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Abstract: One of the spectacular events of Latter-day Saint history unfolded as Oliver Cowdery walked into a conference session in progress at Council Bluffs in 1848 and was personally escorted to the stand by his friend Orson Hyde. No one in the group seems to have been more impressed than Reuben Miller, who at the same meeting had made his own public reconciliation with the Church. While Cowdery's return itself is abundantly attested, no historical source but the Miller account adequately reveals Oliver Cowdery's public testimony upon his return to the Church.

Reuben Miller, Recorder of Oliver Cowdery's Reaffirmations

RICHARD LLOYD ANDERSON*

One of the spectacular events of Latter-day Saint history unfolded as Oliver Cowdery walked into a conference session in progress at Council Bluffs in 1848 and was personally escorted to the stand by his friend Orson Hyde. That his remarks on that occasion were a striking vindication of Mormon claims is shown in all recollections of the event. George A. Smith wrote within ten days: "His testimony produced quite a sensation among the gentlemen present who did not belong to the church, and it was gratefully received by the Saints."[1] No one in the latter group seems to have been more impressed than Reuben Miller, who at the same meeting had made his own public reconciliation with the Church. At least, no one else is known to have recorded the Cowdery remarks in such detail. The reality of the return of the former "Second Elder" does not rest alone on the Reuben Miller account, since a score of solid historical references disprove an anonymous "confession" describing the astounding feat of impersonating Cowdery before hundreds of his former intimates. But while the return itself is abundantly attested, no historical source but the Miller account adequately reveals Oliver Cowdery's public testimony upon his return to the Church.

The Miller-reported speech recounts the irony of Cowdery's humble return contrasted with the presiding and initiating power that he once held; he reiterated Orson Hyde's observations that any successful career in the Church must be based on loyalty to the true priesthood leaders. There is a considerable amount of historical information about Cowdery while he was out of the Church that portrays the co-founder of Mormonism in just this light, as one who took a good deal of personal pride in his spiritual experiences in founding the Restored Church

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[1]Letter of George A. Smith to Orson Pratt from Council Bluffs, October 31, 1848, cited in *Millennial Star*, Vol. 11 (Jan. 1, 1849), p. 14.

and as one who was considerably pained by his separation from its people. The main interest of his returning speech, however, is doctrinal. He discounted the Spaulding story as totally inconsistent with his own experience as secretary to Joseph Smith during the production of the Book of Mormon. He publicly reaffirmed the chief facts within his knowledge of the founding of the Church:

> I wrote with my own pen the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the Prophet. . . I beheld with my eyes, and handled with my hands, the gold plates from which it was translated. I also beheld the Interpreters. . . .
>
> I was present with Joseph when an holy angel from God came down from heaven and conferred, or restored, the Aaronic Priesthood and said at the same time that it should remain upon the earth while the earth stands.
>
> I was also present with Joseph when the Melchisedek Priesthood was conferred by the holy angels[2] of God, which we then confirmed on each other, by the will and commandment of God.[3]

An occasional anti-Mormon writer has denied the accuracy of this discourse on the ground that it was not printed until a decade after the event, but it appears in Miller's journal, a contemporaneous document. In printing this journal account later, Miller insisted that he made notes at the time and consequently had a "verbatim report."[4] Whether that is believed obviously depends upon whether one trusts Miller. And in investigating that question, what emerges is not only his individualistic integrity, but his experience as a reporter and his unusual interest in both the visions of the Restoration and in Cowdery as a person.

PROMINENCE IN UTAH

Coincidence brought Cowdery and Miller together in the Kanesville conference session of October 21, 1848. In the following year, Cowdery was stricken with his last illness in

[2]This term, plural in the original Reuben Miller Journal, was made singular in the initial *Deseret News* printing of the incident. Later changes adding the plural form have been wrongly interpreted as tampering with the text.

[3]Reuben Miller Journal, LDS Church Historian's Office. As noted, the text differs in some minor wording from the initial publication during the life of Reuben Miller, *Deseret News*, April 13, 1859, p. 48. All quotations made from original documents in this article are exact, with the exception of punctuation and spelling corrections.

[4]*Deseret Evening News*, April 13, 1859, p. 48.

