

PART III

DID B. H. ROBERTS LOSE FAITH IN THE BOOK OF MORMON?

Truman G. Madsen

The secret is out. B. H. Roberts, honest historian and man of integrity that he was, gave up, or almost gave up, on the Book of Mormon at the end of his life. This has been whispered about for more than fifty years (Roberts died in 1933). No need to whisper anymore. For a long time, the anti-Mormon press has circulated portions of the document that "prove" it.¹ Now the documents in question have been re-issued by a university press.²

Here then is the high-priced publication of Roberts' now notorious Study of the Book of Mormon. What can we expect of this lavishly introduced and bibliographed publication from editors like Sterling McMurrin and Brigham Madsen? A review of the problems Roberts raised based on the present state of research? A serious analysis of the literary structure of the Book of Mormon in light of Roberts' queries? An appraisal of the relevance of the Ethan Smith parallels (historical, archaeological, anthropological)? A competent account of the nineteenth century context of the publication of the Book of Mormon? To this multiple choice question the answer can only be "none of the above."

What we have is an updated essay McMurrin wrote twenty years ago on Roberts as Mormonism's most effective historian and theologian. Only four new pages have been added about Roberts'

¹ There is something misleading in the phrase, "heretofore unpublished" (Studies of the Book of Mormon, p. xvii). As the editors and the publisher know, copies of this material have been widely circulated and offered for sale.

² B. H. Roberts' Studies of the Book of Mormon, edited with an Introduction by Brigham D. Madsen and a Biographical Essay by Sterling M. McMurrin (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

"Study" (pp. xv-xviii). A patient introduction and bibliography by Brigham Madsen is distinguished both by what it stresses and what it omits of Roberts' late Book of Mormon studies.

The two editors disagree at crucial points. McMurrin, for example, asserts that "without question" Roberts "continued to profess his belief in the Book of Mormon" (p. xviii). Professor Madsen says, instead, that the record is "enigmatic" (p. 29) and "mixed"; he asks, "During the last six years of his life is there any evidence that Roberts still retained his faith in the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, despite his critical examination of the origin of the book?" (p. 29 emphasis added here and throughout). He offers as evidence that Roberts sounded rather enigmatic in an April 1929 sermon when he said, "I rejoice at the prominence given the Book of Mormon in this conference. It is however, only one of many means in letting God's work be known to the world." He concludes: "Whether or not Roberts retained his belief in the Book of Mormon may never be known." (p. 62).

The focus of this essay is that very question.

Roberts' Declarations

McMurrin writes that one "should not neglect" the statements affirming Roberts' belief in the authenticity of the Book of Mormon that appear in the letters" (p. xvii). Yet here are excerpts from Roberts' letters which on point after point the editors manage to neglect. In March 1932, one year before his death, B. H. Roberts wrote:

I am forwarding you with this mail an introductory chapter to a work of mine which is in typewritten form under the title of "Book of Mormon Study" it makes 450 pp. of typewritten matter. It was from research work I did before going to take charge of the Eastern States Mission. I had written it for presentation to the Twelve and the Presidency, not for publication

I may say that it is an "awful" book, but it contains a collection of facts which ought to be known by them.

Roberts specifically says "not for publication." McMurrin says Roberts "apparently" did not prepare the volume for publication (p. xviii). ✓

Roberts says the Study was "from research work done before going to take charge of the Eastern States Mission" [that was May 29, 1922, DF, p. 315]. The editors change "before" to "after."

Roberts' letter says it is an "awful" book. The editors hail it as one of his best. Here at last, they say, Roberts approached the Book of Mormon "critically and forthrightly rather than defensively" (p. xvii) (as if he hadn't approached it critically and forthrightly before and did not approach it defensively after).

In a second letter Roberts declared his intent clearly. Published on pages 57-58 in the text, these explanatory sentences concern the Study:

Let me say once and for all, so as to avoid what might otherwise call for repeated explanation that what is herein set forth does not represent any conclusions of mine.

