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The Three Witnesses

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Abstract: A documentary recounting the lives of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. Attention is given to the Church careers of the men, with special emphasis on their experiences and testimonies relative to the Book of Mormon.

"In 1883 I visited Colorado in company with Pres. W. Woodruff, B. Young and John Morgan, and took part in the organization of the Conejos Stake of Zion in June of that year.

"In August and September, 1884, in company with Elders Erastus Snow and John Morgan, I visited Emery Stake, Conejos Stake, the Eastern Arizona Stake, and the settlements

in the Little Colorado and San Juan Stakes, holding meetings and conferences in all the principal settlements. Since then I have been in exile, and have traveled in northern Utah, in Idaho, Oregon, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, New Mexico, Arizona, south-eastern Utah, Mexico and California, as duty and my safety from the hands of malicious persecutors demanded."

THE THREE WITNESSES.

While Joseph Smith, the Prophet, with Oliver Cowdery as scribe, were engaged in translating the Book of Mormon, in Fayette, Seneca Co., N. Y., in the year 1829, they ascertained that the plates, from which they were translating, should be shown by the power of God to three special witnesses, who should bear record of the divinity of the book, etc. (See Book of Mormon, Ether 5th Chap.)

Almost immediately after making this discovery, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris asked the Prophet Joseph to "inquire of the Lord to know if they might not obtain of him to be these three special witnesses." At length Joseph complied with their wishes, and through the Urim and Thummim received for them a revelation, granting them the privilege conditional upon their faith. (Doc. & Cov., Sec. 17.)

"Not many days after the above commandment was given," writes Joseph Smith, "we four, viz. Martin Harris, David Whitmer, Oliver Cowdery and myself, agreed to retire into the woods, and try to obtain by fervent and humble prayer, the fulfillment of the promises given in the revelation, that they should have a view of the plates, etc.

"We accordingly made choice of a piece of woods convenient to Mr. Whitmer's house, to which we retired, and having knelt down, we began to pray in much faith to Almighty God to bestow upon us a realization of these promises. According to previous arrangements I commenced by vocal prayer to our heavenly Father, and was followed by each of the rest in succession. We did not, however, obtain any answer or manifestation of the divine favor in our behalf. We again observed the same order of prayer, each calling on and praying fervently to God in rotation, but with the same result as before. Upon this our second failure, Martin Harris proposed that he should withdraw himself from us, believing, as he expressed himself, that his presence was the cause of our not obtaining what we wished for; he accordingly withdrew from us, and we knelt down again, and had not been many minutes engaged in prayer, when presently we beheld a light above us in the air, of exceeding brightness; and behold, an angel stood before us; in his hand he held the plates which we had been praying for these to have a view of; he turned over the leaves one by one, so that we could see them, and discover the engravings thereon distinctly. He then addressed himself to David Whitmer, and said, 'David, blessed is the Lord, and he that keeps His command-

ments.' When, immediately afterwards, we heard a voice from out of the bright light above us, saying, 'These plates have been revealed by the power of God, and they have been translated by the power of God. The translation of them which you have seen is correct, and I command you to bear record of what you now see and hear.'

"I now left David and Oliver, and went in pursuit of Martin Harris, whom I found at a considerable distance fervently engaged in prayer. He soon told me, however, that he had not yet prevailed with the Lord, and earnestly requested me to join him in prayer, that he also might realize the same blessings which we had just received. We accordingly joined in prayer, and ultimately obtained our desires, for before we had yet finished, the same vision was opened to our view, at least it was again to me, and I once more beheld and heard the same things, whilst, at the same moment, Martin Harris cried out, apparently in ecstasy of joy, 'Tis enough; mine eyes have beheld,' and jumping up he shouted 'Hosannah,' blessing God, and otherwise rejoiced exceedingly.

"Having thus, through the mercy of God, obtained these manifestations, it now remained for these three individuals to fulfill the commandment which they had received, viz., to bear record of these things, in order to accomplish which, they drew up and described the following document:—

"The Testimony of Three Witnesses.

"Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people unto whom this work shall come, that we, through the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, have seen the plates which contain this record—which is the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites, their brethren, and also of the people of Jared, who came from the tower of which hath been spoken; and we also know that they have been translated by the gift and power of God, for His voice hath declared it unto us; wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true. And we also testify that we have seen the engravings which are upon

the plates, and they have been shown unto us by the power of God, and not of man; and we declare with words of soberness, that an angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates and the engravings thereon; and we know that it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that we beheld and bear record that these things are true; and it is marvelous in our eyes; nevertheless, the voice of the Lord commanded us that we should bear record of it; wherefore, to be obedient unto the commandments of God, we bear testimony of these things. And we know that if we are faithful in Christ, we shall rid our garments of the blood of all men, and be found spotless before the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall dwell with him eternally in the heavens. And the honor be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen.

OLIVER COWDERY,
DAVID WHITMER,
MARTIN HARRIS.'"

OLIVER COWDERY,

Was born in the town of Wells, Rutland Co., Vermont, in October, 1805. He was principally raised in the town of Poultney, Rutland Co., whence his father removed when Oliver was only three years old. About the year 1825, Oliver removed to the State of New York, where his elder brothers were married and settled, and some two years later his father also moved to that State. Oliver was employed as clerk in a store until the winter of 1828–29, when he taught the district school in the town of Manchester, Ontario Co., N. Y., nine miles from his father's house. There he first became acquainted with the family of Joseph Smith, sen. (father of the Prophet), who was one of those who sent children to the school, and Oliver went to board awhile at his house. During that time the family related to him the circumstances of young Joseph having received the plates of the Book of Mormon. Oliver became deeply esteemed and deter-

mined to find out the particulars about this wonderful event. He also prayed to the Lord to enlighten his mind, and one night, after he had retired to rest, the Lord manifested to him, that he had been told the truth in relation to the finding of the plates. He then concluded to pay Joseph Smith a visit, in order to learn more about it, which he did, and on April 5, 1829, he first met the Prophet at his temporary home in Harmony, Penn., whither he had removed because of the persecutions to which he had been subjected in the State of New York. This meeting of Joseph and Oliver was not only providential for the latter, but also for the Prophet himself, who had already been the custodian of the plates of the Book of Mormon for some time, but had been unable to proceed with the translation for the want of a scribe. In Oliver he saw the proper person to assist him in his work, and two days after his arrival, Joseph Smith "commenced to translate the Book of Mormon," with Oliver Cowdery as scribe. A few days later a revelation was given to Oliver Cowdery through Joseph Smith. (Doc. & Cov., Sec. 6.)

