

The Spalding Romance Theory Reviewed

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A very pretty "theory," and somewhat ingenious, but where is the evidence to support it?—D. H. Bays.

Barring the question of the hearsay character of the evidence, I believe that a case can be made out much stronger than the circumstantial evidence upon which many a man has been hung.—A. T. Schroeder.

This may be true, but it must be borne in mind that many an innocent man has been hung upon purely "circumstantial evidence." . . . I need not remind an experienced attorney that there is a vast difference between "hearsay evidence" and "circumstantial evidence." . . . The former Greenleaf peremptorily excludes. . . —D. H. Bays.

In his effort to explain the book of Mormon, the Reverend Bruce Kinney had recourse to the old Spalding romance theory. He was aware of the existence of the famous Solomon Spalding manuscript in Oberlin College, and the fact that it bears no resemblance to the Book of Mormon; but being unwilling to abandon the old, worn-out theory, he concluded that there was a *second* manuscript, an imaginary, enlarged revision of the first, which has never been discovered, and which served as a basis for the Book of Mormon. In this idea he joins a few others who of later years have tried to make it appear that there were two or even three of these Spalding manuscripts, and who probably would en-

large that number indefinitely, if necessary to bolster up their cause.

Briefly stated, the Spalding theory is to the effect that Solomon Spalding, who died in 1816, wrote a story about 1811, which he submitted to a publisher in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, some time prior to the close of 1814, and that Sidney Rigdon either stole or copied this manuscript, or that Joseph Smith stole or copied it after it passed from the hands of the publisher, according to the fancy of the one defending the theory, imagination not being hampered by facts or rules of evidence in this matter. (The widow of Spalding, who is put forward as a leading witness, says the manuscript was *copied* by Rigdon, and the *original* came back into her possession and was later given by her to Doctor Hurlbut—See Smucker's History of the Mormons.) The theory then runs to the effect that from this manuscript the Book of Mormon was concocted.

ORIGIN OF THIS CANARD

The Spalding theory was first exploited in 1834, in a book entitled Mormonism Unveiled, by E. D. Howe. Howe was a "Mormon hater" and was assisted in his work by Doctor Hurlbut, who was seeking revenge for having been excommunicated from the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints for indecent conduct. (See Church History, vol. 1, p. 294.)

Hurlbut at the time was so vindictive that it was necessary for the civil courts to put him under bonds to prevent him wounding or killing Joseph

Smith. (See court records of Court of Common Pleas, Geauga County, Ohio, 1834.) A murderer at heart, foiled in his purpose to do physical injury, he found no means too foul for his use in assassinating character. Yet the results of his work are implicitly accepted by many writers of to-day.

Doctor Hurlbut secured the Spalding manuscript from the widow of Reverend Spalding and turned it over to Howe, as is shown by his testimony and the testimony of the widow. But Howe did not see fit to publish it, although to have done so would have been the surest way to have exposed the fraud, *providing, of course, that his theory was correct.* The fact that he *did not do so* was fatal evidence of the weakness of his position.

Instead of publishing the manuscript he contented himself with publishing affidavits from John Spalding (a brother of Solomon Spalding), Martha Spalding (John's wife), Henry Lake, John Miller, Aaron Wright, Oliver Smith, and one or two others who testified that they had heard the Spalding romance read and later heard the Book of Mormon read and discovered a striking resemblance between the two.

THE "MANUSCRIPT FOUND" COMES TO LIGHT

For many years the Spalding manuscript was lost sight of; but in 1885, Mr. L. L. Rice, who over forty years previously had purchased the *Painesville Telegraph* from E. D. Howe, and had transferred the printing department, with type, press, and manu-

scripts to Honolulu, discovered this manuscript while going over old documents, in connection with his friend, President Fairchild, of Oberlin College.

They read the manuscript carefully and reached the very just conclusion that it could never have served as a basis for the Book of Mormon. The manuscript was delivered into the care of President Fairchild and was placed in the library of Oberlin College. Mr. Fairchild prepared under his own supervision an exact copy of this manuscript, which was published, and may be obtained from the Herald Publishing House, Lamoni, Iowa.