The report herewith submitted is what it purports to be, namely a "study of Book of Mormon origins," for the information of those who ought to know everything about it pro et con as well that which has been produced against it. I do not say my conclusions for they are undrawn.

It may be of very great importance since it represents what may be used by some opponent in criticism of the Book of Mormon.

I am taking the position that our faith in the Book of Mormon is not only unshaken but unshakable, and therefore we can look without fear upon all that can be said against it (emphasis added).

Roberts' letter is a statement of fact--what he was doing; and a declaration of intent--what he hoped to achieve. It is also a statement of negation--the study "does not represent any conclusions of mine." The editors label it instead a "statement of faith." And they speak, incredibly, of his "conclusions," and his "findings." (pp. xvii, xxxi).

Roberts' letter says his study "represents what may be used by some opponent of the Book of Mormon." The editors suggest that he does not really mean that. Instead, these are "his doubts" (p. 22).

Roberts' letter says that he is eager to avoid what might otherwise call for "repeated explanation," that "his faith in the Book of Mormon is unshaken and unshakable," and that he (we) "may look without fear upon all that can be said against it." The editors do not see this as a conclusion. Instead, for them the Study "raises the interesting question of what Roberts did, in fact, believe about the Book of Mormon in his latest years" (p. xviii).

More, McMurrin says, one should note the "many crucial statements in Roberts' study that appear to a typical reader to throw serious doubt on the authenticity of the Book of Mormon or, at least, on Roberts' belief in its authenticity." (p. xviii). This is the same McMurrin who has said in public and private that "all this hassle about the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is a waste of time." Now, for some reason, it has become an "important and interesting controversy" (p. xviii). Both editors flail the uninitiated for soft peddling the "controversy." Yet McMurrin turns around again saying the importance of the Study "lies not so much in the question of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as in the interest which many have in the personality and thought of Roberts himself." (p. xviii).

But here, as elsewhere, Roberts says what he really means and means what he really says: the Study has not shaken his objective assurances let alone his faith in the Book of Mormon. What it has done is troubled his sense of adequacy in finding answers to the questions raised and increased his concern that, as Wesley Lloyd recalls, the Book of Mormon needs "bolstering" (p. 24). It has also led him to abandon some arguments he had used earlier. The cement business, the Le Plongen alphabet, and some of his own points he now sees as questionable.

But if Brigham H. Roberts did not have what he himself considered adequate scientific data to answer these objections,

would he, a man of integrity, hold onto the Book of Mormon? As anyone who has bothered to read the record can see, what he says speaks for itself. Roberts' approach is summed up in his objection to the process of verification. He wrote: "It does not follow that since it is not within our power to verify all our true ideas that therefore we must account them false."

(Written in his copy of Pragmatism, New York: Longmans Green Co., p. 201.)

Further elaboration of Roberts' intent is in five other documents. These are (or were) held by the Roberts family. They have escaped the notice of the editors. I examined these materials several years ago in the office of Roberts' son, Brigham.

1. A note from Brigham Roberts indicating that his father, B. H., tried hard in 1922 to make further presentations on the Book of Mormon in person to his church brethren. He was disappointed. The brethren, pressed for time, encouraged him to submit further material in writing.
2. A comment to his brethren of the Seventy two months before departing for New York. He spoke of his Book of Mormon studies, the importance of them, and said, "Wise men anticipate difficulties and prepare for them."
3. A memo to President Heber J. Grant dated May of 1922 in which he says he will take his "manuscript," which he had "carried to the last analysis" to the Mission field. There he hopes to look for answers to the difficulties and queries posed in the Study, although his heavy ecclesiastical duties seem to have precluded such effort except for a bare minimum.
4. A memo listing the eighteen numbered segments of "the Parallels." This is an organized memo which Roberts hand-wrote in the New York Public Library in 1922.
5. A note appended by Roberts' secretary to the original copy of the Parallels. She writes that it "resulted from a conversation had by Richard R. Lyman and B. H. Roberts," that she was "present at the time of the conversation," and that she "typed it as the dictation of President Roberts who had before him the two books [i.e., the Book of Mormon and View of the Hebrews]."