While engaged in the work of translating, Oliver became exceedingly anxious to have the power to translate bestowed upon him, and in relation to his desire two revelations were given to him through the Prophet (Doc. & Cov., Sec. 8 and 9.) On various other occasions he was favored with the words of the Almighty direct through the Prophet, with whom he for a number of years afterwards was so closely connected in his administrations in the Priesthood and official duties generally. (See Doc. & Cov., Sec. 7, 13, 17, 18, 23, 110, etc.)

On May 15, 1829, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery went into the woods to pray and inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins, which they found mentioned in the record. While engaged in prayer, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and laying his hands upon them, he ordained them, saying:

"Upon you my fellow-servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels and of the Gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness."

This heavenly messenger said that this Aaronic Priesthood had not the power of laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. He also told them that his name was John, the same that is called John the Baptist in the New Testament, and that he acted under the direction of Peter, James and John, who held the keys of the Priesthood of Melchisedek, which Priesthood he said would in due time be conferred on them, when Joseph should be the first and Oliver the second Elder in the Church.

The messenger also commanded them to go and be baptized and ordain each other, and directed that Joseph should first baptize Oliver, and then Oliver baptize Joseph. This they did, after which Joseph laid his hands on Oliver's head and ordained him to the Aaronic Priesthood. Oliver then laid his hands on Joseph and ordained him to the same Priesthood. The Prophet writes:

"Immediately on our coming up out of the water after we had been baptized, we experienced great and

glorious blessings from our heavenly Father. No sooner had I baptized Oliver Cowdery, than the Holy Ghost fell upon him, and he stood up and prophesied many things which should shortly come to pass. And again, as soon as I had been baptized by him, I also had the spirit of prophecy, when, standing up, I prophesied concerning the rise of the Church, and many other things connected with the Church and this generation of the children of men. We were filled with the Holy Ghost, and rejoiced in the God of our salvation."

Early in June Joseph Smith and wife and Oliver Cowdery removed to Fayette, Seneca Co., N. Y., where the translation of the Book of Mormon was continued and finished. John Whitmer, one of the sons of Peter Whitmer, sen., assisted considerably in the writing. It was some time during the month of June of this year (1829) that the plates were shown to the three witnesses; and not long afterwards Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were ordained to the Melchisedek Priesthood by Peter, James and John. A revelation directed principally to Oliver Cowdery was also given, making known the calling of Twelve Apostles in the last days. (Doc. & Cov., Sec. 18.)

When the Church was organized in Fayette, April 6, 1830, Oliver Cowdery was one of the original six members, and was on that occasion ordained by Joseph Smith to be the second Elder in the Church. April 11th, Oliver preached the first public discourse delivered by any Elder in this dispensation. The meeting in which this took place was held in Mr. Whitmer's house in Fayette.

In the following June, Oliver accompanied the Prophet to Colesville, Broome Co., where a large branch of

the Church subsequently was raised up, amidst considerable persecution.

In October, 1830, Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, Peter Whitmer, jun., and Ziba Peterson were called to go on a mission to the Lamanites in the wilderness. These missionaries took leave of their friends late in October of the same year, and started on foot. After traveling for some days, they stopped and preached to an Indian nation near Buffalo, N. Y., and subsequently raised up a large branch of the Church in Kirtland, Ohio. Among the converts at the latter place was the famous Sidney Rigdon, who afterwards became so prominent in the Church. In the beginning of 1831, after a very hard and toilsome journey in the dead of winter, the missionaries finally arrived in Independence, Jackson County, Missouri, about fifteen hundred miles from where they started. This was the first mission performed by the Elders of the Church in any of the States west of New York. Oliver Cowdery and P. P. Pratt commenced a prosperous mission among the Delaware Indians across the frontier line, but they were finally ordered out by the Indian Agents, accused of being disturbers of the peace. Being thus compelled to cease their work among the Lamanites for the time being, the Elders commenced preaching to the whites in Jackson County, with considerable success. In February Elder Pratt was sent back to the East, while Elder Cowdery and his other companion remained in Missouri until the arrival of the Prophet Joseph and many other Elders from the East, July following, when Jackson County was designated as a gathering place of the Saints and dedicated for that purpose.

When the Temple site was dedicated, Aug. 3, 1831, Elder Cowdery was one of the eight men present. He subsequently returned to Kirtland, Ohio, with the Prophet, where they arrived Aug. 27th. In the following November he and John Whitmer was sent back to Missouri with the revelations, which were to be printed there by W. W. Phelps.

On the Prophet's second visit to Missouri, in 1832, Oliver Cowdery was appointed one of a committee of three to review and prepare such revelations as were deemed proper for publication. He was also one of seven High Priests appointed to stand at the head of affairs relating to the Church in Missouri.

After the destruction of the printing press and the troubles in Jackson County, in July, 1833, Oliver Cowdery was sent as a special messenger from the Saints to Kirtland, Ohio, to confer with the First Presidency there. He arrived there in the latter part of August.

At a council held in Kirtland, Sept. 11, 1833, he was appointed to take charge of the printing office to be established at that place, and there he subsequently recommenced the publication of the *Evening and Morning Star*. When the press was dedicated, Dec. 18, 1833, the Prophet records the following concerning Elder Cowdery:

"Blessed of the Lord is Brother Oliver; nevertheless there are two evils in him that he must needs forsake, or he cannot altogether forsake the buffetings of the adversary. If he forsake these evils, he shall be forgiven, and shall be made like unto the bow which the Lord hath set in the heavens; he shall be a sign and an ensign unto the nations. Behold, he is blessed of the Lord

for his constancy and steadfastness in the work of the Lord; wherefore, he shall be blessed in his generation, and they shall never be cut off, and he shall be helped out of many troubles; and if he keeps the commandments, and hearkens unto the counsel of the Lord, his rest shall be glorious."

At the organization of the first High Council in the Church, at Kirtland, Feb. 17, 1834, Elder Cowdery was elected a member. He acted as clerk of the Council for a number of years, and subsequently acted as President of the Council. When the Prophet, with Zion's Camp, started for Missouri in May following, Oliver, together with Sidney Rigdon, was left in charge of the Church in Kirtland.