This manuscript bore the following indorsement, signed by D. P. Hurlbut:

The writings of Solomon Spalding proved by Aaron Wright, Oliver Smith, John N. Miller and others. The testimonies of the above gentlemen are now in my possession.

Mr. Kinney claims that this manuscript does not bear the title of "Manuscript Found" on the title-page. Others have made the same criticism. This is explained by the fact that Spalding's widow says that the publisher urged him to make out a title-page and he refused. But in the very introduction of his work the author says that he translated it from manuscript *found* in a cave. This at once suggests and acknowledges the name by which it was known to the family and friends, so this trivial objection is removed.

DUBIOUS BUT "WILLING" WITNESSES

Thus we have traced the manuscript into the possession of E. D. Howe, among whose effects it was found by L. L. Rice. When Howe came to examine

the manuscript he did not publish it, giving as an excuse that it did not read *as he expected*.

How, then, do we account for the fact that relatives and friends of Reverend Solomon Spalding testified that the Book of Mormon resembled his manuscript story?

Sometimes the human memory is treacherous. We have heard men and women of undoubted veracity in important cases before the civil courts squarely contradict their own testimony given at a preliminary hearing one year previous. A judge of one of the superior courts says that this is a common experience. It must be remembered that these men and women whose affidavits Howe used were testifying concerning a book that they had heard read more than *twenty years before they testified*. How many of our readers are competent to give accurate testimony regarding a novel that they casually heard read twenty or twenty-three years ago,—especially when there was nothing to lead them to think that they would ever be called upon to bear witness as to its character, and so did not particularly charge their minds with its contents?

They testified to the appearance of exactly similar names in both books. How easy for one who had heard Spalding's manuscript read twenty-two years previously to imagine that the word Mormon, appearing in the Book of Mormon, was identical with Mammoons, found in the Manuscript Found, especially as some of these witnesses remembered these names by the *initial letter only*,—as they declared that Spalding made peculiar initial letters.

Again, witnesses whose memory has been made hazy by the lapse of time can be very skillfully directed in their testimony, if they are properly handled by an unscrupulous attorney. These people were bitter enemies of the Saints. They hated the Book of Mormon and desired to destroy it. They were plastic witnesses. They were questioned by men who were seeking revenge and were very skillful in directing them in their testimony. This was brought out by an answer given by Mrs. McKinstry in an interview. She was asked:

When did you first think about the names in the Book of Mormon and the manuscript agreeing?

My attention was first called to it by some parties who asked me if I did not remember it, AND THEN I REMEMBERED THAT THEY WERE.—Braden-Kelley Debate, p. 82.

MORE FROM PRESIDENT FAIRCHILD

We quote further from Fairchild, showing the identity of the manuscript published by us, as attested by three of Howe's witnesses, also its utter lack of resemblance to the Book of Mormon:

The manuscript, lost sight of since the date of Howe's book, came to light at Honolulu, Hawaiian Islands, a year ago last August, in the possession of Mr. L. L. Rice, formerly State printer at Columbus, Ohio. I had asked Mr. Rice, who was an anti-slavery editor in Ohio many years ago, to examine his old pamphlets and papers and see what contributions he could make to the anti-slavery literature of the Oberlin College library. After a few days he brought out an old manuscript with the following certificate on a blank page:

The writings of Solomon Spalding, proven by Aaron Wright, Oliver Smith, John N. Miller and others. The testimonies of the above gentlemen are now in my possession.

D. P. HURLBUT.

The three men named are of the eight witnesses brought forward by Howe. This manuscript is now in my possession, and it is at hand this evening. The manuscript proves its own antiquity. It is soiled and worn and discolored with age. It consists of about one hundred and seventy pages, small quarto, unruled, and for the most part closely written—no far from forty-five thousand words. It has been printed by the Josephite Mormons of Lamoni, Iowa, from a copy of the manuscript taken since it came into my possession. As thus printed it makes one hundred and thirty-two pages of three hundred and twenty words each—equal to about one sixth part of the “Book of Mormon.” No date attaches to the manuscript proper, but on a blank page there is a fragment of a letter containing the date, January, 1812. Mr. Rice probably came into possession of the manuscript in 1839, when he succeeded Mr. Howe in the printing office at Painsville, but he has no recollection of ever having seen the manuscript until it came to his notice in Honolulu.

