

448 *THE UNITARIAN*. Conducted by Bernard Whitman. Cambridge and Boston: James Munroe and Company, Booksellers to the University, 1834.

21½ cm. v (general title & table of contents), 582 pages. AI 27193. Complete run of this short-lived periodical, in one volume [I:1-12, Jan.-Dec. 1834]. Bound in at the beginning of one of the copies examined was a "Notice" of discontinuation dated December 1, 1834 (one page).

The January issue contains a major review of the Book of Mormon by Jason Whitman, brother of the editor. Jason (1799-1848; Harvard, 1825) studied theology and was a Unitarian minister in Maine and Massachusetts. The year of this publication, he became general secretary of the American Unitarian Association for a year; his brother Bernard died that November. Jason Whitman's lengthy and scholarly review of the Book of Mormon occupies pages 40-50. Whitman analyzes Mormon polemic techniques and the receptive mentality of the potential Book of Mormon audience. Whitman, like Alexander Campbell, was sufficiently versed to recognize the cultural setting and contemporary parallels which assured the Book of Mormon's success in certain circles.

They . . . claim for themselves and the members of their church the power of speaking with tongues and of working miracles. They jabber with some strange sounds, and call this the speaking with tongues. They assert it as a fact, that among them the dead have been raised and the sick healed. From these *facts*, as they call them, they draw the conclusion that they are the members of the true church of Christ. If you object to the historical accounts of their sacred books, they refer you to the mounds of the western country, as remains of ancient cities, and as proofs that this country was once inhabited by a race of people better acquainted with the arts of civilized life, than the present race of savages; and this, they contend, is satisfactory presumptive proof of the truth of the history. Do you ask, what reason there is to believe that our Saviour, after his ascension, appeared to the former inhabitants of America? They answer you in the words of their sacred books . . .

Now all this presents itself to the minds of the ignorant, as being plausible, as being forcible. They see not the sophistry. They know not what answer to give, and they are consequently carried away. In addition to all this, the [Mormon] preachers do not shock previously existing attachments, by rejecting the Bible. They profess to receive the whole Bible, just as it stands, . . . They bring forward the Book of Mormon as another and more clear and distinct revelation, given to another branch of the descendants of Abraham . . . [p. 46]

Of particular interest to the study of Mormon parallels are the contents of page 47:

And then, too, the book itself is with some art adapted to the known prejudices of a portion of the community. It is well known, that, among a portion of the

community, there is a strong prejudice against the support, by the people, of a regular ministry. All such will find in the Book of Mormon, that, among the members of the true church, the preachers did not set themselves above the people, that they laboured with their own hands for the supply of their wants . . .

Again, it is well known, that, among some, there are complaints that officers of government should be supported in what they regard a life of ease and laziness, by salaries, drawn from the pockets of the hard-labouring people, in the form of taxes. All such will find in the Book of Mormon, that those rulers are spoken of as most acceptable in the sight of God, who laboured, working with their hands, for the supply of their wants . . .

Still further, it is well known that, in some minds, there is a prejudice against fine clothing, or even against decent apparel, as indicating pride in the wearer. Those, who are under the influence of this prejudice, find something in the Book of Mormon to suit their taste. They find that calamities were often brought upon the Nephites, through the pride of those who wore costly apparel. . . .

Finally, it is well known that, in many minds, there is a strong feeling of opposition to the institution of Masonry. All such find something in the Book of Mormon to meet their views. [p. 47]

Whitman then offers a rather basic, yet telling, analysis which might well be applied to some scripture readers of our own day in various religious denominations:

Thus there are, in the book itself, artful adaptations to the known prejudices of the community. And, besides, there are circumstances, in the condition and views of those among whom this faith spreads, which are calculated to secure it success. In a large portion of the community, there is a great degree of ignorance in regard to the geography of the sacred Scriptures, the manners and customs of the Jews, and the natural history of the Bible. There are many, who read their Bibles daily, and with devotional feelings it may be, who have no idea that the places mentioned in sacred history, like those mentioned in any other history, can be traced on the map, can be found and visited at the present day, although disguised under modern names. It makes no part of their study of the Bible, to ascertain where the places mentioned are to be found, and what they are now called. They have no idea that the allusions to manners and customs, found in the Bible, can be understood, through an acquaintance with the practices and habits of the people described; and, consequently, the study of Jewish manners and customs makes no part of their preparation for understanding the Scriptures. They have no idea that the allusions in Scripture to facts in natural history can be verified by an acquaintance with that science; and, consequently, they make no exertions to understand the natural history of the Bible. They do not take up the Bible and read it with the expectation of being able to understand it, even in regard to these particulars, as they would understand any other book. All such are prepared, by their very ignorance on these subjects, to become dupes of the Mormon delusion; or, rather, they are not prepared to detect and withstand this

delusion. They open the Book of Mormon. The paragraphs begin with the phrase, "And behold it came to pass." They read of the cities of Zarahemla, Gid, Mulek, Corianton, and a multitude of others. They read of prophets and preachers, of faith, repentance, and obedience; and having been accustomed, in reading the Scriptures, to take all such things just as they are presented, without careful examination, they can see no reason why all this is not as much entitled to belief, as are the records of the Old and New Testaments. [p. 48]

Again, there prevail, in the minds of a large portion of the community, pernicious errors in regard to the influences of the Spirit. There are those, who believe that they can certainly tell, from their own feelings at the time, when the Spirit is specially operating upon their hearts; that they can distinguish the operations of the Spirit from the workings of their own minds. There are those who believe that they can tell, from the appearance of an assembly, when the Spirit of God is specially and powerfully present in "their midst." If the speaker is more than usually earnest and fluent, they believe that the Spirit of God is present to his mind, affording special assistance. If the assembly is more than usually interested, and, especially, if many are affected unto tears, they believe the Spirit of God to be powerfully operating upon the hearts of the people. The language, used by preachers and in religious periodical publications, encourages this belief. Go to the camp-meeting ground, or into a protracted meeting, and you will hear the preachers declaring that the Spirit of God is specially and powerfully present. And what is the proof? The speakers felt great freedom in laying open the truths of the gospel, and great earnestness in exhorting sinners. The people were much affected, and many were in tears. [p. 49]

. . . So with the Mormon delusion. The preachers are fluent, they warn sinners with earnestness, they pray with fervour; the people are affected; the Spirit of God is especially, powerfully, and visibly present; and, consequently, the opinions advanced must be correct, the measures adopted are "owned of God." In this way, men, of sound judgment in other respects, are carried away, through the influence of their erroneous views of the operations of the Spirit, and become the dupes of the delusion. [p. 50]