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JOSIAH HICKMAN:  
A STUDENT DEFENDS THE FAITH

MARTIN B. HICKMAN

There is perhaps no more poignant experience for a Mormon raised in the shadow of the temple than to go away to school. Even more than a mission call it creates a sharpened sense of identity, a more acute awareness of being different from the world. If this is true, as it certainly is in 1970, it was even truer a century ago. In 1892 Josiah E. Hickman left Utah for Ann Arbor; he was one of a number of Utah students who found a welcome at the University of Michigan and who represented the vanguard of Mormons who would eventually "go East" for an education. Josiah Hickman also was among the vanguard of Mormons who would devote their lives to the Church educational system. He was graduated from the Brigham Young Academy in 1883 and always insisted that Karl G. Maeser "had laid the foundation of the grandest educational system the world has ever seen. . . ." He was principal of the Millard State Academy in Fillmore from 1887 until 1892 when he "went East" to the University of Michigan. Following his graduation from the University of Michigan he accepted a teaching position at Brigham Young College in Logan. He later received a master's degree in psychology from Columbia. He also taught at BYU during his academic career.

His journal for the years at Michigan is not only a personal account of his academic progress but reveals in vivid detail a pilgrim's progress through a strange new world. Interwoven in his account of his studies is the ever present awareness of being a Mormon. He is "active" in the Branch and becomes the branch president; he is interested in the origin of the Pearl of Great Price and takes a copy of the hieroglyphics to one of his teachers who is reputed to know Egyptian; he visits the other churches in Ann Arbor and compares their teachings with his understanding of the gospel; he asks the "golden questions"

of friends and professors; he relates the new knowledge he is acquiring to the gospel and struggles with the ever-present problem of finding enough money to continue his education and feed his family. It is of course a personal story; but it is a story with which countless Mormons who have gone away to school can identify.

Perhaps no incident in Josiah Hickman's account of life in Ann Arbor more nearly captures his vigorous sense of being a Mormon than his participation in the annual oratorical contest at the university. In the passages which follow he relates his hopes and fears as he approached the contest and his disappointment yet ultimate triumph at its outcome.

Dec. 29, 1894—This week just past has been a vacation but I have been working all the week upon my oration. I have read more than half of O. Whitney's History of Utah and also most of Bancroft's history of Utah. Read Webster's oration and Pilgrim Fathers. I have only written part of the oration. It seems impossible for me to express my thoughts. I am much discouraged in my writing. I feel the want of power of the English language more keenly now than ever before. It is natural for a person to desire to excel; but I have a double cause. I would not have entered the contest only for the purpose of presenting to the world the true history of our people—their drivings and pilgrimages for the truth's sake. Several have tried to discourage me from taking such an unpopular subject, among the number Prof. Trueblood, was one who said not to take the subject but some other, I told him that I would not have entered were it not for presenting this subject. I would rather successfully present this subject than win on any other subject not pertaining to our people. Father, strengthen me that I may accomplish that for which I have entered the contest. Rec'd letter from Ella. She and children are very well for which I am truly thankful.

Jan. 27, 1895—I went to Prof. F. N. Scott, again yesterday with my oration and he helped me on it considerably. He told me he knew of no subject in all the range of the orations that had been given here for years that was equal to mine; but said my language was not as good as it might be.

Feb. 17, 1895—Bro. Talmage lectured here on the story of Mormonism. His lecture was sublime and was well rec'd. He is having great honors heaped upon him. I am working hard on my oration. I know it and have taken 3 lessons from Prof. Trueblood; will take one more. He has made some very good comments to others about my oration. I trust they are well founded remarks. Bro. Talmage is to speak to us today.



(Have written to Ella and Mrs. Daniels.) Meeting over and Bro. Talmage, delivered a sublime sermon and stirred our very souls. His advice was excellent. The comments of the papers and public were extravagant in praise of him. He is considered a great orator. His defence of our people was excellent.

Feb. 24, 1895—The oratorical contest for the '95 students took place last Fri. night. There were 7 of us. Lautner and myself stood no. 1 and were a tie. We were both chosen to enter the final contest to be held Mar. 15. I have heard many excellent comments from students and Prof. on my oration. One thought (said), I put him in mind of Dan. Webster. Though I mention this I do it with humility as I acknowledge the hand of the Lord in my success and He shall receive the honor. Our colony is highly elated over our success. I feel it (subject presented) will be a benefit to our people.

Mar. 3, 1895—I am getting started fairly well in my studies of this semester. I have made a few changes in my oration by aid of Profs. Scott and Trueblood, since delivering it. I have it copied again at the cost of \$1.50 for 4 copies. The judges of the final contest are: Prof. Murray, Princeton, Univ. On thought and comp. D. Heinmann, Detroit lawyer. Dr. R. Boon, Princ. of Ypsi College. Prof, Fulton, Ohio. On delivery, Regent Cocked Adrian, Mich. and Regent Barber, Mich.