These statements tell us B. H. Roberts went to the Eastern States "seeking answers." He hoped in the meantime for the help

of his colleagues. Some help came. But he lamented in 1929 that "the helpers were very few."

The Manuscript Itself

Was Roberts playing the role of "devil's advocate" when he wrote these manuscripts? The editors say or imply that one cannot "adduce evidence for the Devil's Advocate theory from the manuscript itself" (p. xviii). Let us turn then to the manuscript.

On page 182, Roberts says: "All this, it could be said by one disposed to criticize the Book of Mormon" Roberts is stating what he expects the critics of the Book of Mormon to argue. Is this not precisely what a devil's advocate does? Is this not evidence of the "devil's advocate theory" adduced from the manuscript itself?

In Part I of the "Difficulties," Roberts says: "I shall be most earnestly alert upon the subject of Book of Mormon difficulties, hoping for the development of new knowledge, and for new light to fall upon what has already been learned, to the vindication of what God has revealed in the Book of Mormon."

If we had nothing from Roberts' pen, either before or after he pulled this material together, superficial reading could spot his concern. He says he will "await the vindication of revealed truth." He also asks that "a most earnest appeal should be made to that source of wisdom and knowledge (God) and with the faith and persistence that will admit of no denial." He asks repeatedly, "What can we answer?" "What are to be our answers to the questions asked on these subjects?" "These questions are put by me . . . not for self-embarrassment, surely, nor for the embarrassment of others, but to bring to the consciousness of myself and my brethren that we face grave difficulties in all these matters, and if there is any way by which we may 'find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge even hidden treasures' . . . then a most earnest appeal should be made to that source of wisdom and knowledge, and with a faith and persistence that will

admit no denial." (p. 115). Again on page 142, "How shall we answer the questions that arise from these considerations of American archaeology? If we cannot, what is to be the effect of it all upon the minds of our youth?" And then he says, "Most humbly but also most anxiously, I await the further development of knowledge that will make it possible for us to give a reasonable answer to those who question us concerning the matter herein discussed." (p. 143). He asks questions. The questions go on and on. He was dissatisfied with answers. But not with the book.

On Theophany versus Book

McMurrin uses a longstanding positivistic ploy to make "theophanies" (say, for example, visions) "private, subjective, and inevitably elusive," as distinct from a book which can be seen, held, read, shelved (p. xvi). Is this move intended to imply that Roberts placed more weight on empirical evidence than on spiritual? If so, it misstates both Roberts' and Mormonism's theories of knowledge.

As McMurrin well knows, in the end, God, angels, spirits, and all the theological realm are for Mormonism no less (nor more) confirmable in principle than are chairs, tables, or books, although the latter are directly transferable items of experience. Mormonism reenthrones the senses as legitimate avenues of religious experience.

For Roberts, both the origin events of the Book of Mormon and the book itself--and much of Mormon theology--rest on ocular, auditory and tactile evidence. That is not the only kind. But it is the kind a thorough-going empiricist cannot consistently ignore. Of course, an empiricist can inconsistently ignore it. But that is another story.

For example: "There are no such things as angels," to McMurrin. Yet Roberts had a direct and revelatory encounter with

an angelic personage and made it a matter of record six months before his death.³

"But the statements of the Three Witnesses are worthless." Yet Roberts met, interviewed, and respectfully cross-examined David Whitmer in Richmond, Missouri, because he was one of those Witnesses. Roberts reiterated Whitmer's "unimpeachable" conclusions on at least seven occasions during Roberts' last five years.

"But there is no objectivity to the plates." Roberts visited the Hill Cumorah often in solemn assemblies (the last time in 1930) and recorded in his own 1927 Book of Mormon Notebook (Roberts' scriptural notebook) a series of affidavits on the discovery and disposition of the plates.

"But there is no such thing as a translation aided by a Urim and Thummim." Roberts, however, handled Joseph Smith's Seer Stone, and wrote in his Comprehensive History, not as a skeptic: "The writer has reasons for knowing that it is now in possession of the Church--this year of 1930." (Vol. 6, p. 231).

