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Abstract Review of *Book of Mormon Dictionary* (1988), by George Reynolds.

George Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Dictionary*. Salt Lake City: Stemmons, 1988. 63 pp. (small print). \$1.99.

Reviewed by Bruce A. Van Orden

**Every City, Hill, River,
Valley, and Person**

George Reynolds is fondly remembered for his pioneering studies and publications on the Book of Mormon.¹ Not only did Reynolds compile the classic *A Complete Concordance of the Book of Mormon*,² he also published 109 articles on Book of Mormon topics, 55 of these appearing in the biweekly magazine for the Deseret Sunday School Union, the *Juvenile Instructor*.³ These articles provided the grist for two other noteworthy books: *The Story of the Book of Mormon* and *A Dictionary of the Book of Mormon*.⁴ The second of these was published anew as *Book of Mormon Dictionary* in 1988 by Stemmons Publishing Company of Salt Lake City. The 1988 publication is 8 1/2 x 11 inches and punched with three holes in order to fit into a gospel student's binder. My purpose in this review is to assess George Reynolds's

¹ I have discussed George Reynolds and the Book of Mormon in "George Reynolds: Loyal Friend of the Book of Mormon," *Ensign* (August 1986): 48-51; "George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl on Book of Mormon Geography," *Theatean* (1982): 60-79; *Prisoner for Conscience' Sake: The Life of George Reynolds* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 108, 133, 135, 151-55, 163-66.

² George Reynolds, *A Complete Concordance of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: by the author, 1900); the most recent edition is Philip C. Reynolds, ed. & arr., *A Complete Concordance of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976).

³ Van Orden, *Prisoner for Conscience' Sake*, 222-35.

⁴ George Reynolds, *The Story of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1888; George Reynolds, *A Dictionary of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1891). Both volumes had more editions in later years while Reynolds was still alive. Reynolds's son, Philip C. Reynolds, also published both in 1957 through Deseret Book.

contributions to Book of Mormon scholarship, particularly through his *Book of Mormon Dictionary*. And since the seven-volume work, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, allegedly coauthored by George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, is still on the market, I will also comment on those volumes.

George Reynolds was not just a Book of Mormon scholar, of course. He served as a secretary to the First Presidency from shortly after his arrival in Utah as a British immigrant in 1865 until his death in 1909. In 1890 he was called to the First Council of Seventy, or as one of the first seven presidents of the Seventy, as the calling was commonly designated then. He was twice a missionary in England, an emigration agent in the European Mission, an assistant editor for the *Deseret News* and the *Juvenile Instructor*, a member of the board of directors for numerous Church businesses, a Salt Lake City councilman, a college lecturer, and a general administrator in the Deseret Sunday School Union. He is most remembered as the “test case” in which he was the first Mormon tried and convicted for polygamy and the first to go to prison for this “crime.” *Reynolds v. the United States* (1879) is considered a landmark Supreme Court decision.

While in the Utah Territorial Penitentiary from 1879 to 1881 George began his awesome contribution to Book of Mormon commentary. He was thrilled with the new 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon—arranged into chapters and verses by Elder Orson Pratt. Since he had virtually nothing else to do, Reynolds decided to use his time in intensive study of all the scriptures. After a few weeks the idea hit him that he could provide some explanation of Book of Mormon life and times to young readers, even as he had done many times with Bible stories over the previous several years. So he started sending his copy to the *Juvenile Instructor* office for publication every two weeks. The articles sported such titles as “The Laws of the Nephites,” “Personal Appearance of the Nephites,” “The Art of War among the Nephites,” “Nephite Proper Names,” “Agriculture among the Nephites,” and “The Lands of the Nephites.” The last, a series of five articles, was the first serious attempt by a Mormon author to identify Book of Mormon sites with western hemispheric cities, mountains, rivers, isthmuses, and continents. Thus the tantalizing

study of Book of Mormon geography (shall we also admit “debate”?) was born into the Latter-day Saint Church.

During the summer of 1880, after writing approximately eighty articles in prison for the *Juvenile Instructor*, most of them about the Book of Mormon, George became deeply depressed over the monotony of prison life. He stopped writing for a month. Then a brainstorm hit him: Church members could use a concordance to the Book of Mormon similar to Alexander Cruden’s *Complete Concordance to the Old and New Testaments*. With renewed vigor, Reynolds plunged back into his work, transcribing passages from the Book of Mormon at the rate of as many as 350 per day. By the time of his release in January 1881, George had completed 25,000 entries in his concordance. But his monumental work, delayed again and again by hosts of other duties, would not be published for another twenty years.