On the evening of Nov. 29, 1834, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery united in solemn prayer and made a covenant with the Lord, that if He would prosper them in certain things, they would give a "tenth to be bestowed upon the poor of his Church, or as he shall command." This was the first introduction of the paying of tithing among the Latter-day Saints.

In Feb., 1835, the Three Witnesses, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer and Martin Harris, chose twelve men from the Elders of the Church, to officiate as the Twelve Apostles. In blessing them and giving them instructions Oliver Cowdery took a prominent part. He was also one of the trustees of the school in Kirtland, where he studied Hebrew and other languages, in connection with the Prophet and other Elders. Sept. 14, 1835, he was appointed to act as Church Recorder.

He was present at the dedication of the Temple in Kirtland, and took

a very active part in giving the assembled Elders their washings and anointings; and on April 3, 1836, he, in connection with the Prophet Joseph, saw and heard the Savior, as also Moses, Elias and Elijah the Prophet, who committed unto them the keys necessary for the furtherance of the work of the great latter-day dispensation. (Doc. & Cov., Sec. 110.)

Sept. 3, 1837, at a conference held in Kirtland, Elder Cowdery was appointed assistant Counselor to the First Presidency. Some time during that year he removed to Far West, Caldwell Co., Mo., where he acted as clerk of the High Council and Church Recorder. He was also a member of a committee appointed to select locations for the gathering of the Saints.

On Wednesday April 11, 1838, Elder Seymour Brunson preferred the following charges against Oliver Cowdery before the High Council of Far West:

"1st. For persecuting the brethren by urging on vexatious lawsuits against them, and thus distressing the innocent. 2nd. For seeking to destroy the character of President Joseph Smith, jun., by falsely insinuating that he was guilty of adultery, etc. 3rd. For treating the Church with contempt by not attending meeting. 4th. For virtually denying the faith by declaring that he would not be governed by any ecclesiastical authority or revelations whatever, in his temporal affairs. 5th. For selling his lands in Jackson County, contrary to the revelations. 6th. For writing and sending an insulting letter to President Thomas B. Marsh, while on the High Council, attending to the duties of his office as President of the Council, and by insulting the High Council with the contents of said letter. 7th. For leaving his

calling, in which God had appointed him by revelation, for the sake of filthy lucre, and turning to the practice of law. 8th. For disgracing the Church by being connected in the bogus business, as common report says. 9th. For dishonestly retaining notes, after they have been paid; and, finally, for leaving or forsaking the cause of God, and returning to the beggarly elements of the world, and neglecting his high and holy calling, according to his profession."

The following day (April 12th) the Bishop of Far West and High Council examined his case. "The 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 7th, 8th and 9th charges were sustained. The 4th and 5th charges were rejected, and the 6th was withdrawn. Consequently he (Oliver Cowdery) was considered no longer a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

After his excommunication, Oliver Cowdery engaged in law business and practiced for some years as a lawyer in Michigan, but he never denied the truth of the Book of Mormon. On the contrary, he seems to have used every opportunity he had to bear testimony of its divine origin. While practicing law in Michigan, a gentleman, on a certain occasion, addressed him as follows, "Mr. Cowdery, I see your name attached to this book. If you believe it to be true, why are you in Michigan?" The gentleman then read the names of the Three Witnesses and asked, "Mr. Cowdery, do you believe this book!" "No, sir," was the reply. "Very well," continued the gentleman, "but your name is attached to it, and you declare here (pointing to the book) that you saw an angel, and also the plates, from which the book purports to be translated; and now you say you don't believe it. Which time did you tell the truth?"

Oliver Cowdery replied with emphasis, "My name is attached to that book, and what I there have said is true. I did see this; I know I saw it, and faith has nothing to do with it, as a perfect knowledge has swallowed up the faith which I had in the work, knowing, as I do, that it is true."

At a special conference held at Kanessville, Iowa, Oct. 21, 1848, and presided over by Apostle Orson Hyde, Oliver Cowdery was present and made the following remarks:

"Friends and Brethren,—My name is Cowdery, Oliver Cowdery. In the early history of this Church I stood indented with her, and one in her councils. True it is that the gifts and callings of God are without repentance; not because I was better than the rest of mankind was I called; but, to fulfill the purposes of God, He called me to a high and holy calling.

"I wrote, with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith, as he translated it by the gift and power of God, by the means of the Urim and Thummim, or, as it is called by that book, 'holy interpreters.' I beheld with my eyes, and handled with my hands, the gold plates from which it was transcribed. I also saw with my eyes and handled with my hands the 'holy interpreters.' That book is true. Sidney Rigdon did not write it; Mr. Spaulding did not write it; I wrote it myself as it fell from the lips of the Prophet. It contains the Everlasting Gospel, and came forth to the children of men in fulfillment of the revelations of John, where he says he saw an angel come with the Everlasting Gospel to preach to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. It contains principles of salvation; and if you, my hearers, will walk by its light and obey its precepts, you will be saved with an everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God on high. Brother Hyde has just said that it is very important that we keep and walk in the true channel, in order to avoid the sand-bars. This is true. The channel is here. The holy Priesthood is here.

"I was present with Joseph when an holy angel from God came down from heaven and conferred on us, or restored, the lesser or Aaronic Priesthood, and said to us, at

the same time, that it should remain upon the earth while the earth stands.

"I was also present with Joseph when the higher or Melchisedek Priesthood was conferred by holy angels from on high. This Priesthood we then conferred on each other, by the will and commandment of God. This Priesthood, as was then declared, is also to remain upon the earth until the last remnant of time. This holy Priesthood, or authority, we then conferred upon many, and is just as good and valid as though God had done it in person.

"I laid my hands upon that man—yes, I laid my right hand upon his head (pointing to Brother Hyde), and I conferred upon him this Priesthood, and he holds that Priesthood now. He was also called through me, by the prayer of faith, an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ."

In the early part of November following Elder Hyde called a High Council in the Log Tabernacle, to consider the case of Oliver Cowdery; having been cut off by the voice of a High Council, it was thought that, if he was restored, he should be restored by the voice of a similar body. Before this body Brother Cowdery said:

"Brethren, for a number of years I have been separated from you. I now desire to come back. I wish to come humbly and to be one in your midst. I seek no station. I only wish to be identified with you. I am out of the Church. I am not a member of the Church, but I wish to become a member of it. I wish to come in at the door. I know the door. I have not come here to seek precedence. I come humbly and throw myself upon the decisions of this body, knowing, as I do, that its decisions are right, and should be obeyed."

