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The Editor's Notebook

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Abstract Summary of current issue.

THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

With this issue the *Journal* returns to a shorter format. Whether this will become the norm I cannot say. But there is good reason for publishing the enclosed articles without waiting for the full maturation of other studies that we now happily aim for the next two issues. Those that appear herein bring tangible, added light to the Book of Mormon and its story.

One of the continuing issues that face students has to do with archaeological evidence for the Book of Mormon. (Even the Bible does not escape serious questions about the relationship between text and artifact, often suffering because, given our present state of knowledge, evident connections do not exist.) The Book of Mormon makes certain "predictions" about civilizations in ancient America, predictions that looked silly in 1830. But as John E. Clark demonstrates, the picture of the New World that has begun to emerge from serious study is beginning to look a lot like descriptions in the Book of Mormon. As in all archaeological work, the picture remains incomplete in many of its parts because excavators never uncover a whole city nor recover all of its artifacts nor expose completely all of its layers. But the picture is growing clearer.

The founding narrative of Nephi continues to draw the attention of authors to its treasures. The majority of our studies in this issue—three—touch on Nephi's work. Roy A. Prete tackles the challenge of filling out God's role in historical events when seen through the lens of Nephi's report. This issue, which is as relevant as a person's experiences today, has puzzled the best philosophical minds through the centuries. Prete draws together the strands of Nephi's account that offer an answer to whether God intervenes in human affairs.

In a different vein, Charles L. Swift gracefully leads us back to Lehi's vision of the tree of life and examines it against the broad backdrop of visionary experiences that are recorded in literature. It is in both tiny details and wide panoramas that the wealth of Lehi's

visionary view is exposed to our sight. The whole report about the vision of the tree of life exhibits remarkable care in its conception and composition.

From a fresh angle, Dana M. Pike and David Rolph Seely draw on their shared backgrounds in Old Testament studies to examine a single passage copied by Nephi from his beloved Isaiah, in whose words "[Nephi's] soul delighteth" (2 Nephi 11:2). With important consequences for how we understand the plates of brass, the question that Pike and Seely lay before us is whether these plates preserve an ancient, unattested reading in Isaiah 2:16, "and upon all the ships of the sea."

The *Journal* welcomes to its pages a study by two well-known Latter-day Saint historians, Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter. They are in the midst of a major work on Martin Harris, one of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon and the underwriter of the costs of publishing it. With their usual care, they examine what can be learned of the circumstances that finally compelled Martin Harris to make good on his pledge to meet the expenses incurred when the Book of Mormon appeared in print.

In sum, these pages of the *Journal* continue to add to the store of knowledge about this wondrous book. The fact that Martin Harris stuck with his pledge to underwrite the costs of publishing the Book of Mormon in the face of substantial opposition offers a glimpse into how deeply one of Joseph Smith's intimate associates valued the Prophet's efforts and the resulting scripture.