After Reynolds was again a free man, his friends urged him to organize his writings on the Book of Mormon into a single volume. George, a thoroughly modest man, resisted this for a few years, but when the federal Anti-Polygamy Crusade hit full stride in 1885 and he had a little extra time when the First Presidency was on the “Underground,” he decided to put together his *Story of the Book of Mormon*. This volume was a graphic portrayal of the narrative story line in the scripture along with his analyses of Book of Mormon lifestyles, names, geography, and ethnology that he had produced in jail. These sociological studies are remarkable for their detail and clarity. Reynolds was the first Latter-day Saint scholar to undertake such thorough commentary on the Book of Mormon text. All along he pecked away at his concordance project and often with the aid of his older children.

In *Story of the Book of Mormon*, George investigated a host of names—actually, all the proper names that appear in the Book of Mormon. He provided detailed descriptions of every city, valley, hill, land, and river mentioned in the Book of Mormon, also a first. And he was the first to place a B.C. and A.D. date with every story and event in the book.

His work on dating came in handy when he and his publishers came out with an illustrated *Book of Mormon Chronology Chart* in 1890. That same year another brainstorm hit George. Why not use all this data to make a dictionary of Book of Mormon terms? He

quickly arranged all the proper names of people, hills, valleys, rivers, and cities into alphabetical order, supplementing individual entries as necessary. His publisher friend and neighbor Joseph Hyrum Parry prepared the book quickly for publication, and it went on sale in January 1892. Had he been as blessed as we are with superlative word processing, the diligent George Reynolds would probably have been done several months earlier! His preface to *A Dictionary of the Book of Mormon* demonstrates his feelings of consecration to the Lord's work and the Lord's people:

The increasing interest taken in the study of the Book of Mormon and in the history of the peoples whose origin, progress and destruction it narrates, encourages the author of this little work to think that this addition to the literature of the subject will not be like one born out of due time, but will be received as an acceptable aid to the study of its sacred pages. To the members of Theological Classes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, whether of the quorums of the Priesthood, of the Sunday Schools, Church Schools or Improvement Associations, we particularly submit this book—the first of its kind—believing it will afford them material help in their investigations of Book of Mormon subjects, and their study of Nephite and Jaredite history; and we trust it will not be without value to every one who takes an interest in the races who rose, flourished and vanished in Ancient America.

This Dictionary contains the name of every person and place mentioned in the Book of Mormon, with a few other subjects of interest referred to therein.

With the hope that it may not be altogether unproductive of good, or of increasing true knowledge with regard to the handworkings of God in the history of the nations of the earth, this little volume is respectfully submitted to all who love the truth.⁵

⁵ Reynolds, *Dictionary* (1892 ed.), frontispiece.

Throughout his life, George Reynolds wrote eight books and over 400 articles, plus a few poems, for Church periodicals and several newspapers.⁶ His books ranged in subject matter from Bible history to geography, from travel to biographies of famous men, from natural science to original stories, and from theology to spirited defense of gospel principles. He was considered by his peers to be one of the most learned men in the Church. He was entirely self taught. George had received no schooling since entering his bookkeeping apprenticeship as a teenager in London. Elder Heber J. Grant remarked that he never asked George a question but that he received an outstanding answer. His close associate in the Seventies, Elder Seymour B. Young, noted, "He was one of the most modest and retiring of men, never officious in his superiority but humble and quiet."⁷ Perhaps it can be said that throughout his long and tiring labors, George Reynolds did more than any other person in the nineteenth century to train the youth of the Church in the teachings of the Book of Mormon.

Found many years after his death among his papers was a note in Reynolds's handwriting: "If you find a customer undecided between the Story and the Dictionary, push the Dictionary."⁸ He probably believed that the dictionary's format was more conducive as a study *aid* to the Book of Mormon than his book *The Story of the Book of Mormon*; experience probably taught him that the latter was usually read alone, without the student delving into the Book of Mormon itself.

In my opinion, Reynolds's *Book of Mormon Dictionary* is indeed an enduring book. Thus I applaud Stemmons Publishing Company for reproducing it for this generation's Book of Mormon students. I am aware that some BYU Book of Mormon teachers have required that their students buy and use the *Dictionary*. A modern gospel student, of course, still has the need to identify every proper personal name and place name.

This dictionary, printed in several editions, emphasizes detail. For example, the entry for *Amalekites* reads:

⁶ His bibliography is found in Van Orden, *Prisoner for Conscience' Sake*, 221–35.

⁷ As cited in Van Orden, *Prisoner for Conscience' Sake*, 211.

⁸ As cited in *ibid.*, 165.