Brother George W. Harris, President of the Council, moved that Brother Cowdery be received. Considerable discussion took place in relation to a certain letter which, it was alleged, Brother Cowdery had written to David Whitmer. Brother Cowdery again rose and said:

"If there be any person that has aught against me, let him declare it. My coming back and humbly asking to become a mem

ber through the door, covers the whole ground. I acknowledge this authority."

Brother Hyde moved that Brother Oliver Cowdery be received into the Church by baptism, and that all old things be dropped and forgotten, which was seconded and carried unanimously. Soon afterwards he was re-baptized.

Elder Phineas H. Young, who was present at the death of Oliver Cowdery, at Richmond, Missouri, March 3, 1850, says, "His last moments were spent in bearing testimony of the truth of the Gospel revealed through Joseph Smith, and the power of the holy Priesthood which he had received through his administrations."

Elder S. W. Richards relates the following:

"The arrival of Oliver Cowdery and his family at Council Bluffs from the east in the winter of 1848-49 was an interesting event in the history of the Church. With his family, he was on his way to the body of the Church located in Utah, but as some time must elapse before emigrant trains could venture upon the plains, he determined to visit his wife's friends, the Whitmers, in Missouri.

"While making that journey, a severe snow storm made it convenient for his family to spend several days with Elder Samuel W. Richards and family, who were temporarily residing in upper Missouri, awaiting the opening of the emigration season. That favorable opportunity was made the most of to discuss all matters of interest connected with the early history of the Church, with which Elder Cowdery was personally acquainted and Elder Richards was not.

"His relation of events was of no ordinary character, maintaining unequivocally all those written testimonies he had furnished to the Church and world in earlier days. Moroni, Peter, James and John, and other

heavenly messengers, who had ministered to him in connection with the Prophet Joseph Smith, were familiarly but sacredly spoken of, and all seemed fresh upon the memory as though but events of yesterday. His language was considerate, precise and forcible—entirely free from lightness or frivolity—such as might be expected from one who had been schooled with angels and taught by Prophets; more of the heavenly than the earthly.

"His only ambition seemed to be to give himself and the remainder of his life to the Church; declared he was ready and willing, if desired, to go to the nations of the earth and bear his testimony of that which God and angels had revealed—a testimony in his personal experience of many things which no other living person could bear. His hopes were buoyant that such might be his future lot as cast with the Church, in the body of which he declared the Priesthood and its authority were and must continue to be. An overruling Providence saw fit to order otherwise. Soon after arriving among his relatives in Missouri, he was taken sick and died, in full faith and fellowship of the latter-day work, desiring the world might know that his testimony was of God." (*Contributor*, Vol. 5, page 446.)

His half-sister, Lucy P. Young, a widow of the late Phineas H. Young, relates that Oliver Cowdery married a Miss Whitmer (a sister of the Whitmer brothers) in Missouri in 1833; and that just before breathing his last, he asked his attendants to raise him up in bed, that he might talk to the family and his friends, who were present. He then told them to live according to the teachings contained in the Book of Mormon, and promised them, if they would do this, that they would meet him in heaven. He then said, "Lay me down and let me fall asleep."

A few moments later he died without a struggle.

David Whitmer testified to Apostles Orson Pratt and Jos. F. Smith in 1878, as follows:

"Oliver died the happiest man I ever saw. After shaking hands with the family and kissing his wife and daughter, he said, 'Now I lay me down for the last time; I am going to my Savior;' and he died immediately, with a smile on his face." (See *Mill. Star*, Vol. 40, page 774.)

In an article published in the *Mill. Star*, Vol. 48, page 420, Elder Edward Stevenson gives the following testimony in relation to Oliver Cowdery:

"I have often heard him bear a faithful testimony to the restoration of the Gospel by the visitation of an angel, in whose presence he stood in company with the Prophet Joseph Smith and David Whitmer. He testified that he beheld the plates, the leaves being turned over by the angel, whose voice he heard, and that they were commanded as witnesses to bear a faithful testimony to the world of the vision that they were favored to behold, and that the translation from the plates in the Book of Mormon was accepted of the Lord, and that it should go forth to the world, and no power on earth should stop its progress. Although for a time Oliver Cowdery absented himself from the body of the Church, I never have known a time when he faltered or was recreant to the trust so sacredly entrusted to him by an angel from heaven."

DAVID WHITMER

Was born at a small trading post, near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Jan. 7, 1805. While yet an infant his father, who served his country through the revolutionary war, removed with his family to western New York and settled on a farm in Ontario County, near Watkin's Glen