Mar. 17, 1895—The contest came off last Friday night. I received third place. Mays and Ingraham rec'd first and second prizes respectfully. First prize, medal and \$75. Second Prize \$50. Mays beat me four points out of 530. Ingraham beat me 2 out of 530 or less than 1%. Judges in composition marked me 1, 3, 2. Dr. Boon gave me first place in thought and composition. On the whole I received the highest % in thought and composition. I rec'd 9% more than best of them. The judges on delivery marked me 3, 3, and 5. Prof. Fulton marked me No. 5. It is the general cry by Prof. and students that it was a rank injustice and that he was prejudiced or went against his own judgment. Our colony is very much exercised over the injustice. I feel all right and feel that the Lord willed it so and hence am thankful over the turn of affairs. Prof. Trueblood, has come to [Richard R.] Lyman and enquired if any one had said that he influenced Fulton so that he marked me down. He says he did not. He said though that Fulton last year when acting as judge asked him what young men he wanted to be chosen, or were best to rep. the Univ., but Trueblood, said he would say nothing about which were the most suitable. He said: Now Mr. Lyman, as the contest is over I will say that if Hickman, had got first place there would have been trouble

and would have met opposition as the dean of Scientific Dept (D'Ooge) was opposed. It seemed evident to me that it was a concocted affair.) He told Lyman also that it was not in any fault of my delivery for I was good but on account of unpopular subject. Prof. Fulton, said also, after the contest that I and Ingraham were the only two that got complete hold of the hearts of the audience. Thought I rec'd faint applause when I arose I had not been speaking but about 3 minutes when I had the audience. It was the warm in the building and many fans and hats were being fanned but by the time I was half through every fan and handkerchief had stopped and death silence reigned. It was the general comment that they had never heard such silence before in their lives, women were seen to weep. One man told me that if he knew that he could produce such silence and deep effect as I did that he would be willing to enter though he knew he would lose, for he considered that the greatest of all honors to sway an audience as I did. General comments: I should at least have had second place in delivery was said by nearly all; some said 1st place. "That man has more oratory in him than all the other orators put together. His oratory was a new style from any they had heard before. A man of riper years said this. A lady said to Lyman, that my oration was grander and surpassed Dr. Talmadges' oration. Mr. Gorr (assistant to Prof. Scott) said, that it was the grandest oration he had ever heard from a student. Prof. Scott complimented me very highly on the oration. The two that carried off the prizes were excellent orators. The one that beat me 4 points is said to be the greatest orator the Univ., had ever had among the students. . . . As my oration received the highest marks in thought and composition, it is to be published among the honored ones. I feel that I have done my duty and am very thankful that the Lord has blessed me with nearly everything I asked him for. I believe that it is for the best the way that it turned out. I acknowledge His hand in it all and give Him the praise for all aid and all honor and success rec'd.

Mar. 24, 1895—I have rec'd this week some most gratifying compliments on my oration. Prof. Scott, told me that he was very pleased to learn that I rec'd first place in thought and composition, for I deserved it. He also said that there was not justice done me by judges in delivery [in marking] for the audience awarded me first place. Though the judges did not, it was almost the universal opinion that I surpassed all in delivery. He said Mr. Hickman, I thought your delivery was sublime and could not have been bettered. Oratory is your fort and I should advise that you continue in that line, though you will have trouble with your language you will overcome that and I will expect to hear of you in 8 or 10 years being among the foremost orators of the land. You do not need any



more days of elocution. I quote here what Heinman, one of the critics on thought and comp., a lawyer from Detroit said; "All the papers were very gratifying and I think the Univ., will be splendidly represented. A good, clear, earnest, almost fervid, paper was the Banishment of the Mormon People. Unfortunately the almost historical nature of the topic cut in on the originality of thought. If the author can handle all subjects as well he ought to be extremely clear cut and effective before an audience." I have his letter. It was written to Dr. Trueblood. These comments with others are double testimonials to me that the Lord aided me and inspired judges, and audiences with the deep and earnest thought that I had in my composition. Father I lay all at thy feet, turn it to my good and to good of others and take the honor to Thy self. May I ever be so blessed of Thee and be humble in the same. May these truths take root and grow in the hearts of the hearers. I learn with satisfaction that my oration with other prize orations of the last 5 years are to be published in a bound volume. Johnny McClellan has written up our contest and sent with a glowing tribute to me. More than I deserve, to our home papers, Deseret News and Dispatch. Also the oration which they are to publish. It was also published in eastern papers.