

Part III. THE GREEK PSALTER MYSTERY

or

Mr. Caswall Meets the Press

Scene: It is the usual TV panel. The participants sit behind large placards designating them as:

The Reverend Henry Caswall

The Moderator

Reporter No. 1 Mr. Ecks

Reporter No. 2 Mr. Wye

Reporter No. 3 Mr. Zee

The Caswall credentials

Moderator: This evening we have as our guest the man whose story of Joseph Smith and the Greek Psalter has been voted the most effective single contribution to Anti-Mormon literature; it is to the best of our knowledge the only story implicating Smith in a fraud that has never been questioned. We shall ask Mr. Caswall's friend, Mr. W. S. Parrott, to introduce him. Mr. Parrott.

W. S. Parrott: "In our attempt to exhibit Mormonism in its truly diabolical character, it gives us satisfaction to appeal to so high and reliable an authority as the Reverend Henry Caswall, vicar of Figcheldean, and Rural Dean of Salisbury."¹ Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the unquestioned, the unchallenged, the undoubted, the one and only Rev. HENRY CASWALL! (Applause).

H. Caswall: Thank you, my friends. "It has come to pass in the course of Divine Providence, that although I am now the pastor of an English congregation, I have become well acquainted with the early history of the 'Latter-day Saints,' and seen and conversed with their 'prophet' at the head-quarters of their sect in Western America. And, in consequence of the information which I have thus obtained, I do not merely *think* the religion of the 'Latter-

to see the papyri. Smith is all the things Caswall thought he would be: "Even more wicked than I could have supposed him to be," is his expression. His unbelievable speech is completely out of keeping with the known manner of Smith at the time, but perfectly in character with the idiotic slob of the Caswall stereotype. The false prophet immediately starts swaggering and boasting, rudely contradicting his distinguished guest—he and he only knows the answers, he uses the three or four minutes at his disposal with devastating economy as he prates of Egyptian Hieroglyphics and Golden Plates and characters in Reformed Egyptian and the angel, all in the most preposterously crude language. Of course he must identify the book as "Reformed Egyptian" though that was a *New World invention, not to be found in any Old World document*. This is another fatal slip, but Caswall who had not read the Book of Mormon didn't know it: everything must be true to *his* idea of what the boob Joseph Smith would say.

Rept. 2: Not only is Caswall the sole witness to what is supposed to have happened in Nauvoo—never mentioned in any other writings than his—but what is more, he *knows* he is!

Rept. 1: What makes you so sure of that?

Rept. 2: The great freedom with which he improvises. He could only take the liberties he does if he were quite sure that no one *else* would ever tell the story. And why is he so absolutely certain that no one else ever will tell that story or any part of it? Why is he perfectly free to tell it as he chooses? Simply because it is a product of his own imagination. To close the door to inquiry, he has fixed it so that no one will ever identify his Mormons, and they will never identify him.

Moderator: So what is your final opinion, Mr. B?

Rept. 2: That the Greek Psalter Story is the end product of a long process of revising and re-editing in an attempt to provide a story of fraud that would stick. The original plot called for a frame-up and a trap; there was

to be an interview with Smith at which he was to fail to recognize a Greek Bible. To make sure that he would fail, a doctored text was used, a text that no scholar in America could read, though Caswall was to announce publicly that the test would be a very simple and elementary one. The moment Smith had admitted or in any way displayed his incapacity to read the book it was to be taken from him, tied up in many wrappings and scrupulously kept out of the hands of the Mormons, no matter how much they offered for it. Only then, after the book had been sealed, would Caswall announce that Smith "had effectively demonstrated his ignorance," since the bearer of the book "knew it positively to be a Greek Psalter." Then the professor would be free to "make known to the world" how the prophet had exhibited his gross ignorance.

Only the interview never took place, as is clear (a) from the fact that it is nowhere mentioned save in Caswall's own writings, though Nauvoo was an open city and the interview was supposed to have caused a great sensation; (b) from the intrinsic absurdities with which Mr. Caswall's account of it abound, e.g., his inability to see Smith's eyes; (c) from Caswall's willingness to change his story to suit any later convenience; it is absolutely certain that he composed and altered various episodes in retrospect. That would not be so bad if we had in the key episode, the identification of the Psalter by Smith, an unchanging nucleus. But (d) that is the very part of the story which has been doctored the most.

Since the interview did not take place, Caswall was free to follow Cicero's method of reporting "in his leisure time" fully and lovingly all the things that should have happened, had the plan been tried, with Smith the perfect clown and Caswall the Christian Hero. It is an old and familiar device. It is clearly and repeatedly stated in the earlier versions that the purpose of the interview was to expose Smith's ignorance by putting his scholarship to the test. An after-thought or minor embellishment of the original version—that since Smith had declared the Psalter to

be what was tantamount to another Book of Mormon he could not be an honest man, and since he was not honest he could not be a true prophet—is later adopted as the leitmotif of the story, and after 1851 it is pretended that the purpose of the test from the first was not to test Smith's scholarship but the divinity of his calling. Accordingly the story is thoroughly revamped to fit the new thesis.

Rept. 3: (with a start): How long have we been off the air? Do you realize what time it is?

Rept. 1: We must have wasted hours with that old fellow.

Rept. 2: Hardly wasted. Here is the most respected, the most scholarly, the most unassailable witness who ever testified to the villainy of Joseph Smith, and it has been our privilege not only to test his veracity but actually to see what makes him tick. A rewarding experience, gentlemen, "another page," as Caswall would say, "in the great book of human nature."