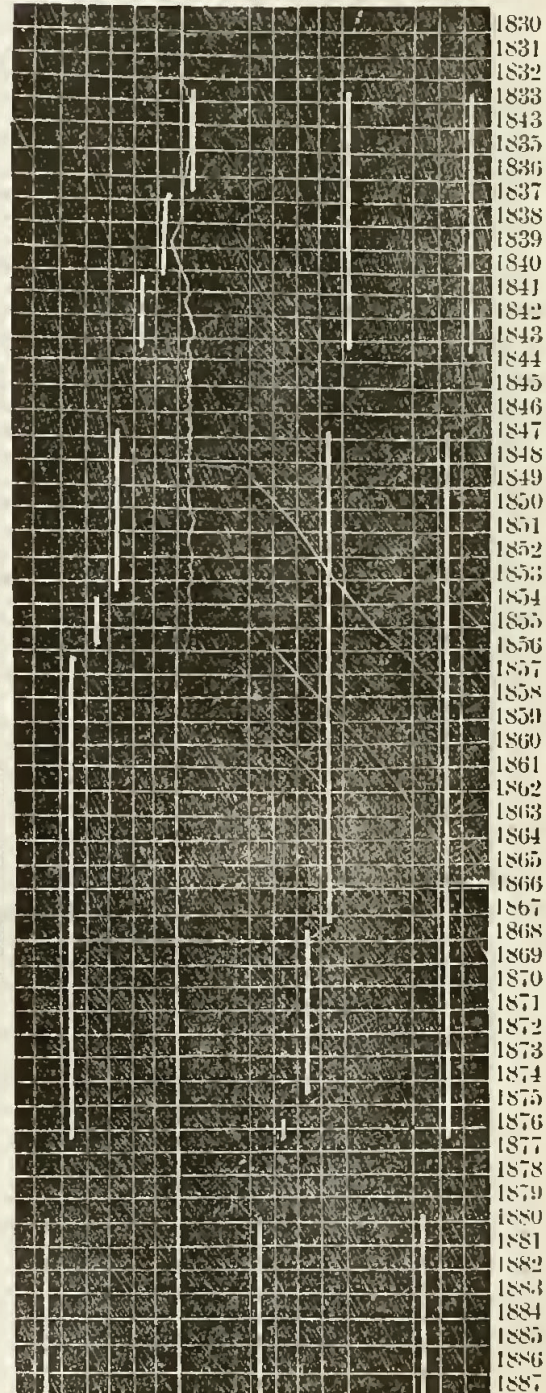
—at a point midway between the northern extremities of Lake Cayuga and Seneca, two miles from Waterloo, seven from Geneva, and twenty-five from Palmyra—where David lived until the year 1831. The father, who was a hard-working, God-fearing man, was a strict Presbyterian and brought his children up with rigid sectarian discipline. Besides a daughter who married Oliver Cowdery, there were five sons—Peter, Jacob, John, David and Christian—who helped their father on his farm until they had arrived at the age of manhood. The following is David Whitmer's own statement to a reporter of the *Kansas City Journal*; published June 5, 1881:

"I first heard of what is now termed Mormonism, in the year 1828. I made a business trip to Palmyra, N. Y., and while there stopped with one Oliver Cowdery. A great many people in the neighborhood were talking about the finding of certain golden plates by one Joseph Smith, jun., a young man of the neighborhood. Cowdery and I, as well as many others, talked about the matter, but at that time I paid but little attention to it, supposing it to be only the idle gossip of the neighborhood. Mr. Cowdery said he was acquainted with the Smith family, and he believed there must be some truth in the story of the plates, and that he intended to investigate the matter. I had conversation with several young men, who said that Joseph Smith had certainly golden plates, and that before he had attained them he had promised to share with them, but had not done so, and they were very much incensed with him. Said I, 'How do you know that Joe Smith has the plates?' They replied, 'We saw the plates in the hill that he took them out of, just as he described it to us before he had obtained them.' These parties were so positive in their statements that

I began to believe there must be some foundation for the stories then in circulation all over that part of the country. I had never seen any of the Smith family up to that time, and I began to enquire of the people in regard to them, and learned that one night during the year 1823, Joseph Smith, jun., had a vision, and an angel of God appeared to him and told him where certain plates were to be found, and pointed out the spot to him, and that shortly afterward he went to that place and found the plates, which were still in his possession. After thinking over the matter for a long time, and talking with Cowdery, who also gave me a history of the finding of the plates, I went home, and after several months, Cowdery told me he was going to Harmony, Penn., whither Joseph Smith had gone with the plates, on account of the persecutions of his neighbors, and see him about the matter. He did go, and on his way he stopped at my father's house and told me that as soon as he found out anything, either truth or untruth, he would let me know. After he got there he became acquainted with Jos. Smith, and shortly after wrote to me, telling me that he was convinced that Smith had the records and that he (Smith) had told him that it was the will of heaven that he (Cowdery) should be his scribe to assist in the translation of the plates. He went on and Joseph translated from the plates, and he wrote it down. Shortly after this, Mr. Cowdery wrote me another letter, in which he gave me a few lines of what they had translated, and he assured me that he knew of a certainty that he had a record of a people that inhabited this continent, and that the plates they were translating from gave a complete history of these people. When Cowdery wrote me these things, and told me that he had revealed knowledge concerning the truth of

- PRESIDENTS:
- Joseph Smith.....
 - Brigham Young.....
 - John Taylor.....
- FIRST COUNSELLORS:
- Sidney Rigdon.....
 - Heber C. Kimball.....
 - George A. Smith.....
 - John W. Young.....
 - George Q. Cannon.....
- SECOND COUNSELLORS:
- Frederick G. Williams.....
 - Hyrum Smith.....
 - William Law.....
 - Willard Richards.....
 - Jedediah M. Grant.....
 - Daniel H. Wells.....
 - Joseph F. Smith.....

DIAGRAM OF THE FIRST PRESIDENCY. (See Page 73.)