A sect of Nephite apostates whose origin is not given. Many of them were after the order of Nehor. Very early in the days of the republic they had affiliated with the Lamanites and with them built a large city, not far from the waters of Mormon, which they called *Jerusalem*. They were exceedingly crafty and hard-hearted, and in all the ministrations of the sons of Mosiah among them only one was converted. They led in the massacres of the Christian Lamanites or people of Anti-Nephi-Lehi; and in later years the Lamanite generals were in the habit of placing them in high command in their armies, because of their greater force of character, their intense hatred to their former brethren, and their more wicked and murderous disposition. In the sacred record they are generally associated with the Zoramites and Amulonites.⁹

The biggest weakness of the *Dictionary*, however, for modern readers is Reynolds's identification of Book of Mormon sites with locations in North, Central, and South America. His extended geographical view that the Book of Mormon story took place essentially over the length and breadth of North and South America holds little appeal to present-day Book of Mormon scholars.

Modern Book of Mormon geography students might take issue with Reynolds's identifications with known map locations, such as his assertion that the land Bountiful "extended southward from the Isthmus of Panama."¹⁰ According to Reynolds, the Isthmus of Panama was the "narrow neck of land" in the Book of Mormon, a point disputed by most scholars affiliated with FARMS today.

His definitions present some problems for us today. For example, his entry for *Cumorah, Hill* reads:

One of the most noted places in ancient American history was the land in which was situated the hill known to the Jaredites as Ramah, and to the Nephites as

⁹ Reynolds, *Dictionary* (1892 ed.), 47 (1988 ed.), 8-9.

¹⁰ Reynolds, *Dictionary* (1892 ed.), 352 (1988 ed.), 61.

Cumorah. In its vicinity two great races were exterminated; for it was there that the last battles were fought in the history of both people. There also the sacred records of the Nephites found their final resting place. . . . Moroni afterwards concealed the treasures committed to his keeping in the same hill, where they remained until they were by Heaven's permission, exhumed and translated by the Prophet Joseph Smith. This hill is situated about three or four miles from Palmyra, in the State of New York.¹¹

Reynolds would have been helpful in this and all other definitions if he had included Book of Mormon references for students to read and check on their own. It is obvious that he hadn't visited western New York State where Palmyra and the New York Cumorah were located. It is highly speculative and unreasonable to conclude that any major battles involving tens of thousands of soldiers—perhaps even hundreds of thousands in the case of the Jaredites—would have used the New York Cumorah, merely a small drumlin, as a base of operations for battle. And the Book of Mormon text never states that Moroni placed the sacred records back in the hill before he died. For all we know, Moroni could have deposited the plates in the New York hill, providentially near the youth Joseph Smith, after Moroni became an angel and had the unique capability of “fly[ing] through the midst of heaven” (Revelation 14:6).

But who am I to mercilessly fault George Reynolds for his pioneering efforts in Book of Mormon scholarship? At least he was the first to undertake such a massive and comprehensive study of the book and its text. Even Parley Pratt and Orson Pratt didn't do that. And as far as the Hill Cumorah and Middle America and South America go, *no* Mormon in the nineteenth century really had a chance to study those places in depth by travel, anthropology, and archaeology. Reynolds was merely fleshing out the traditional views that had developed through the extant writings of Oliver Cowdery, Parley Pratt, and Orson Pratt. To us in the late twentieth century falls the responsibility with all of our educational opportunities, computer options, and travel opportunities

¹¹ Ibid. (1892 ed.), 108–9, (1988 ed.), 19.

(all usually subsidized by tithing funds) to arrive at more complete and perhaps more accurate, yet still tentative, conclusions.

Yes, Reynolds's dictionary entries were devotional in nature. So what? It was nothing more than a reflection of an absolutely selfless and pure soul who showed his complete allegiance to God and his glory. I'm inspired by George's reference to righteous Book of Mormon figures like Nephi ("the most lovable of men, true as steel, never wavering, full of integrity, faith and zeal") and Alma the Younger ("an unceasing missionary, an undaunted soldier of the cross, a lucid expounder of the principles of the everlasting Gospel; a proficient organizer of men, a distinguished warrior and a triumphant general").¹²

So, again, I commend Stemmons Publishing for making available to us *Book of Mormon Dictionary*. They did a capital job of accurately reproducing Reynolds' exact text in a larger format. One thing they should have done, though, is make bolder all the words that are the titles of the actual articles. It is not easy for the eye to distinguish the separate entries on a page.