Richmond, Missouri, while Miller had migrated to Salt Lake Valley and was beginning his one-third century's prominence there as a farmer, businessman, civic leader, and pioneer bishop. In his second year of residence in the valley he was appointed bishop of the Mill Creek Ward and held this position until his death in 1882.[5] The year after he became bishop he entered county government as a selectman, the equivalent of today's commissioner. This post he also held until his death. John Taylor, then President of the Church, spoke at his funeral, paying tribute to him as a "highminded, honorable man." Another speaker at Miller's funeral was the perceptive and candid Elias Smith who, as probate judge, had been chairman of county government for the entire time of Miller's tenure. Something of Miller's personal character emerges in Smith's estimate: what impressed him was Miller's "wide practical experience coupled with the best of judgment, to say nothing of his uprightness and honesty, which he possessed to an eminent degree."[6] Biographical sketches of Miller verify his prominence and effectiveness as a pioneer and community leader in Utah and describe other facets of his life, such as his successful farming and business operations[7] and his large and able family.[8] The Church newspaper editorialized on these qualities at his death:

> He was an active and capable man, with a strong individuality, and both as Bishop and Selectman, was an able public servant, whose services and experience were of great value to the community.[9]

No doubt his contributions to Utah merit further study, but it is the story of Reuben Miller's religious convictions and conflicts in the pre-Utah period that shows why he would be an

[5]Andrew Jensen, *Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1941), p. 504.

[6]*Deseret Evening News,* July 26, 1882.

[7]See Frank Esshom, *Pioneers and Prominent Men of Utah* (Salt Lake City, 1913), Part 2, p. 1040: "He was known to be a hard worker and a keen business man, and succeeded in accumulating considerable worldly goods."

[8]Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City, 1920), Vol. 3, pp. 166-67, gives details of his wives and children. In 1918 total descendants were 360. The National Historical Record Company's *Biographical Record of Salt Lake City and Vicinity* (Chicago, 1902) publishes biographies of Miller and five sons who were active in business and community affairs.

[9]*Deseret Evening News,* July 26, 1882. One instance is Miller's service as a delegate to the convention for forming a state constitution, January 20, 1862. Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah* (Salt Lake City, 1893), Vol. 2, p. 39.

accurate reporter of Cowdery's recollections of the supernatural events of the founding of Mormonism.

MILLER'S CONVERSION

As a young man Miller migrated from his Pennsylvania birthplace to Illinois, where he became first a millwright, then a substantial farmer in Ottawa, La Salle County. There, as an undoubtedly respected member of the community,[10] he became a Mormon convert (1843) while in his early forties. That he was early given important Church positions demonstrated his ability and reliability. The year following his baptism, he was selected as bishop in the formal organization of the Latter-day Saints in his area.[11] A machine duplication exists of a Miller letter dated July 29, 1845, which describes what must be typical activities of the period of this early bishopric. He reports to William Clayton that he is about to leave La Salle County for Chicago to facilitate transportation of several wagon loads of goods (particularly glass) to Nauvoo, and that he will use three yoke of oxen taken in tithing. Miller's own summary of his early performance in the Church was made in 1846 and lists a call to settle at Nauvoo, an assignment as collection agent for tithing and building funds, and appointment as "the leader of a company to go West in the coming Spring."[12] The pursuance of this calling was the beginning of an episode in Reuben Miller's life that is but faintly disclosed in published sketches and yet is the key to his intense interest in Oliver Cowdery's words at the time of his return.

BELIEF IN STRANG'S REVELATIONS

James J. Strang maintained that Joseph Smith wrote a letter appointing him as successor, that this appointment was effected

[10]In his pamphlet exposing Strang (*James J. Strang, Weighed in the Balance of Truth, and Found Wanting* [Burlington, Wisconsin, 1846], p. 5), Miller challenged anyone doubting his integrity to "write to Ottawa, LaSalle Co., Illinois." Later called on a mission to this area, he wrote (Ottawa, LaSalle Co., Ill., January 24, 1870) that he was personally well treated; in spite of basic prejudice against his message, many came to hear him preach "for respect to an old neighbor." (*Deseret Evening News,* February 8, 1870.)

[11]The date, October 23, 1844, and basic facts agree in Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City, 1932), Vol. 7, pp. 311-12, and in Miller's resumé (cited in the previous footnote), p. 1.

[12]*Ibid.,* See Journal History, September 24, 1845, where Reuben Miller is listed with several dozen local leaders to effect the exodus to Nauvoo.

through the visit of an angel, and that the location of ancient plates was also revealed. By the Urim and Thummim he translated their message: the "forerunner" (Joseph Smith) would be slain, but the translator of the records (James J. Strang) would be a "mighty Prophet." The documents embodying these revelations were printed, along with the testimony of witnesses to Strang's plates, in the initial number of the *Voree Herald* in January, 1846, immediately before Reuben Miller's first contact with Strang. Both men were in northern Illinois, Miller attempting to effect the gathering west and Strang attempting to prevent it. The most detailed account of their confrontation is found in the Strangite *Chronicles of Voree,* the manuscript history of this movement. Miller is introduced in that record as "a man of distinguished worth and sterling integrity."[13] The narrative relates that William Marks was instrumental in introducing Miller to Strang's disciples, who arranged that he should hear Strang present his claims, with the privilege of refutation allowed. On January 12, 1846, this meeting took place before an audience of about sixty. Strang spoke four hours "in his rapid manner," and Reuben Miller was impressed:

> High Priest Reuben Miller said that the main points and principles which had been set out were well sustained by the authorities referred to in the Book of Doctrines and Covenants, that he was not able to contend against the force of them. Strang had all the authorities on his side. And as nothing but truth would do them any good he consented then to learn the truth by all their testimonies which God had given and should give them and to receive the truth, whatsoever it might be.[14]

Miller queried Strang closely on the details of his appointment by divine manifestations. Sincere if somewhat naive, he determined to "go to Nauvoo and see what discoveries I could make in regard to Joseph's writing such an appointment and the claims of the Twelve to the Presidency of the Church."[15] Admittedly "mired in Strangism,"[16] he approached Brigham Young on January 30, 1846. The leader of the Twelve grasped

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[13]Chronicles of Voree, microfilm negative at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, p. 52.

[14]*Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

[15]Miller, *James J. Strang*, p. 1.

[16]*Ibid.*

the central issue, Miller's search for direct revelation to establish divine authority:

> Yesterday I had some conversation with Reuben Miller of Ottowa, he being considerably bewildered by Strang's new fangled revelation—rendered him almost devoid of reason although apparently honest in what he was doing, and said the word of the Lord would be decidedly satisfactory to him—whereupon I said, Thus saith the Lord unto Reuben Miller through Brigham Young—that Strang is a wicked and corrupt man and that his revelations are as false as he is—therefore turn away from his folly—and never let it be said of Reuben Miller that he was ever led away and entangled by such nonsense. Thus saying, I left him, my time being too precious to be spent in hearing and even talking about such trash.[17]

Still believing in the reality of Strang's vision of appointment, Miller publicly lectured some six weeks longer in Nauvoo for the new cause; thereafter, he left for Strangite organizational conferences in Wisconsin.[18]

Miller's thinking at the point of Strangite conversion is revealed not only in the Strang records and the Journal History of Brigham Young, but in his own accounts of the experience. His recollections minutely agree with these two contemporary records in stressing "a divine appointment through Joseph"[19] as the foundation upon which acceptance of Strang was built. Miller alludes more than once to the initial number of the *Voree Herald,* which he examined "carefully."[20] Since this issue contained the basic documents alleging Strang's divine commission, Miller's emphasis upon it shows that he regarded the visitation of heavenly messengers as conclusively establishing authority to represent God:

> The Voree Herald was placed in my hands; I read it with care, and at that time not having a very great knowledge of the Law of the Church or the Book of Doctrine and Covenants—I considered his appointment and his arguments reasonable.[21]

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[17]History of Brigham Young, Vol. 662 C at LDS Church Historian's Office, entry of Jan. 30, 1846, cited by S. Dilworth Young, "An Experiment in Feeling," Brigham Young University, *Speeches of the Year,* Jan. 17, 1967, p. 11.

[18]Miller's activity in Nauvoo and complete commitment to Strang at this period are recorded both in his *James J. Strang* (p. 2) and also a letter written to Strang from Nauvoo, Feb. 15, 1845. (Yale Strang Collection, Ms. 14.)

[19]Reuben Miller, *Truth Shall Prevail* (Burlington, Wisconsin, 1847), p. 6.

[20]*Ibid.,* p. 4.

[21]Miller, *James J. Strang,* p. 1.

It is evident that Reuben Miller thought that these documents would impress other Latter-day Saints, for he shortly brought out 3,000 copies of a tract entitled *A Defence of the Claims of James J. Strang to the Authority Now Usurped by the Twelve; and Shewing Him to be the True Successor of Joseph Smith, as First President of the High Priesthood.*[22] The pamphlet is characteristic of Miller's frame of reference. He regards divine manifestations as the source of authority and uses the approach of merely reprinting the "historical" basis of Strang's authority, with a minimum of comment.[23]

DISBELIEF IN STRANG'S REVELATIONS

Miller was soon disenchanted with Strang and came to doubt the integrity of his divine commission. The pamphlet defending Strang was in the press in February, 1846, about a month after his conversion. His commitment then was serious enough not only to publish this pamphlet, but to be agent in notifying the Twelve of their impending excommunication by Strang, and to participate in the event as high councilman in the Strangite April Conference, when he was sustained as "President of the Stake at Voree."[24] In repeated organizational meetings, Miller frequently served as a clerk in recording minutes of speeches and transactions.[25] But this close and official contact with Strang only hastened disillusionment. In a later pamphlet Miller explained that in the beginning Strang took the clear position that the appointing angel merely appeared and announced his authority, and did not perform any ordaining ceremony through laying on of hands. Miller thus expected the proper ordination to follow in Strang's organizational conferences, since he knew that Strang was merely an elder and

[22]Proof of Miller's authorship and the fact that the pamphlet basically reproduces the initial number of the *Voree Herald* are discussed by Dale Morgan, "A Bibliography of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [Strangite]," *Western Humanities Review,* Vol. 5 (Winter 1950-51), pp. 51-52.