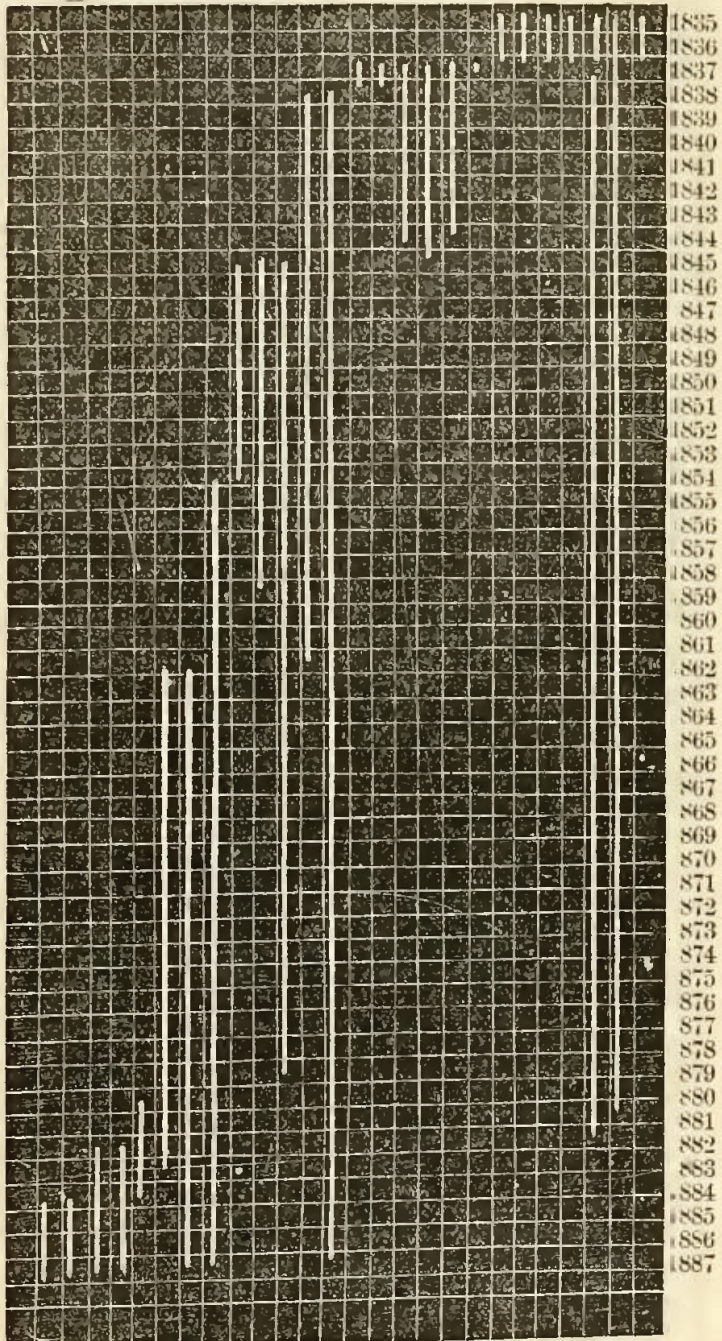


them, I showed these letters to my parents, and brothers and sisters. Soon after I received another letter from Cowdery, telling me to come down into Pennsylvania, and bring him and Joseph to my father's house, giving as a reason therefor that they had received a commandment from God to that effect. I went down to Harmony and found everything just as they had written me. The next day after I got there they packed up the plates and we proceeded on our journey to my father's house, where we arrived in due time, and the day after we commenced upon the translation of the remainder of the plates. I, as well as all of my father's family, Smith's wife, Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris, were present during the translation. The translation was by Smith, and the manner as follows:

“He had two small stones of a chocolate color, nearly egg shape, and perfectly smooth, but not transparent, called interpreters, which were given him with the plates. He did not use the plates in the translation, but would hold the interpreters to his eyes and cover his face with a hat, excluding all light, and before his eyes would appear what seemed to be parchment, on which would

DIAGRAM OF THE FIRST SEVEN PRESIDENTS OF THE SEVENTIES. (See Page 81.)

1. Hazen Aldrich.....
 2. Joseph Young.....
 3. Levi W. Hancock.....
 4. Leonard Rich.....
 5. Zebedee Coltrin.....
 6. Lyman Sherman.....
 7. Sylvester Smith.....
 8. John Gould.....
 9. James Foster.....
 10. Daniel S. Miles.....
 11. Josiah Bitterfield.....
 12. Salmon Gee.....
 13. John Gaylord.....
 14. Henry Herriman.....
 15. Zera Pulsipher.....
 16. Albert P. Rockwood.....
 17. Benjamin L. Clapp.....
 18. Jedediah M. Grant.....
 19. Horace S. Eldredge.....
 20. Jacob Gates.....
 21. John Van Cott.....
 22. William W. Taylor.....
 23. Abraham H. Cannon.....
 24. Seymour B. Young.....
 25. Christian D. Pieldstedt.....
 26. John Morgan.....



appear the characters of the plates in a line at the top, and immediately below would appear the translation, in English, which Smith would read to his scribe, who wrote it down exactly as it fell from his lips. The scribe would then read the sentence written, and if any mistake had been made, the characters would remain visible to Smith until corrected, when they faded from sight to be replaced by another line. The translation at my father's occupied about one month; that is from June 1. to July 1, 1829." (See *Mill. Star*, Vol. 43, page 421, etc.)

From the History of Joseph Smith we make the following extract:

"Shortly after commencing to translate, I became acquainted with Mr. Peter Whitmer, of Fayette, Seneca Co., N. Y., and also with some of his family. In the beginning of the month of June (1829), his son David Whitmer came to the place, (Harmony) where we were residing, and brought with him a two-horse wagon, for the purpose of having us (Joseph Smith and his wife and Oliver Cowdery) accompany him to his father's place, and there remain until we should finish the work. He proposed that we should have our board free of charge, and the assistance of one of his brothers to write for me, as also his own assistance when convenient.

"Having much need of such timely aid in an undertaking so arduous, and being informed that the people of the neighborhood were anxiously awaiting the opportunity to enquire into these things, we accepted the invitation and accompanied Mr. Whitmer to his father's house, and there resided until the translation was finished and the copyright secured. Upon our arrival, we found Mr. Whitmer's family very anxious concerning the work, and very friendly towards ourselves. They continued so, boarded and lodged us according to proposal, and John Whitmer, in particular, assisted us very much in writing during the remainder of the work."

In the meantime David, John and Peter Whitmer, jun., became the Prophet's zealous friends and assistants in the work, and being anxious to know their respective duties, and having desired with much earnestness that Joseph should enquire of the Lord concerning them, Joseph did so, through the means of the Urim and Thummim, and obtained for them in succession three revelations. (See *Doc. & Cov.*, Sec. 14, 15 and 16.)

In June, 1829, David Whitmer was baptized by Joseph Smith, in Seneca Lake, and was soon afterward privileged to behold the plates of the Book of Mormon as one of the Three Witnesses.

After the organization of the Church with six members, of which David was one, he commenced to preach and accompanied the Prophet on several of his missionary trips to Colesville and other places. He also baptized quite a number of those who joined the Church at that early day.

After the Prophet had moved back to Harmony, Hiram Page, one of the Eight Witnesses, got in possession of a stone, by which he received certain revelations that conflicted with the order of the Church. The Whitmer family, Oliver Cowdery and others believed in these spurious revelations, for which the Lord, through the Prophet, reprimanded David Whitmer and instructed him not to give "heed to those whom He had not appointed." (*Doc. & Cov.*, Sec. 30,)

Joseph Smith succeeded in setting matters right after his return to Fayette in August, 1830, and from that time until his removal to Ohio in the beginning of 1831, Joseph

Smith resided with the Whitmer family, which during the same year removed to Jackson County, Missouri.