Caustic Style

The "either/or" that these editors impose should be "both/and." How can Roberts have assumed the role of a belligerent and caustic critic and still have been sincere in accounting the book a "sacred treasure in the Gospel"? That is what the record shows he did, before, during, and after his Study. How could a man who spoke with such conviction of the documents and doctrines of his religion be so articulate in bringing up objections? Because he thought the Book of Mormon fragile? No. Because he thought it impregnable. He had said in 1905, "I do not believe the Book of Mormon can be assailed and overcome." (Improvement Era, 8, August 1905, p. 384). He said

3 See his Biographical Notes.

it again in his unsent letter to Heber J. Grant. He said it again and again to his missionaries.

On the caustic debating style, Roberts, as McMurrin says, "liked nothing better than a good fight. If there were no debate in sight he would produce a battle by monologue" (p. xxi). So he would. And his Book of Mormon Study is "Exhibit A." One of his deliberate efforts was to present the case of his opponent to the full satisfaction of the opponent. Only then would he reply. This was part of his personality and of his method. He often went on Saturdays from the Brooklyn Mission Home dressed in rough clothes and at Times Square sought verbal swordplay with whomever, to debate on whatever. All this "to sharpen his wits." Against the general Church policy of "avoiding disputations," he encouraged his missionaries to have confrontations with argumentative religionists, of whatever persuasion. "You will have a good experience. And you will learn," he would say. He enjoyed street meetings and involved his missionaries in them precisely because in such settings hecklers with their counterthrust punctuated every sentence. Even in his most burdened days in New York he occasionally slipped into Times Square to sharpen his wits in the midst of shrill and heavy-handed arguments in that linguistic soapbox derby. "Let them bring forth their strong reasons!" he said, quoting the Doctrine and Covenants. The result is that he was almost as competent in the alternatives to his philosophy and religion as he was in his own. "I would rather debate anyone on the planet than B. H. Roberts," Hugh B. Brown once said admiringly. "He was a master." It was uncharacteristic of him to "tone down" the force of objections raised. He preferred to magnify them, then bring to bear on them his own critical abilities.

Mission School

Now what about the records of his five-year Mission Presidency (1922-27)? Let us focus on the five consecutive, month-long "mission schools" Roberts held in the Brooklyn Mission Home.

"We had one-hour sessions daily from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Sometimes we had evening sessions beginning at 7:30 when President Roberts would clarify questions or explain passages from the standard works, with emphasis on the Book of Mormon from which he quoted often. We literally drank from his wisdom. With notebooks open we wrote and listened to a great teacher." (From the Journal of Lavon Bates Clark.)

In a conversation with a nonmember, Roberts reported to his class he heard the old charge "there is nothing in the Book of Mormon of value." Roberts replied with Alma 41:10 "Wickedness never was happiness" and asked if he had ever heard such an expression before. The man acknowledged he had not. "That one sentence alone proves the Book of Mormon is a great book and is of great value to men." (See Journal of John C. Allen.)

"How does one come to know the book?" Roberts pressed his missionary colleagues. He answered there were two ways: (1) exhaustive study, (2) thorough prayer. (Conversation with Milo Marsden, July 22, 1983.) As for Roberts' own assurance, he told missionaries that Moroni's words were "the greatest promise ever made to mankind."

In the mission home after a new lady missionary delivered a talk about the flyleaf of the Book of Mormon, Roberts exclaimed, "Excellent." And added that "the Book of Mormon was the only volume on earth that had the flyleaf dictated by God, and how profound and important were the things that were contained in it." (See Journals of Zina Tate Cox and Job Hemsley.)

