I have been interested since a long time in the Mormons and Joseph Smith's supposed translations of Egyptian texts. A careful study has convinced me that Smith probably believed seriously to have deciphered the ancient hieroglyphics, but that he utterly failed.

What he calls the 'Book of Abraham' is a funeral Egyptian text, probably not older than the Greek ages. His figure 1 should be commented upon as follows:

The dead man (1) is lying on a bier (4) under which are standing the four canopic jars (5-8) and before which is standing the offering table (10). The soul is leaving the body in the moment when the priest (3) is opening the body with a knife for mummification. Fig. 3 may be part of the same papyrus—the Goddess Maat (Truth) is introducing the dead (5) and his shadow (6) before Osiris (1) and Isis (2) before whom an offering table stands (3).

It is impossible from Smith's bad fac-similes to make out any meaning of the inscriptions, but that they cannot say what Smith thought is clear from the certain signification of the figures 1-5. 6 only may be interpreted in different ways, but never as Smith did.

Fig. 2 is copied from a hypocephalus of the ancient Egyptians, a magical book on which Dr. Birch has often written in the proceedings of the Biblical Archaeological Society, and Dr. Leamans in the Actes des Congress des Orientalistes of Leyden. None of the names mentioned by Smith can be found in the text, and he has misinterpreted the signification of every one figure: Fig. 5 is the divine cow of Hathor, 6 are the four children of Horus as the Canopic Gods, 4 is the God Sokar in the Sacred Book, etc.

I hope this will suffice to show that Jos. Smith certainly never got a Divine revelation in the meaning of the ancient Egyptian Script, and that he never deciphered hieroglyphic texts at all. He probably used Athenasius Kirsher

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the Jesuit's work, and there found a method of reading the old Egyptian signs very much like his own.

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