David Whitmer, who had married Julia A. Jolly, in 1830, located on the Big Blue River, at a point three miles east of Westport, and two years later shared in the persecutions heaped upon the Saints in that locality. In the fall of 1833 he was finally driven out of the county by the mob, together with the rest of the Saints. Next he located in Clay County, where he, July 3, 1834, was appointed President of the High Council, organized there by the Prophet. For nearly four years after this he acted as one of the leading Elders of the Church in Missouri, and after the location at Far West, in Caldwell Co., he was sustained as President of the Saints there; but falling into transgression, he was rejected as such, in a general conference held in Far West, Feb. 5, 1838, and finally, April 13, 1838, he was excommunicated from the Church by the High Council, at Far West, the following charges having been sustained against him:

“1st. For not observing the Word of Wisdom. 2nd. For unchristianlike conduct in neglecting to attend meetings, in uniting with and possessing the same spirit as the dissenters. 3rd. In writing letters to the dissenters in Kirtland, unfavorable to the cause, and to the character of Joseph Smith, jun. 4th. In neglecting the duties of his calling, and separating himself from the Church, while he had a name among us. 5th. For signing himself President of the Church of Christ, after he had been cut off from the Presidency, in an insulting letter to the High Council.”

Shortly after his excommunication David Whitmer left Far West and removed to Clay County, and in the

latter part of 1838 located in Richmond, Ray Co., where he has resided ever since.

We introduce the following from a report of Apostles Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith:

“On Saturday morning, Sept. 7, (1878), we met Mr. David Whitmer, (at Richmond, Ray Co., Mo.), the last remaining one of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon. He is a good-sized man, 73 years of age last January, and well preserved. He is close shaven, his hair perfectly white, and rather thin; he has a large head and a very pleasant, manly countenance that one would readily perceive to be an index to a conscientious, honest heart. He seemed wonderfully pleased, as well as surprised, at seeing Elder Orson Pratt, and said he would not have known him as he had grown so fat and stout; he remembered him as a slender, bashful, timid boy. After a few moments conversation he excused himself, saying he would return again to see us. This meeting was in the bar-room of the hotel. When he called again he was in company with Col. Childs, a middle aged man, and a resident of the place. By invitation we accompanied them to Mr. Whitmer's office, where we were introduced to Mr. David J. Whitmer (eldest son of David), Mr. George Schweich (grandson of the old gentleman), Mr. John C. Whitmer (son of Jacob Whitmer), Col. James W. Black, of Richmond, and several others. A couple of hours were very pleasantly passed in conversation, principally on Utah matters, when we parted for dinner, agreeing to meet Mr. Whitmer again at his office, at 4.30 p. m.

“Agreeable to appointment we met Mr. Whitmer and his friends, at his office, but as the place was too public for private conversation and as it seemed impossible to obtain a private personal interview with David Whitmer, by himself, we invited him and such of his friends as he saw proper to fetch along to our room in the

hotel. Mr. Whitmer apologized for not inviting us to his house, as it was 'wash day,' and he and his wife were 'worn out' with the extra labor, exposure, etc., etc., consequent on rebuilding since the cyclone. He accepted our invitation to our room and brought with him James R. B. Vancleave, a fine looking, intelligent, young newspaper man, of Chicago, George Schweich, John C. Whitmer, W. W. Warner and another person whose name we did not learn. In the presence of these the following, in substance, as noticed in Brother Joseph F. Smith's journal, is the account of the interview: * * *

"Elder O. Pratt to David Whitmer. Do you remember what time you saw the plates?"

"D. Whitmer. It was in June, 1829, the latter part of the month, and the eight witnesses saw them, I think, the next day or the day after (i. e. one or two days after). Joseph showed them the plates himself, but the angel showed us (the Three Witnesses) the plates, as I suppose to fulfill the words of the book itself. Martin Harris was not with us at this time; he obtained a view of them afterwards (the same day). Joseph, Oliver and myself were together when I saw them. We not only saw the plates of the Book of Mormon, but also the brass plates, the plates of the Book of Ether, the plates containing the records of the wickedness and secret combinations of the people of the world down to the time of their being engraved, and many other plates. The fact is, it was just as though Joseph, Oliver and I were sitting just here on a log, when we were overshadowed by a light. It was not like the light of the sun, nor like that of a fire, but more glorious and beautiful. It extended away round us, I cannot tell how far, but in the midst of this light about as far off as he sits (pointing to John C. Whitmer, sitting a few feet from him), there appeared, as it were, a table with many records or plates upon it, besides the plates of the

Book of Mormon, also the sword of Laban, the directors (i. e., the hall which Lehi had) and the interpreters. I saw them just as plain as I see this bed (striking the bed beside him with his hand), and I heard the voice of the Lord, as distinctly as I ever heard anything in my life, declaring that the records of the plates of the Book of Mormon were translated by the gift and power of God.

"Elder O. Pratt. Did you see the angel at this time?"

"D. Whitmer. Yes; he stood before us. Our testimony as recorded in the Book of Mormon is strictly and absolutely true, just as it is there written. Before I knew Joseph, I had heard about him and the plates from persons who declared they knew he had them, and swore they would get them from him. When Oliver Cowdery went to Pennsylvania, he promised to write me what he should learn about these matters, which he did. He wrote me that Joseph had told him his (Oliver's) secret thoughts, and all he had meditated about going to see him, which no man on earth knew, as he supposed, but himself, and so he stopped to write for Joseph. Soon after this, Joseph sent for me (D. Whitmer) to come to Harmony to get him and Oliver and bring them to my father's house. I did not know what to do, I was pressed with my work. I had some 20 acres to plow, so I concluded I would finish plowing and then go. I got up one morning to go to work as usual, and on going to the field, found between five and seven acres of my ground had been plowed during the night. I don't know who did it; but it was done just as I would have done it myself, and the plow was left standing in the furrow. This enabled me to start sooner. When I arrived at Harmony, Joseph and Oliver were coming toward me, and met me some distance from the house. Oliver told me that Joseph had informed him when I started from home, where I had stopped the first night, how I read the sign at

the tavern, where I stopped the next night, etc., and that I would be there that day before dinner, and this was why they had come out to meet me; all of which was exactly as Joseph had told Oliver, at which I was greatly astonished. When I was returning to Fayette, with Joseph and Oliver, all of us riding in the wagon, Oliver and I on an old-fashioned wooden spring seat and Joseph behind us—when traveling along in a clear open place, a very pleasant, nice-looking old man suddenly appeared by the side of our wagon and saluted us with, 'good morning, it is very warm,' at the same time wiping his face or forehead with his hand. We returned the salutation, and, by a sign from Joseph, I invited him to ride if he was going our way. But he said very pleasantly, 'No, I am going to Cumorah.' This name was something new to me, I did not know what Cumorah meant. We all gazed at him and at each other, and as I looked around enquiringly of Joseph, the old man instantly disappeared, so that I did not see him again.

