842. During the forenoon I was at my office, correcting the first plate or cut of the records of Father Abraham, prepared by Reuben Hedlock, for the *Times and Seasons*, and in council in my office, in the afternoon; and in the evening with the Twelve and their wives at Elder Woodruff's, at which time I explained many important principles in relation to progressive improvement in the scale of intelligent existence.

March 2, 1842. I read the proof of the *Times and Seasons*, as Editor for the first time, No. 9, Vol. 3, in which is the commencement of the Book of Abraham.

March 4. At my office exhibiting the Book of Abraham in the original to Brother Reuben Hedlock, so that he might take the size of the several plates or cuts, and prepare the blocks for the *Times and Seasons*: and also gave instruction concerning the arrangement of the writing on the large cut, illustrating the principles of Astronomy, with other general business.

March 8. Joseph the Prophet recommenced translating from the Records of Abraham for the tenth number of the *Times and Seasons* and were engaged at the office day and evening.

March 9. Examining copy for the *Times and Seasons* presented by Messrs. Taylor and Bennett, and a variety of other business in my office, in the morning; in the afternoon continued the translation of the Book of Abraham, called at Bishop Knight's and Mr. Davis, etc., with the Recorder, and continued translating and revising and reading letters in the evening. . . .

I am now very busily engaged in translating, and, therefore, cannot give as much time to public matters as I could wish, but will nevertheless do what I can, to forward your affairs.

Elder Wilford Woodruff recorded in his Journal under date of February 19, 1842:

The Lord is blessing Joseph with power to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of God; to translate through the Urim and Thummim ancient records and hieroglyphics old as Abraham or Adam which caused our hearts to burn within us while we behold their glorious truths opened unto us. Joseph the Seer has presented us some of the Book of Abraham which was written by his own hand but hid from the knowledge of man for the last four thousand years but has now come to light through the mercy of God. Joseph has had these records in his possession for several years but has never presented them before the world in the English language until now, but he is now about to publish it to the world, or parts of it, by publishing it in the *Times and Seasons*, for Joseph the Seer is now the Editor of that paper and Elder Taylor assists him while it has fallen to my lot to take charge of the Business part of the establishment. I have had the privilege this day of assisting in setting the TYPE for printing the first piece of the Book of Abraham that is to be presented to the inhabitants of the EARTH in the LAST DAYS.

Elder Woodruff recorded that the last week of February was spent at the printing office, where “nothing remarkable transpired with us during the week excepting we prepared a plate for making a cut of the commencement of the Book of Abraham which is to be published in the 9th No. of the third volume of the *Times and Seasons* which will be interesting to many of the inhabitants of the earth.”

On March 19, 1842, Elder Woodruff recorded:

Spent the day in the printing office. We struck off about 500 No. of the 10th No. third volume of *Times and Seasons* which contained the portion of the Book of Abraham that gave his account of Kolob, Oliblish, God sitting upon his Throne. The earth, other planets and many great and glorious things as revealed to Abraham through the power of the priesthood. The truths of the Book of Abraham are truly edifying, great and glorious which are among the rich treasures that are revealed unto us, in the last days.

In the *Times and Seasons*, March 15, 1842, immediately following Chart II of the Book of Abraham is an important communication dated January 3. This indicates how valuable instructions were delayed in reaching the public. Though the “cut” for Chart III had long been prepared, it was not printed until the issue of May 16.

Though the Book of Abraham was not published until Joseph Smith became a Mason, there can be no doubt that it had been translated for years, and that Masonry did not have the slightest influence upon that valuable document. It is another witness that the sacred rituals that may resemble certain features of Masonry were well known to the ancient patriarchs even before the temple of Solomon was erected.