[23]Only four pages out of sixteen are original, and even these are highly documentary. Two pages treat "The Doctrine of Primitive Mormonism" and another two pages contain "Irresistable Conclusions," all of which is really an argument for Strang based on the laws of succession from the Doctrine and Covenants.

[24] References to these and other less important events in Miller's Strangite period in the Chronicles of Voree attest to his prominence: pp. 24, 63-64, 67-68, 76, 85. By p. 99 Miller is conspicuous by his absence at the September 1, 1846, conference.

[25]*Ibid.,* pp. 67, 76, 85.

held no keys of priesthood leadership. When no such ordination materialized, Miller temporarily held his peace until he heard that Strang now claimed that an elaborate ordination ceremony had accompanied the initial angelic visitation. Miller bluntly accuses Strang of manufacturing a new story "that was entirely contradictory to his former remarks (on this subject) to myself and others." In the same pamphlet Miller reveals his own thinking upon being confronted with the second, contradictory version of Strang's visitation:

> I came to the conclusion, irresistibly, that I had embraced an error, a delusion, and one that would be handed down on the pages of history, as a monument of his folly and of the corruption and wickedness of the human heart; and that it was a duty which I owed to God and to his people, to resign my station as President over the Stake, and my place on the High Council, and give my reasons for the same to the brethren. This I done on the 27th of June last, at the meeting ground in Voree.[26]

The Strang collection at Yale contains detailed notes of a Miller speech dated July 25, 1846, the essence of which is his insistence that Strang's authority and revelations do not measure up to the patterns of Joseph Smith's priesthood and the testimony of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon.[27]

Miller now resolutely retraced his steps. The trustees at Nauvoo communicated with Brigham Young on October 20 that Reuben Miller had been baptized the previous day.[28] In response to a later summons by Strang to defend his membership, Miller issued a terse ultimatum of his own. Insisting that he had told nothing but the truth about Strang, he requested "the favor to cut me off immediately." In his blunt critique of Strang, Miller sees a single issue:

> You hold no authority to remove me from the Church of

[26]Miller, *James J. Strang*, pp. 3-4.

[27]Yale Strang Collection, Ms. 48 (cp. Ms. 47). It is likely that either the Miller or Strang manuscript date is wrong and that the two speeches are the same, since the content Miller describes corresponds exactly to the main outline of the speech of the Strang manuscript. For further evidence of Miller's outspoken opposition see also Ms. 165 and Ms. 235, both letters from John C. Bennett from Burlington, Wisconsin, on August 18 and August 20, recognizing the impact of "the whole Miller conspiracy."

[28]Journal History, November 4, 1846; see also *ibid.*, November 11, 1846, p. 3, which quotes a letter of John M. Bernhisel of November 4, 1846: "Reuben Miller has recently been here, was baptized and ordained again, and then returned to Voree to enlighten his benighted and deluded brethren."

> Christ or to give or take the priesthood of the Son of God. So go ahead.[29]

MISSIONARY TO THE STRANGITES

Not content with verbal and local disassociation with Strang, Miller took unhesitating steps to set the printed record straight. Because of "a duty which I conscientiously believed I owed to God and to his church" he published in September 1846 the pamphlet, *James J. Strang, Weighed in the Balance of Truth, and Found Wanting. His Claims as First President of the Melchisedek Priesthood Refuted.* He challenged Strang's "appointment" as fraudulent and his witnesses of plates inadequate in comparison to those of the Book of Mormon.[30] He perceived Strang as the inventor of false experiences: his ordination by "an unknown messenger" is a defective "picture to hand down upon a church record to future generations."[31] Later Miller was outraged by John C. Bennett's version of Strang's appointment, and before February, 1847, he published his second attack upon Strang's legitimacy: *Truth Shall Prevail: a Short Reply to an Article Published in the Voree Herald (Reveille), by J. C. Bennett; and the Willful Falsehoods of J. J. Strang, Published in the First Number of Zion's Reveille.*[32] Again, Miller was preoccupied with documentation. Affidavits of prominent Strangites were given to show that Miller was correct in maintaining that Strang had switched stories on his ordination. The printed revelations of Joseph Smith were cited to prove that the laying on of hands characterized the restoration of both the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods. As for Strangite impeachments of Miller, he retorted:

> They cannot injure me with their lies and hellish spirit of revenge. *I hold the documents in my hands.*[33]

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[29]Yale Strang Collection, Ms. 46, Letter from Reuben Miller to James Strang, Burlington, Wisconsin, Dec. 23, 1846.