Roberts frequently spoke, Mark Allen recalls, of problems with the Book of Mormon. He especially quoted the many parallels between the new scriptures and the Bible, and also he discussed the strenuous process of translating and the possibility of errors in vernacular expressions. Says Allen, "His faith in the divinity of the book was strong, but he agonized over the intellectual problems in justifying it. His fervent expression was, 'O Brother Allen, we have many serious problems with the Book of Mormon.'" These conversations occurred in 1927-28 after Roberts had remained in Manhattan to write "The Truth, the Way,

the Life," his comprehensive doctrinal treatise. Allen adds that Roberts wished he could call in his volume three of New Witnesses. Why? Because he had given up faith in the Book of Mormon? No. Because he thought he had found a better way to establish and appreciate its divinity, a doctrinal approach: "He was uneasy with attempts to build a case out of trivial coincidence and gratuitous parallels." A more fruitful approach lay in "searching out the deeper spiritual and moral meaning and showing their logical consistency with the body of accepted religious truth of the Church." (See letter of Mark Allen, July 20, 1983.)

In Private and In Prayer

Roberts had seven secretaries during his Mission Presidency (1922-27): Elizabeth Hinckley, Ora Knecht, Elsie Cook (who took his dictation for the six months he stayed in New York after his release), Leroi C. Snow, John L. Emmet, G. Stanley McCallister, and Henry D. Taylor. Each kept notes and exchanged letters with their mentor down to the time of his death. Each attended one or more of the mission schools, the intensive one-month study-train-practice sessions held in the Brooklyn Mission Home. Each was involved in his conferences, sermons, and street meetings. Each heard him pray and watched him participate in the morning devotionals in the home. Their judgment is uniformly clear: the Book of Mormon was his linchpin and his sacred text.

Henry Taylor's account is typical: "A session on the top of 'Patriarch Hill' above Joseph Smith Memorial Monument in Vermont. Roberts knelt in the soft soil and delivered, as was his custom, an 'epic prayer.' He reviewed the manifestations or theophanies of God on mountain tops, and proceeded to pray in thanksgiving for each of the major events of the restoration beginning with the first vision, continuing with the discovery of the plates, the translation of the Book of Mormon, the calling of witnesses, and conferral of Divine authority, and so on. As he prayed, the tears streamed down his cheeks." The date? 1927.

Acts

We have sketched what Roberts said and wrote in the period after 1922, after the Study was written. That leaves out of account other official acts which reflect his commitment to the Book. In this same period, for example, (1) he planned, organized, and conducted a mission-wide Cumorah conference, including President Heber J. Grant, on the anniversary of Joseph Smith's first viewing of the plates, September 1923. He repeated the celebration the next year, 1924. On the first occasion he prepared five major discourses on the Book of Mormon, three of which were later published: Christ in America; the Book of Mormon warnings to America; on the Book of Mormon as witness of the restoration; (2) he kept two "special ambassadors" presenting lectures on early American antiquities traveling throughout the eastern seaboard; (3) he helped procure for the Church the Hill Cumorah, the Joseph Smith farm, and the Peter Whitmer farm; (4) he arranged for the establishing of a monument to the Angel Moroni atop the Hill Cumorah; (5) he gathered missionaries on the west side of the Hill Cumorah to review the recovery of the plates and came again in 1930 to repeat his conviction and say, "See what God hath wrought"; (6) he recommended in 1929 that a chapel be built at the base of the Hill Cumorah to honor the Church's centennial; (7) he suggested a full-length film on the story of the Three Witnesses and the Eight Witnesses.

On The Truth, the Way and the Life

✓ The omission of this manuscript from Brigham Madsen's analysis is a glaring absence. Would a Book of Mormon doubter have written that work?

We know when Roberts wrote it, immediately after his release as President of the Eastern States Mission (April 1927). We know how long he kept at it: intensively for six months in New York and then on and off until 1932, the year before his death. Eight chapters of it are rooted in detailed exposition of the Book of

Mormon: the atonement as revealed--as harmonic with the reign of law; as related to the attributes of God; as indispensable; as broader in scope than satisfaction for Adam's sin; as efficacious though vicarious. The later chapters concern the ethical teachings of the "intensification" of the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi. Of this core of his treatise, he concluded: "Knowledge of the whole will be necessary to the complete understanding of the parts." (TWL, vol. II, Chapters XL-XL). The whole and the parts are derived from the Book of Mormon.