I now turn to the well-known seven-volume Reynolds-Sjodahl *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*. May I be so bold as to label this work a *fraud*? It is a fraud, because the compiler of these volumes in the 1950s, Philip C. Reynolds, pulled a fast one on us. He made it look as if George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl had collaborated on this project and indeed together had produced this lengthy and extensive commentary. Nothing of the sort happened at all.

I can find absolutely no evidence that Reynolds and Sjodahl collaborated in any way during their lifetimes. Perhaps they knew each other, but that's all. Sjodahl worked for the *Deseret News* starting in 1890. That is the same year George Reynolds was called to the First Seven Presidents of the Seventy. Reynolds probably knew everybody in Salt Lake City who was in any way connected with Church employment. But Reynolds had a severe stroke in 1907, from which he never recovered, and died in 1909. Sjodahl didn't even get into the Book of Mormon commentary business until a decade after Reynolds was dead. Yes, Sjodahl referred often to Reynolds's *Story of the Book of Mormon* in arti-

¹² Ibid. (1892 ed.), 28, 267, (1988 ed.), 5, 46.

cles for the *Improvement Era* and in his own commentary, *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon*, published in 1927 by Deseret News Press. These references were generally out of respect to significant contributions to certain areas of Book of Mormon scholarship by Reynolds. On the whole, however, I see Sjodahl as an independent writer with a singular style of his own. He did not imitate Reynolds in any way; indeed, he frequently differed with conclusions drawn by Reynolds.

How then did the names of Reynolds and Sjodahl become united to the extent that many modern students of the Book of Mormon consider the pair to be inseparable in their work? The answer lies in the retirement work of Philip C. Reynolds.

Phil Reynolds was both a son to George Reynolds and a son-in-law to Janne M. Sjodahl. Phil was born 24 July 1890 to the third wife of George Reynolds, Mary Goold. He married Lila Sjodahl 19 March 1919. Phil was nineteen when his father died and nearly twenty-nine when he married Sjodahl's daughter. George Reynolds and Janne Sjodahl would therefore not have known each other through any mutual relationship to Phil.

Phil Reynolds became a mining engineer by profession. At the age of sixty-one in 1951, he suffered a stroke, and during his long convalescence, he turned his attention to the writings of both his father and father-in-law. With the help of a son-in-law, David S. King, later a Utah Congressman, Phil Reynolds produced the seven-volume *Commentary*.

Upon even casual reading of *Story of the Book of Mormon* and *Dictionary of the Book of Mormon*, it is obvious that Phil lifted wholesale portions of both works and inserted them verbatim into the seven-volume collection. This Phil did without the slightest acknowledgment in his prefaces or footnotes. He also did the same with Sjodahl's *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon*. He apparently also used some of Sjodahl's unpublished notes. Clearly Phil linked a great deal of the commentary together by his own writings.

What I find most objectionable is the appearance that *Commentary* was written by both men, Reynolds and Sjodahl. The introductory comments read as if Reynolds and Sjodahl had collaborated and that Phil completed the work that had not been finished. The pronouns *we* and *our* are found frequently in the text

implying joint authorship. Certainly there is no noting of which author wrote which pieces.

Both the *Improvement Era* and the *Church News* wrote favorable reviews about Phil Reynolds's work of editing and gathering.¹³ What would cause Philip C. Reynolds to cover up the real manner in which he compiled his publications? The Reynolds family were amused at Phil's actions. They knew him then to be an inactive member of the Latter-day Saint Church. Family stories still exist of Phil's smoking large cigars in a room filled with semipornographic *Vargas Girls* drawings while working on *Commentary*.¹⁴ Perhaps Phil was motivated by a desire to make money during his retirement as well as to further the election chances of David S. King. Certainly Phil grabbed the copyright for all of his father's works and reprinted them and gathered all the royalties. Phil also put together an equally fraudulent Reynolds-Sjodahl *Commentary on the Pearl of Great Price*.

I feel that *Commentary on the Book of Mormon* is a travesty on the names of George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl. Many students and scholars have spoken to me about the frustration they have had with the volumes, and in their minds they may have blamed the supposed authors for various inefficiencies and incongruencies. I sincerely hope that this review will help revitalize the well-deserved outstanding reputation that George Reynolds held in his day and encourage people to look into the works of Janne M. Sjodahl on their own merits.

¹³ "The Church Moves On," *Improvement Era* (March 1966): 172; "Author Finishes Commentary on Book of Mormon," *Church News*, 23 December 1961, 6; "Literary 'Dream' Is Boon to Church," *Church News*, 16 October 1965, 15.

¹⁴ Interview with Grant Reynolds Hardy, grandson of George Reynolds and nephew of Philip C. Reynolds, Salt Lake City, Utah, 28 July 1981.