

invention of the banner to the founder and ancestor of the nation—in the Scrolls and the Book of Mormon it is Jacob or Israel.

### The Torn Garment, an Apocryphal Tale

When Moroni begins his story by saying, "Let us remember the words of Jacob," he is plainly reminding his hearers of a tale that is familiar to them all. Yet who in the West has ever known anything about the story that follows, in which the words of Jacob are: "Even as this remnant of garment of my son hath been preserved, so shall a remnant of the seed of my son be preserved, . . . while the remainder of the seed of Joseph shall perish, even as the remnant of his garment"? Here the survival of Joseph's garment guarantees and typifies the survival of Joseph (Alma 46:24).

In the tenth century of our era the greatest antiquarian of the Moslem world, Muhammad ibn-Ibrahim ath-Tha'labi, collected in Persia a great many old tales and legends about the prophets of Israel. After the fall of Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews, many of the sectaries, such as those that once lived around the Dead Sea, moved East to be under the protection of the Persians. Thus groups of Jews representing various sects and shades of belief were scattered all over central Asia in the Middle Ages, and it is from such, no doubt, that Tha'labi gets his amazing fund of information, which is worthy to be set up beside the most enlightening volumes of Apocrypha. Among other things, Tha'labi tells a number of stories, which we have not found anywhere else, about Jacob and the garment of Joseph. In one, Joseph's brethren bring his torn garment to their father as proof that he is dead, but Jacob after examining the garment ("and there were in the garment of Joseph three marks or tokens when they brought it to his father") declares that the way the cloth is torn shows him that their story is not true: "Behold, if the bear had eaten him he surely would have rent his garment, and since he

would (naturally) have fled towards the gate, verily the garment should have been torn behind." But since this is not the case it may be that Joseph still lives. Another account is the case of "the vizier" Potiphar, who by examining the tears in Joseph's garment, knew that he was innocent and spared his life, "for he knew that if he [Joseph] had attacked his wife the tear would have been in front." So again his torn garment declared that Joseph should live.<sup>16</sup>

Most significant is Tha'labi's discussion of the two remnants of Joseph's garment, from which we quote:

And when Joseph had made himself known unto them [his brethren] he asked them about his father, saying, "What did my father after [I left]?" They answered, "He lost his eyesight [from weeping]." Then he gave them his garment [*qamis*, long outer shirt]. According to ad-Dahak that garment was of the weave [pattern, design] of Paradise, and the breath [spirit, odor] of Paradise was in it, so that it never decayed or in any way deteriorated [and that was] a sign [omen]. And Joseph gave them that garment, and it was the very one that had belonged to Abraham, having already had a long history. And he said to them, "Go, take this garment of mine and place it upon the face of my father so he may have sight again, and return [to me] with all your families." And when they had put Egypt behind them and come to Canaan their father Jacob said, "Behold, I perceive the spirit [breath, odor] of Joseph, if you will not think me wandering in my mind and weak-headed from age." . . . [for] he knew that upon all the earth there was no spirit [breath, odor] of Paradise save in that garment alone. . . . And as-Sadi says that Judah said to Joseph, "It was I who took the garment bedaubed with blood to Jacob, and reported to him that the wolf had eaten Joseph; so give me this day thy garment that I might tell him that thou art living, that I might cause him to rejoice now as greatly as I caused him to sorrow then." And Ibn-Abbas says that Judah took the garment and went forth in great haste, panting with exertion and anxiety . . . and when he brought the garment he laid it upon

his face, so that his sight returned to him. And ad-Dahak says that his sight returned after blindness, and his strength after weakness, and youth after age, and joy after sorrow. [Then follows a dialogue between Jacob and the King of Death].<sup>17</sup>

Note here that there were *two* remnants of Joseph's garment, one sent by *Joseph* to his father as a sign that he was still alive (since the garment *had not decayed*), and the other, torn and smeared with blood, brought by *Judah* to his father as a sign that Joseph was dead. Moroni actually quotes Jacob ("Now behold, this was the language of Jacob" [Alma 46:26]) as saying: "Now behold, this giveth my soul sorrow; nevertheless, my soul hath joy in my son" (Alma 46:25). Compare this with Judah's statement in the Old World account, that the undecayed garment caused Jacob as much joy as the bloody garment caused him sorrow. In both accounts Jacob is described as being near to death—hence Judah's haste to reach him with the garment and make amends for the evil he has done.

Surely there is "a type and a shadow" in this story, for the particular concern of Israel is with Joseph and Judah and how, after working at cross purposes, they were reconciled after many years by the magnanimity of the one and the remorseful repentance of the other. It is another form of the symbolic story of the Two Sticks told in Ezekiel 37. But aside from the great symbolic force of the tale, there can be no doubt that the story told by Moroni as one familiar to all the people actually was one that circulated among the Jews in ancient times and was taken to the East by them, being like much early Jewish lore completely lost in the West. It was totally unknown to the world in which Joseph Smith lived.

These interesting little details are typical apocryphal variations on a single theme, and the theme is the one Moroni mentions; the rent garment of Joseph is the symbol both of his suffering and his deliverance, misfortune and

preservation. Such things in the Book of Mormon illustrate the widespread ramifications of Book of Mormon culture, and the recent declaration of Albright and other scholars that the ancient Hebrews had cultural roots in every civilization of the Near East. This is an acid test that no forgery could pass; it not only opens a window on a world we dreamed not of, but it brings to our unsuspecting and uninitiated minds a first glimmering suspicion of the true scope and vastness of a book nobody knows.

### Questions

1. Why has the denunciation of war and the awareness of its evils in no way diminished the frequency of ferocity of wars?
2. Was Moroni justified in putting to death those who would not "support the cause of freedom"? Was that real freedom?
3. Is there any justification for war? Can we break the commandments of God every day and then profess indignation because he allows us to suffer the effects of our folly?
4. What things are strange and unfamiliar in the Title of Liberty story?
5. What Old World parallels are there to these things?
6. What common origin is indicated to explain the resemblance?
7. How does the concept of war in the *Milhamah* Scroll and Alma differ from the modern view?
8. What considerations justify seeking illuminating parallels between the Book of Mormon customs and beliefs and practices as far away as Iran? Could there be any real connection between the two?
9. What indication is there in the story of Moroni's banner that the Nephites were familiar with apocryphal teachings since lost to the world?
10. Discuss the attitude of the Book of Mormon towards types and symbols. To what extent can such things be realities?