Roberts considered the Book of Mormon the finest statement in print on the balance of justice and mercy. Now, having achieved the status, according to our editors, of "higher critic," "critical and forthright," Roberts describes the result as "the most important work that I have yet contributed to the Church, the six-volumed Comprehensive History of the Church not omitted." (Letter to President Heber J. Grant and counselors, February 9, 1931). He adds that "Life at my years with an incurable ailment is very precarious and I should dislike very much to pass on without completing and publishing this work." This work was completed and that letter written two and a half years before Roberts' death.

Before and After

Both editors imply that if one dealt with Roberts' post-"Book of Mormon Study" sources, a radically different Roberts would emerge. See McMurrin on p. xvii, and Brigham Madsen on p. 22. It is true that Roberts shifted his approach on the Book of Mormon from "evidences" to "doctrine," as seen above. But his belief in the divinity of the Book of Mormon remained firm. There are eight categories in which Roberts continued active in Book of Mormon advocacy in his final decade, as he had been active before:

1. Tracts. After 1922, he wrote thirteen tracts, five of them on the Book of Mormon. They speak of the great value of the "Fifth Gospel," how it is needed by the world, how it was "revealed to Joseph Smith," and how it

removes "the rubbish of theological speculations." BYU Special Collections MOR, N230, AL, No. 282a-d.

2. Books. After 1922, he wrote three new manuscripts that which were intertwined with or updatings of earlier research:
 - (i) Rasha the Jew, a three-part account of the Book of Mormon, written in the mode of personal manifesto and testimony. Over a million copies of the article were circulated. The articles were copyrighted and published by Roberts in 1932.
 - (ii) The six-volume Comprehensive History of the Church. Nine chapters deal with the origin, witnessing, publication, and impact of the Book of Mormon. This was completed by May 1930.
 - (iii) The Truth, the Way and the Life, Roberts' doctrinal treatise. It was substantially finished by 1928, ready for publication in 1932. He delivered up to 200 sermons related to material in this treatise; these remain unpublished except that Liahona, the Elders Journal, mentions and gives synopses of them. More than a third revolved around the Book of Mormon.
3. Conference Addresses. After 1922, Roberts had nineteen opportunities to speak in Conference. He chose to devote eleven to the Book of Mormon.
4. Improvement Era Articles. After 1922, Roberts wrote three articles dealing with Christ in America.
5. Church News Contributions. After 1922, Roberts introduced a series called "New Dispensation Thoughts." Several of these deal with the Book of Mormon.
6. Recorded addresses on radio on special occasions. After 1922, for example, he spoke on modern revelation, the Easter vision of 3 Nephi, the challenge of the Book of Mormon to American lawlessness, and America will not fail.
7. Stake Conference addresses. About half of his stake conference speaking assignments were filled with messages drawn from the Book of Mormon, his interview with David Whitmer, and his profound admiration for the "perfection" of the sacramental prayers in the Book of Mormon as evidence of the divine origin of the Book of Mormon.

But this is mere statistical anatomy. To understand the flesh on these public pronouncements, we must be specific. The fuller list has been published by F.A.R.M.S.; excerpts are given by John Welch in Part I above.

From these statements, it is clear that Roberts believed in the Church--to the end. In April 1930, bringing his recently completed multi-volume Comprehensive History to the pulpit of the Tabernacle "as to an altar," he spoke of the Book of Mormon as "revealed and translated by the power of God, and supplies the world with a new witness for the Christ, and the truth and the fulness of the Gospel." He dedicated this monumental work in prayer to God "unto thee and thy cause."

If Roberts believed in the Church, and if belief in the truthfulness of the Church turns on belief in the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, as McMurrin states as an axiom (p. xv), then must it not follow that Roberts believed in the Book of Mormon?

On Science

McMurrin sees Roberts engaged in a campaign to instill greater rationality and scientific respectability into the Church--a struggle "against the anti-scientific bias of some of his ecclesiastical colleagues." (p. xx). Was Roberts smitten with or by the lure of scientism?