The manuscript has no resemblance to the “Book of Mormon,” except in some very general features. There is not a name or an incident common to the two. It is not written in the solemn Scripture style.

Western Reserve Historical Society, vol. 3, pp. 185-200, Tract No. 77, March 23, 1886.

Thus by skillful questioning and careful direction, Hurlbut and Howe were able to get the kind of testimony that they wanted from these people who were trying to remember the contents of a manuscript that they had heard read more than twenty years before. They were *obliging* but unreliable witnesses. Upon such a flimsy basis does the Spalding romance theory rest.

NO MANUSCRIPT BY SPALDING COULD SERVE AS A BASIS
FOR BOOK OF MORMON

One has but to read this manuscript to be con-

vinced that it never served as a basis for the Book of Mormon. Nor will it do to think that any revised copy of that manuscript by the same author might have served for such a basis. The personality of an author appears in every book that he may write. Those who read this Manuscript Found will soon conclude that *no book ever written by Reverend Solomon Spalding* could possibly have served as a basis for the Book of Mormon.

Anyone with brains enough to work Solomon Spalding's writings over and produce such a book as the Book of Mormon would not have needed any help from Spalding's pen in the first instance.

MEN WHO HAVE ABANDONED THE SPALDING THEORY.

Really intelligent and careful students of the question have completely abandoned the Spalding story. David Utter is reported to have said:

No one who has ever carefully read the Book of Mormon could fail to see that it never in any part was written for a romance. . . . Now, at last, the Spalding manuscript has been found, and it rests secure in the library of Oberlin College. —The Latter Day Saints, by Kauffman, p. 29.

Reverend D. H. Bays, who studied the question for forty years, and was hailed by our Christian friends as a "child of Providence," whose book, they assured us, was absolutely reliable as a textbook, says:

The long-lost Spalding story has at last been unearthed, and is now on deposit in the library of Oberlin College at Oberlin, Ohio, and may be examined by anyone who may take the pains to call on President Fairchild, of that institution. . . .

The Spalding story is a failure. Do not attempt to rely upon it—it will let you down.

The entire theory connecting Sidney Rigdon and the Spalding romance with Joseph Smith in originating the Book of Mormon *must be abandoned*.—*Doctrine and Dogmas of Mormonism*, pp. 24, 25.

President Fairchild, of Oberlin College, says:

The theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon in the traditional manuscript of Solomon Spalding, will probably have to be relinquished. . . . Some other explanation of the origin of the Book of Mormon must be found, if any explanation is required.—*Manuscript Found*; pp. 5, 6.

And last, but not least, comes the new *Encyclopedia Britannica* (11th edition), in which we read:

It was a contention of the early anti-Mormons, now **HOWEVER DISCREDITED**, that the Book of Mormon as published by Smith was rewritten with few changes from an unpublished romance, *The Manuscript Found*, written before 1812 by Solomon Spalding. . . . There is no actual proof that Rigdon lived in Pittsburg, or was employed in a printer's shop there as early as when Spalding's "copy" must have been left with the printer; and there is **NO EVIDENCE THAT RIGDON KNEW ANYTHING OF MORMONISM UNTIL AFTER THE PUBLICATION OF THE BOOK OF MORMON**.—*Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 18, p. 843.

On this point President Fairchild says:

We are to remember that twenty-two years or more had elapsed since they had heard the manuscript read; and before they began to recall their remembrances they had read, or heard the "Book of Mormon," and also the suggestion that the book had its origin in the manuscript of Spalding. What effect these things had upon the exactness of their memory is matter of doubt. No one was present to cross-question, and Hurlbut and Howe were intent upon finding the testimony to support their theory.

—*Western Reserve Historical Society*, vol. 3, pp. 185-200, Tract No. 77, March 23, 1886.