[30]Miller, *James J. Strang,* pp. 10, 16.

[31]*Ibid.,* p. 14.

[32]The date of the pamphlet is known from Bennett's rebuttal, written February 1, 1847. Miller's letter of February 5, 1847 (on file in the LDS Church Historian's Office) alludes to the recent publication of "my second epistle." See Morgan, cited at n. 22, *supra,* p. 113. Although no copy was found by Morgan, BYU Special Collections Librarian Chad J. Flake recently located one complete and one defective copy in working on his forthcoming bibliography. These copies are in the LDS Church Historian's Office. Since the complete copy is signed by Brigham Young, it probably is the pamphlet sent him by Miller.

[33]Miller, *Truth Shall Prevail,* p. 11; italics are Miller's.

With their taste and talent for polemics, Strang and his associates lost no time in excoriating Miller. They answered his first pamphlet with the sneer, "Reuben 'is a great man of the kind,' but the *kind* is very peculiar, Brighamite, and terrestrial."[34] Bennett's answer to the second pamphlet was a general denial, prefaced by the significant admission, "I have heretofore regarded Mr. Miller as a man of unquestioned probity."[35] Even though Miller stirred up bitter charges of misrepresentation, it must be admitted that his character fared surprisingly well in Strangite circles. After most of the issues ceased to be current, Strang still referred to him as one of the "several men of talent and influence [that have] separated from me . . ."[36] This is an important point in assessing Miller's trustworthiness as a recorder of Cowdery's returning discourse. Miller proved his independence by dissenting openly both in Nauvoo and Voree; he also proved his reputability by earning the grudging respect of the leaders of both camps who differed from his position. An enlightening confirmation of the sincerity of such respect comes from the letters to Strang of "Louisa," in Dale Morgan's phrase "a superb woman." She first doubted Strang because her high opinion of Miller postulated "some very good and substantial reason" for his dissent, although her revulsion of polygamy kept her from following Miller in his loyalty to the Twelve. She said of Miller:

> I have known him for a long time, and his conduct has always been such as to give me a high opinion of his integrity and uprightness. I cannot believe that he would intentionally do wrong or suffer himself to be influenced by any improper motives.[37]

[34]*Voree Herald,* October, 1846.
[35]*Zion's Reveille,* February 4, 1847.
[36]*Ibid.,* August 12, 1847.
[37]Letter of "Louisa" to James Strang, from Ottawa, July 15. The fact of Miller's disillusionment with Strang makes an 1846 date virtually certain. The letter is Ms. 37 of the Yale Strang Collection. Morgan's opinion of the quality of this woman is given in his typewritten notes to Ms. 37. See also his commentary to Ms. 159, where he justly calls the author "wise and witty" and identifies her signature on that letter as "Louisa S." This is a correction of Milo M. Quaife's incorrect reading in his biography of Strang. The Morgan reading is confirmed by several similar "S" capitalizations in the letter. Morgan suspected that "Louisa S." of Ottawa was Louisa Sanger. This is now clear from the fact that two letters of James Strang to Louisa Sanger are preserved in the LDS Historian's Office (Dec. 5, 1844, and March 10, 1845) that fit minutely into the dialogue between Strang and this correspondent. From the Partiarchal Blessing file her birthdate can be determined, March 20, 1812. She was 34 years of age when she gave the quoted opinion of Miller. The 1850

Reuben Miller's lot was now cast with the people whom he regarded as holding true authority: "I have truly and sincerely repented of my course and conduct, and have traveled 270 miles and was baptized for the remission of sins, and had my priesthood confirmed."[38] His source of authority and direction was the Twelve, with whom there seems to have been considerable mutual respect. Even during his days as the emissary of Strang in Nauvoo, he reports a cordial relationship:

> [I]n justice to the Twelve I must say, while investigating their claims to the Presidency of the Church, and that of Mr. Strang; they treated me kindly, and affectionately, and as brothers; reasoned with me, and remembered me in their prayer meetings, and done all that was required at their hands as servants of God in my case, to save me from what they said they knew to be a delusion of the blackest die. But I could not see the force and power of their argument, for I was completely mired in the spirit of apostacy, and when they shook hands with me the last time I saw them, they blessed me in the name of the Lord, and said I would return to the bosom of the Church again.[39]

His correspondence in the LDS Church Historian's Office reveals a deep though not abject desire to be reinstated to his former status of trust with the leaders of the Church. On November 17, 1846, he wrote from Nauvoo to Elders Young and Kimball, "I have examined myself and believe I acted in honest sincerity." He further stated, "I come before you in all confidence, believing as I do that God has forgiven me," and called the attention of "Bro. Brigham" to their last conversation, when "you told me I would see my error before six months and would again return to the bosom of the Church." He sought approval for his missionary activities among the Strangites, whom he now sought to reclaim.