In his October 1930 Conference address, he plead with the youth to recognize the revolutionary changes in the trends of scientific thought and cited admonitions given the earliest gathering of schools and learning in the Church for "obtaining wisdom both by faith and also by research and experimentation, and by becoming familiar with the great truths that are taught in the best books." (p. 21). Witnessing, however, he said was more revealing than research.

In October, 1932, he gave a follow-up discourse on witnessing. He had just consumed a "thoughtful and splendid" volume of essays, Has Science Discovered God (Millikan, Eddington, Einstein, Huxley, Jeans, Lodge). His assessment:

I doubt if science ever will "discover God." I know how raw, perhaps, that sounds to your ears and you will credit much of it to assumption. Well, be that as it may. I, nevertheless, do not believe that science will discover God. That, as I understand it, is not the work assigned to science. Scientists may do much in confirming from their discoveries the existence and the power and the glory of God; but it will be God who will reveal God; men will not find him "unto perfection" by their searching. It is the work of God to reveal himself and absolutely necessary that he should do so in order that we may have religion at all.

Not only will science not discover God, but not even religion discovers him. It is not the order of facts for religion to discover God. The order of facts is God must reveal God. (p. 94)

He remained of this persuasion to the end. Having survived a hospital ordeal, an amputation, and the verdict of the doctors that his days were numbered because of diabetes, he confided to his son that he wanted to "witness again." Ceremonially, he lifted the torch again in a stake gathering, reiterating his testimony ". . . not from scientific knowledge or book learning but from the knowledge that comes through faith."

Serious Textual Scholarship

The editors praise Roberts for finally getting down to some deep textual criticism. Yet who is being superficial?

In this volume Hugh Nibley gets one footnote (p. 388). John L. Sorenson is ignored. There is no mention of Lehi in the Desert or Since Cumorah. McMurrin has announced that he does not and will not read Nibley because (a) Nibley is "playing games," and it is unfortunate for people to take him seriously, (b) Nibley is "an enemy of the Church" on the order of Tertullian, (c) Nibley's preoccupation with ancient languages is an aberration. So much for an open mind on Nibley. But what of Nibley's sources?

Stendahl's indictment of Biblical scholars in general applies all too poignantly locally. He scores Biblical scholars for their "cavalier" attitude toward the after-history of the Bible

and specifically the Book of Mormon. For Stendahl, "the laws of creative interpretation by which we analyze material from the first and second Christian centuries operate and are significantly elucidated by works like the Book of Mormon or by other writings of revelatory character." Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984) p. 99.

Several world class scholars, including W. D. Davies, Krister Stendahl, James Charlesworth, and David Noel Freedman, have made comparative studies of the Book of Mormon to other bodies of literature--biblical, apocryphal, pseudepigraphic, and theological. None of these scholars has settled for himself the question of the historicity of the Book of Mormon. And each has strong competing religious ties--institutional and otherwise. All the more reason to contrast their serious work with the flippant and a priori hand-waving that occurs too often in local academia. If "serious textual criticism" appeals to McMurrin in Roberts, why not in these others? If it is superficiality that McMurrin dislikes in Roberts' historical writings (p. xxiii), what of McMurrin's own cavalier treatment of the Book of Mormon and ignorance even of its history as an object for study? It isn't just that he rejects efforts to pursue genuine textual, linguistic, historical, archaeological, and cultural studies. It is that in doing so, he claims to be a genuine scholar with both credentials and competence.

McMurrin's Stance

The editors describe Roberts as "foursquare" with his readers (p. xxii). Profoundly true. He put his assumptions and his faith-state convictions up front. He did not deny having them or pretend that they were inoperative as he came to his historical and theological studies. The present editors here do (but elsewhere don't) hesitate to be honest like their subject.