From the same work we quote further from Fairchild regarding the testimony of Mrs. Spalding, and the very remarkable clarity of memory coming with passing years and the necessity of "making a case":

"Mr. Howe sent a messenger, Dr. D. P. Hurlbut, of Conneaut, to the widow of Solomon Spalding (Mrs. Davison by a second marriage), who was then living with her daughter in Monson, Massachusetts, to ascertain further about the manuscript and to procure it if it were still within reach. Mrs. Davison stated that her husband had a variety of manuscripts, one of which was entitled the "Manuscript Found," but of its contents she had no distinct remembrance; she thought it was once taken to Patterson's printing office in Pittsburg, and whether it was ever returned to the house again she was quite uncertain. If it was returned, it must be with other manuscripts in a trunk which she left in Otsego County, New York.

"This was all that Mrs. D. knew of the manuscript in 1834, when Howe published his book; but in 1839, five years later, a statement was published in the *Boston Recorder* under her signature, in which she describes the manuscript very fully, states very definitely that Mr. Patterson took the manuscript, kept it a long time, was greatly pleased with it, and promised to publish it if Mr. Spalding would make out a title-page and preface, which Mr. S. refused to do. She further states that at her husband's death, the manuscript came into her possession and was carefully preserved. This seems to be a great enlargement of memory or of knowledge since 1834, and it is difficult to read the extended and elaborate statement without reaching the conclusion that Mrs. Spalding-Davison had very little to do with it.

D. H. BAYS ON THE IMAGINARY SECOND MANUSCRIPT

The new fangled theory that there were two or three manuscripts is perhaps best answered by one of the ablest of our opponents, Mr. D. H. Bays, who in the *Christian Evangelists* for November 2, 1899,

in reply to one A. T. Schroeder, one of his own yoke mates, but an advocate of the "three manuscript" theory, wrote as follows:

I was, at the time my book was written, fully aware that such assertions had repeatedly been made, but as I have never been able to obtain the testimony of a SINGLE WITNESS in support of the claim, I have unhesitatingly dismissed it as an IDLE SPECULATION.

You assure me that the first of these manuscripts "simply outlined the story and is the one now in Oberlin." The second, you assert with equal gravity, "was prepared for the printer," while in the third "the plot of the story changed as to the place from which Indians came here and the names changed to suit the change in the plot"; and this, you assure me, is the one which furnishes the basis for the Book of Mormon." This is a very PRETTY "THEORY," and SOMEWHAT INGENIOUS, but WHERE IS THE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT IT? . . .

I confess myself not a little surprised that an attorney, trained in a school of justice to weigh and determine the value and admissibility of evidence, should ask a candid public to decide so grave a matter upon the bare assertion of an INTERESTED PARTY, without the SHADOW OF EVIDENCE to support it.

If "three manuscripts" ever existed, why not produce the evidence to prove it? Why not induce that library of "over one thousand books and pamphlets" to yield up some of its hidden treasures of knowledge upon this point, and settle this mooted question once for all? Mormonism for more than half a century has been demanding the production of the Manuscript Found that it might be compared with the Book of Mormon. Since the discovery of that now historic document, and the further unquestionable fact that it bears not the slightest resemblance to the Book of Mormon, the *wonderful discovery* has been made that Solomon Spalding wrote "three manuscripts!" While you affirm very dogmatically, as others have done before you, that Spalding wrote three manuscripts, yet like your predecessors, you offer not a SIN-

GLE FACT in support of this claim. In the face of these significant facts, you with characteristic pertinacity assert:

"If you had made any investigation worth mentioning, you would have found that the absolute identity of the very unusual names in the Book of Mormon with the second Spalding Manuscript was originally one of the principal evidences of the connection between the two."

Here we have the assumption that a "second Spalding Manuscript" actually existed, and from this assumed premise you jump to the conclusion that the names were "absolutely identical" with those in the Book of Mormon. My objections to this statement are:

1. The existence of a second manuscript is assumed, not proved.

2. If such manuscript really existed, no proof is offered to show the "absolute identity" of the names with those in the Book of Mormon.