Miller's private correspondence from Wisconsin shortly before rejoining the migrating Saints consistently emphasizes the double theme of honoring his priesthood authority, all the more important now after the risk of losing it, and of reaching anyone in his former status of a deceived believer. His letter to Brigham Young on April 21, 1847, insists:

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census indicates that she was then unmarried. LaSalle County histories speak of the family as respected and indicate that Louisa had died by 1877. Elmer Baldwin, *History of La Salle County* (Chicago, 1877).

[38]Miller, *Truth Shall Prevail,* p. 6.

[39]Miller, *James J. Strang,* p. 2.

> Brother Young, my object is to do good and be useful in the day and generation in which I live, magnify my priesthood, and assist to build up the kingdom of God, and truly as far as in me lies be a servant of the Lord. Therefore I consider it right to use all honorable means to redeem the Saints from the spiritual darkness in which the devil has thrown them and bring them back to the true fold and the principles of immortal glory.

A similar letter to Brigham Young on February 5, 1847, reiterates Miller's strongest theme, underlined by himself: "And by the grace of God that priesthood *shall be magnified.*" This means to Miller an intensified campaign of disseminating his writings among the Strangites. This letter asks for some official reaction to his first pamphlet and states that in the absence of direction, "I consider it for the welfare of the cause of God to publish my second epistle," which was enclosed with this letter. He admits that his publications might be seen as too contentious, but insists that the best way to reach those deceived is by printing the truth.

On Reuben Miller's side, his writings seem to have been a substantial influence in disillusioning Strang's followers. The letter just quoted states that the initial pamphlet against Strang produced "a great revolution . . . among the honest Saints." "Whole branches" were affected, and requests were received "almost daily" for the publication. That Miller's publications had such an effect is revealed in Strangite correspondence. For instance, Lester Brooks wrote from Ohio to the Wisconsin headquarters on January 12, 1847, that on his recent stopover in New York he found the branch in a "most stupid condition. They have a pamphlet written by Reuben Miller against Brother Strang. They are inclined to think there is something quite wrong."[40] Another Strang adherent wrote him by way of deploring dissent from him, reviewing as a major crisis the fact that "that paper Miller put out was circulated with triumph. . . ."[41]

MILLER'S CONTACT WITH COWDERY

Miller's own motivation was the sole reason for his publications, since he received no encouragement from the leaders

[40]This letter is quoted in full by Milo M. Quaife, *The Kingdom of Saint James* (New Haven, 1930), pp. 243-45. (Periods and capitals of obvious sentences are mine.) Yale Strang Collection, Ms. 54.

[41]Letter of John Macauley to James Strang, from Galena, Illinois, June 29, 1849. Yale Strang Collection, Ms. 422.

of the Church. At the time of his reconversion they had written him,[42] but in the next six months no other letter was received.[43] On April 21, 1847, as just discussed, Miller appealed for direction once more, describing his past publishing activities. In addition, he reported rumors of a planned Strangite mission to England and indicated that he was countering it by preparing a documentary communication for the British Mission "in which is embodied some of the visions and revelations of Mr. Strang," together with "the full history" of their newly established secret ceremonies. While former information from Miller seems to have been received without complete enthusiasm,[44] this last letter provoked the bluntest direction from the Church leaders. It was not delivered until some five months later on the Platte River, and was answered by Willard Richards "as an individual" after the Council had declined to answer Miller formally. Richards' answer of September 17, 1847, assumes that Strang's claims are patently ridiculous and thus takes a dim view of Miller's writings as useless controversy. Richards further alludes to "the many calls of the council for you to come home" and chides Miller for "wasting so much time with your pen" instead of acting on their advice. One who reads this letter will realize that Miller was given a stinging rebuke, despite, in Richards' words, the "spirit of kindness that has dictated it."[45]

Some ten miles from Reuben Miller's residence near Burlington, Wisconsin, was Elkhorn, Wisconsin, to which Oliver Cowdery had moved shortly before Miller was told in no un-

[42]Journal History, November 14, 1846, notes that Brigham Young heard a letter that "he had written in behalf of the Council to Reuben Miller, giving him advice in relation of his future movements."

[43]Two of the letters quoted above, on file in the LDS Church Historian's Office and written from Burlington, Wisconsin, to Brigham Young, establish Miller's lack of contact with the Twelve. The letter of February 5, 1847, reads: "Bro. Haywood has been here a few days since and informs me that you have written to me, but I have never received anything from any of the brethren in the camp. And I feel bad enough. Nevertheless I must do the best I can and act according to the best light and knowledge that God may bless me with." The letter of April 21, 1847, begins: "I have written to you from time to time, but as yet have received nothing from you. But I am not discouraged. Believing that you have not given me over as one unworthy of your notice, I expect something soon."