McMurrin is on record as a benevolent naturalist, categorically rejecting much Judaeo-Christian history, which he considers myth and legend; and many Mormon myths and legends,

✓ which he considers nonsense and never believed. He has announced over and over that there is no evidence for the Book of Mormon and a good deal of evidence against; in neither case has he seriously studied the evidence. This involves him in the necessity of denying that anything B. H. Roberts considered evidence for the Book of Mormon is evidence. He has said there is no point in having a "second witness," because what is in the Bible is adequate. Then he goes on to reject the Biblical as well as the Book of Mormon doctrines of atonement. He has over and over characterized the Book of Mormon as a "betrayal" of genuine Mormonism because of a statement in Mosiah: "The natural man is an enemy of God." In this verse he finds both original sin and Calvinistic depravity (the verse itself in fact explicitly undercuts both dogmas). He has made it known that the story of the origin of the Book of Mormon, including the angels, plates, and translation are an unnecessary burden the Church has unfortunately but deliberately decided to carry. As a cultural Mormon, he would like to see the whole book and its historical claims jettisoned. With these premises it is no surprise that he skews the data on Roberts, praising Roberts' probing while ✓ discounting his assurances. He does not need Roberts' "Study" to reinforce his negative faith. He brought that faith to his treatment of the author and made no changes on the basis of Roberts' substance.

The Contradiction

Both McMurrin and Madsen voluntarily put themselves in a bind. They want to re-raise "the interesting question of what Roberts did in fact believe about the Book of Mormon in his late years." McMurrin concludes that the fact that Roberts "continued to profess his faith in the authenticity of the book seems to be without question." But he adds that this is "despite the strong arguments and statements in his study that would appear to explicitly express a conviction that it is not authentic." (p. xviii). But Brigham Madsen says "that may never be known." (p. 30).

✓ Following these cues, what are we to conclude from the editors? Answer: Play loose with Roberts' own self-revealing statements before, during, after and--most impressively --in the manuscript. Play tight with the hypothesis that the real B. H. Roberts is in the unanswered questions in the "Study" and nowhere else. And if he didn't give up on the Book of Mormon, he should have.

✓ Brigham Madsen's final paragraph exceeds even McMurrin's sometimes excessive tribute: "As for Roberts himself, one can appreciate his fierce independence, his forthright honesty, his deeply embedded integrity, and above all, his fearless willingness to follow wherever his reason led him. He would be abrasive in his defense of stubbornly held beliefs, but he had the capacity to change his views when confronted with new and persuasive evidence." (p. 30) But since, again, both editors acknowledge Roberts' public statements in defense of the Book of Mormon to the end of his life, we have a dilemma. How can one appreciate Roberts' "fierce independence," his "forthright honesty," his "deeply embedded integrity," and above all, his "fearless willingness to follow wherever his reason led him," if he had a privately-held, contemptuous or skeptical position on the Book of Mormon and, therefore, in his last eleven years, lived a flagrant and foolish lie?

Conclusion

These editors applaud Roberts for "seeing both sides." They praise his desire to be objective and his sincere desire to be "honest and open with his readers." In their own methodology and approach, they are a cut above the average work from the microfilm anti-Mormon press. But their bibliography is blatantly one-sided. That is not in the spirit of B. H. Roberts, who thoroughly immersed himself on and on, pro et con, not just con et con. In scholarly company, the refusal to examine the pro has labels. But whatever one calls it, it is the very attitude B. H. Roberts lived and died to overcome.

Anti-Mormon use of Roberts' material has been flagrantly selective--ignoring, omitting, suppressing, even destroying, what Roberts himself said in and about his manuscript. They conclude, "B. H. Roberts had lost his faith in the Book of Mormon." One would expect better than that from preparers of a publication issuing from a university press. These editors are subtler and more sophisticated than the typical anti-Mormons. But their product is little better. Their tribute to B. H. Roberts turns out to be--to use a word of which the editors are fond--a betrayal.

As John Welch shows in his "Finding Answers to B. H. Roberts' Questions," the tide waters of serious Book of Mormon study have washed far beyond 1933. One advantage to be gained by this exhuming of obsolescence is to provide a measure of how far they have come. Roberts was caught in assumptions of his time and had neither the tools nor data now available. He raised more perplexing questions than he was able to answer. Since his day many more have been raised with greater refinement, clarity and skill than he could possibly summon. But so have answers improved. Let us get on with the project.