Hence, until you establish the alleged fact that such "second Spalding Manuscript" had a bona fide existence, and that the "very unusual names" found in the Book of Mormon are "absolutely identical" with those found in the so-called "second Spalding Manuscript," a fair-minded, just public will reject this new-fangled "Spalding Manuscript theory" AS THE MEREST VAGARY OF A PREJUDICED MIND, AND WHOLLY WITHOUT THE SLIGHTEST FOUNDATION IN FACT. I do not say that the "three manuscripts" had no actual existence; but I do say that if such manuscripts ever had anything more than an imaginary existence somebody knows it; and if somebody knows it, why not have that somebody step upon the witness stand and boldly testify to the fact? But why pursue this question further, since you admit that it is only a *theory*—a theory, too, supported by such a class of evidence which, as a lawyer, you well know would BE REJECTED BY ANY COURT IN THIS BROAD LAND OF OURS. Acknowledging the fact you say:

"I can not establish these facts except by hearsay evidence, which Greenleaf would bar."

In concluding this paragraph you remark that:

"Barring the question of the hearsay character of the evi-

dence, I believe a case can be made out much stronger than the *circumstantial evidence* upon which many a man has been hung." (Italics mine.)

This may be true, but it must be borne in mind that many an innocent man has been hung upon purely "circumstantial evidence," and it is a principle of law from which there is no deviation that a guilty man may better escape the punishment due to his crimes than that an innocent man should suffer the extreme penalty of the law. Hence, juries are always instructed to give the prisoner the benefit of a doubt. But, of course, I need not remind an experienced attorney that there is a vast difference between "hearsay evidence" and "circumstantial evidence." The former Greenleaf peremptorily excludes.—*Journal of History*, vol. 2, p. 94.

A SPIDER'S WEB OF SUPPOSITIONS

The extremely tenuous nature of the Spalding romance theory in its present form is best shown by permitting it to be stated by its own opponents. Mr. Charles Shook, who was advertised just recently as the man destined to shake our work to its foundation, may have that honor. He admits the existence of the Spalding manuscript in Oberlin College, but thinks there may have been another one enlarged and "polished" up. Hear him:

It is POSSIBLE that Spalding, in polishing and finishing his story, REWROTE IT, and that it was the story rewritten which was submitted to Patterson and which fell into Rigdon's hands; while the old manuscript MAY have been placed in a trunk, with other papers of Spalding's, which was sent, after his death, to the home of his wife's brother, W. H. Sabine, in Onondaga County, New York. Smith worked as a teamster for Sabine in 1823, and some have CLAIMED that he either copied or stole this manuscript. The first is very unreasonable, the second is POSSIBLE IF SUCH MANUSCRIPT WAS IN SABINE'S POSSESSION.—*Cumorah Revisited*, by Shook, p. 28.

Grover Cleveland would call these men "ifists." According to him the "ifist," lost in the woods without fire or food, said, "If we had a fire, and if we had some eggs, we would have ham and eggs, if we had the ham."

Mr. Shook argues that IF Spalding ever rewrote his manuscript, and IF he submitted it to the publisher, Rigdon MAY have stolen it; and IF this did not happen, Smith MAY have copied it while in the possession of Sabine, and IF he did not copy it, he MAY have stolen it, IF, last of all, SABINE EVER HAD SUCH A MANUSCRIPT.

These men have gone back to the original Christian or Campbellite proposition, "IF we have authority to preach we have authority to baptize."

We can not too heartily thank Mr. Shook for his very ingenuous statement of the case.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE

Mr. Bays very nicely demolished this spider's web of guesses. His was the conclusion of a very close student of the subject, who certainly was not prejudiced in favor of the Book of Mormon; in fact he was eager enough to defeat the Book of Mormon, but in this instance he was more fair, or perhaps less desperate than those grave robbers who would violate the peaceful and well-earned repose of the dead and long-buried Spalding romance theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon.

Gentlemen, it has been dead too long, and, unlike Lazarus, never having had Jesus for a friend, it can not hope for a successful reincarnation.