[44] See the Journal History entries of November 16, 1846, and December 22, 1846, which seem to have connotations of skepticism concerning the value of Miller's work in Wisconsin.

[45]The letter is quoted in full in the Journal History, September 17, 1847, pp. 2-5. What is evidently the writer's copy is on file at the LDS Church Historian's Office.

certain terms of his duty to migrate west.[46] The two men were now in remarkably similar circumstances, for the reconciliation of Oliver Cowdery had been effected through the means of Phineas Young (Brigham's brother and Cowdery's brother-in-law), and the invitation to be baptized and gather with the Saints was extended in a letter to Cowdery of November 22, 1847, sent from Winter Quarters by Elders Young and Richards for the Twelve.[47] Thus both Miller and Cowdery were in close proximity in the winter of 1847, and both were making plans to dispose of their properties and join the Saints migrating west. Cowdery's response (February 27, 1848) to Brigham Young expresses his hope to be present at April Conference at Winter Quarters.[48] Because of a combination of poverty, ill health, and personal projects, Cowdery did not fulfill this plan, and he explained to Phineas Young in a letter of April 16, 1848, that he still planned to migrate but was counting heavily on help from Reuben Miller:

> Brother Miller has manifested the right spirit on the subject of my going West, nor does he know but I am now on my way, or there, ere this, and he said that he will furnish me with a team, if I went in the fall, and go up when he does, as he intends to go if he succeeds in making a sale. He will do that at any rate, if I wish it, and as much more as you shall say is the wish or advice of Brother Brigham.[49]

The financial condition of the two men on the eve of

[46]Cowdery's name first appears as attorney of record in Elkhorn, Wisconsin, in a case filed May 20, 1847; however, the firm of Cowdery and Wilson tried numerous cases throughout July of the same year in Tiffin, Ohio. This data published by Stanley R. Gunn (*Oliver Cowdery,* Salt Lake City, 1962, pp. 186-190) can be supplemented by further facts. Cowdery wrote one letter from Madison, Wisconsin, on May 18, 1847 (*Seneca Advertiser,* June 18, 1847); his next published letter was written from Elkhorn, Wisconsin, on August 15, 1847 (*Seneca Advertiser,* Sept. 3, 1847) and indicates receipt of "some four numbers" of the weekly *Advertiser* in Wisconsin prior to that time. This implies that his residence was in Elkhorn, Wisconsin by mid-July of 1847.

[47]Cited by Gunn, *Oliver Cowdery,* pp. 191-192.

[48]Cited in full *ibid.,* pp. 268-269. Journal History, February 27, 1848, copies the letter in full, and the original is on file in the LDS Church Historian's Office.

[49]This letter, not in the Journal History, was copied from the original by Stanley R. Gunn and is printed in full by him, *Oliver Cowdery,* pp. 255-257. In addition to the paragraph quoted, the urgency of Cowdery's financial reliance on Miller is underscored by the request that Phineas Young "say a word to Brother Miller, in your next letter to me, as I know he stands ready to render me any aid I want, on your suggestion." The postscript reiterates the point: "As I determine to come even if I do not dispose of my place, it is important that you enclose to me a word to Bro. Miller. This will enable me to go about it in good time, and not suffer a disappointment."

their return to the Church as portrayed in the foregoing letter of Cowdery is confirmed by the existing deeds on file in Walworth County, where both resided. Miller had sold farm land on June 10, 1848, for a recited consideration of $1,000, which probably did not constitute his total assets.[50] On the other hand, Cowdery held title only to his Elkhorn residential property, then subject to mortgage, and did not locate a buyer until long after the above letter. The sale was made, for a recited consideration of $300 on October 3, 1848, and there is reason to assume that debts encroached upon this small sum.[51]

Cowdery's deed of sale marks an approximate time of departure for his return to the Church at Council Bluffs, inasmuch as one of the witnesses on the deed is "Phineas H. Young," his brother-in-law, in Elkhorn to assist in his return to the Church. Reuben Miller had left with his family for Council Bluffs some three weeks earlier, noting in his journal the departure from the Burlington, Wisconsin, area on September 12, 1848. Miller travelled through La Salle County, Illinois, where he stopped with former acquaintances in this area of his initial career in the Church. At this point the most important entry of the journey appears under the date of September 18, 1848:

> Here we met Bro. Phineas H. Young and stopped with him the remainder of the day. I paid to him 50 dollars in money, and 31 dollars on Bro. Oliver Cowdery, making in all 81 dollars.[52]

From the Cowdery deed of sale in Elkhorn two weeks after this, it is clear that Phineas Young was on his way then to get Cowdery and his small family.[53] The Miller journal entry fits precisely the earlier Cowdery letter representing Miller's willingness to contribute money to Cowdery's return.

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[50]Deed of Reuben Miller to Edward E. Prindle and Others, June 9, 1848, recorded at Walworth County Courthouse, Elkhorn, Wisconsin, under date of June 16, 1848.

[51]Deed of Oliver Cowdery to Jonathan Delap, October 2, 1848, recorded at Walworth County Courthouse, Elkhorn, Wisconsin, January 8, 1848.

[52]Reuben Miller Diary, LDS Church Historian's Office.

[53]In Strang's community of Voree, but a few miles from Cowdery's residence at Elkhorn, the presence of Phineas Young in the area was noted: "Even Phineas Young is here, telling that brother Cowdery is going with him to Council Bluffs." (*Gospel Herald,* October 5, 1848.) Young must have arrived some days before such a published notice.

Because of his earlier departure Reuben Miller arrived in Kanesville, according to his journal, in the late afternoon of Sunday, October 15, 1848. Cowdery arrived just six days later, proceeding immediately to the session of conference that he addressed. Just before Cowdery's arrival, Miller had himself addressed the conference, making public acknowledgment of his mistake in believing Strang's revelations.[54] It is obvious that he was necessarily interested in the parallel situation of Cowdery's return, especially in the reiteration of Cowdery's solemn witness to the reality of the revelations that stood as the foundation of Mormonism. The proof of this is a private letter from Reuben Miller to his friends in La Salle County, Illinois, after his own return to the Church in Kanesville. No letter of the Apostle Paul to his converts is more ecstatic. Miller insists that his faith has found nothing but confirmation:

> Yes, true it is the church has been nourished and fed according to the word of God. And the kingdom of our God has moved steadily on amidst all the opposition of the apostates and wicked and corrupt men. I can say to you and to all my friends and brethren that I have come *home*. And never felt more at *home* in all my life. It really appears as though the trees, Bluffs, and every thing around us are praising King Immanuel. While the *holy priesthood* is swaying a scepter in *righteousness* that will sooner or later arouse the nations of the earth from their *midnight slumber of ages*. Yes, there is a *spirit* and *power* with this people that no mortal arm can withstand, or any nation or kingdom overthrow.[55]

Reuben Miller had once detected inconsistent testimony from James J. Strang and fallen into deepest disillusionment. The profound conviction of the Kanesville letter of November 16, 1848, rests in no small part upon the consistent reaffirmations of the "Second Elder" on his return, for the postscript of this letter of elation reads:

> Brother Oliver Cowdery is here and has been baptized by Elder Hyde on last Sunday, is again restored, and bears a strong and positive testimony. This people are *united*, and are a *good, great,* and *mighty* people.

[54]Letter of George A. Smith to Orson Pratt from Council Bluffs, October 20, 1848, *Millennial Star,* January 1, 1849.

[55]Letter of Reuben Miller to Brother Sabey [Henry Sabba Erekson] from Council Bluffs, November 16, 1848, a photocopy of which was furnished by Vaughn Erekson of Salt Lake City, Utah. The original is held by his aunt, Miss Mary Fern Erekson. All underlining is Miller's in the original letter.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, an informed reader of the Reuben Miller account of Cowdery's speech on his return to the Church will recognize the following insights into Miller's personality, interests, and abilities:

1. No religious vagabond bent on exploiting Mormon factions, Miller changed his affiliation once and was recognized by associates in both groups then and throughout later life as a man of independence and honesty.
2. Because of his conversion to and deconversion from Strang's claims of visions, he was intensely interested in the validating evidence of the revelations of Joseph Smith.
3. His specific religious interest, revealed in his pamphlets, is in the question of priesthood authority through the physical presence and ordination of resurrected beings. His general interest is in the integrity of supernatural experience, including the reality of the plates of the Book of Mormon.
4. In his own words, he was concerned with "a church record" for "future generations" and was highly sensitive to what "would be handed down on the pages of history." His experience of being deceived by contradictory documents led him to this position.
5. His experience in writing (including the publication of three pamphlets) and minute-taking demonstrates some skill in recording the essentials of public speeches.
6. He contributed financially to Oliver Cowdery's return and was vitally interested in him because of proximity and similar circumstances in returning to the Church.
7. Because of a Miller letter written four weeks after Cowdery's return and while Cowdery was still at Kanesville, there is clear evidence independent of the journal that Miller was at the time deeply impressed with the "strong and positive testimony" of the returning Second Elder.

No one in 1848 had more access to the facts of the modern dispensation than Oliver Cowdery. And no one in his audience that October had better motivation and capacity to record Cowdery's reaffirmations than Reuben Miller.