"Joseph F. Smith. Did you notice his appearance?"

"D. Whitmer. I should think I did. He was, I should think, about five feet eight or nine inches tall and heavy set, about such a man as James Vancleave there, but heavier; his face was as large; he was dressed in a suit of brown woolen clothes, his hair and beard were white, like Brother Pratt's, but his beard was not so heavy. I also remember that he had on his back a sort of knapsack with something in, shaped like a book. It was the messenger who had the plates, who had taken them from Joseph just prior to our starting from Harmony. Soon after our arrival home, I saw something which led me to the belief that the plates were placed or concealed in my father's barn. I frankly asked Joseph if my supposition was right, and he told me it was. Sometime after this, my mother was going to milk the cows, when she was met out

near the yard by the same old man, (judging by her description of him), who said to her: 'You have been very faithful and diligent in your labors, but you are tired because of the increase of your toil; it is proper, therefore, that you should receive a witness that your faith may be strengthened.'" Thereupon he showed her the plates. My father and mother had a large family of their own, the addition to it, therefore, of Joseph, his wife Emma and Oliver very greatly increased the toil and anxiety of my mother. And although she had never complained she had sometimes felt that her labor was too much, or at least she was perhaps beginning to feel so. This circumstance, however, completely removed all such feelings and nerved her up for her increased responsibilities. * * *

"Elder O. Pratt. Have you in your possession the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon?"

"D. Whitmer. I have; they are in O. Cowdery's handwriting. He placed them in my care at his death, and charged me to preserve them as long as I lived; they are safe and well preserved.

"J. F. Smith. What will be done with them at your death?"

"D. Whitmer. I will leave them to my nephew, David Whitmer, son of my brother Jacob, and my namesake.

"O. Pratt. Would you not part with them to a purchaser?"

"D. Whitmer. No. Oliver charged me to keep them, and Joseph said my father's house should keep the records. I consider these things sacred, and would not part with nor barter them for money.

"J. F. Smith. We would not offer you money in the light of bartering for the manuscript, but we would like to see them preserved in some manner where they would be safe from casualties and from the caprices of men, in some institution that will not die as man does.

"D. Whitmer. That is all right. While camping around here in a

tent, all my effects exposed to the weather, everything in the trunk where the manuscripts were kept became mouldy, etc., but they were preserved, not even being discolored. (We supposed his camping in a tent, etc., had reference to his circumstances after the cyclone, in June last.) The room in which the manuscripts were kept, was the only part of the house which was not demolished, and even the ceiling of that room was but little-impaired.

'Do you think,' said Phil. Page, a son of Hiram Page, one of the Eight Witnesses, 'that the Almighty cannot take care of his own!'

'Next day (Sunday Sept. 8th) Mr. Whitmer invited us to his house, where, in the presence of David Whitmer, Esq., (son of Jacob), Philander Page, J. R. B. Vancleave, David J. Whitmer (son of David the Witness), George Schweich (grandson of David), Colonel Childs and others, David Whitmer brought out the manuscripts of the Book of Mormon. We examined them closely and those who knew the handwriting pronounced the whole of them, excepting comparatively a few pages, to be in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery. It was thought that these few pages were in the handwriting of Emma Smith and John and Christian Whitmer.

'We found that the names of the Eleven Witnesses were, however, subscribed in the handwriting of Oliver Cowdery. When the question was asked Mr. Whitmer if he and the other witnesses did or did not sign the testimonies themselves, Mr. Whitmer replied that each signed his own name. 'Then where are the original signatures?' D. Whitmer 'I don't know, I suppose Oliver copied them, but this I know is an exact copy.' * * *

'Joseph F. Smith suggested that perhaps there were *two copies* of the manuscripts, but Mr. Whitmer replied that, according to the best of his knowledge, there never was but the one copy. Herein, of course, he is evidently uninformed.

"Elder O. Pratt again felt closely after the subject of procuring the manuscripts, but we found that nothing would move him on this point. The whole Whitmer family are deeply impressed with the sacredness of this relic. And so thoroughly imbued are they with the idea and faith that it is under the immediate protection of the Almighty, that in their estimation, not only are the manuscripts themselves safe from all possible contingencies, but that they are a source of protection to the place or house in which they may be kept, and, it may be to those who have possession of them. Another reason why they cling to this relic is that David Whitmer has reorganized the 'Church of Christ' with six Elders and two priests, after the pattern of the first organization, the two priests, as we suppose, representing Joseph and Oliver as holding the Aaronic Priesthood from the hand of John the Baptist. David and John Whitmer were two of these six Elders, four others, viz. John C. Whitmer, W. W. Warren, Philander Page and John Short, having been ordained by David and John. And as the recent death of John has diminished the number to five Elders it would be interesting to know if, according to their strict construction, the vacancy can be filled. Their creed is to preach nothing but the Bible and the Book of Mormon."

The following was published in the Richmond (Mo.) *Conservator* of March 25, 1881:

"Unto all Nations, Kindreds, Tongues and People, unto whom these presents shall come:

"It having been represented by one John Murphy, of Polo, Caldwell County, Missouri, that I, in a conversation with him last summer, denied my testimony as one of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon.

"To the end, therefore, that he may understand me now, if he did not then; and that the world may know the truth, I wish now, standing as it were, in the very sunset of life, and in the fear of God, once for all to make this public statement:

"That I have never at any time denied that

testimony or any part thereof, which has so long since been published with that book, as one of the Three Witnesses. Those who know me best well know that I have always adhered to that testimony. And that no man may be misled or doubt my present views in regard to the same, I do again affirm the truth of all my statements as then made and published.

“He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear;’ it was no delusion; what is written is written, and he that readeth let him understand. * * *

“And if any man doubt, should he not carefully and honestly read and understand the same before presuming to sit in judgment and condemning the light, which shineth in darkness, and showeth the way of eternal life as pointed out by the unerring hand of God?”

“In the Spirit of Christ, who hath said: ‘Follow thou me, for I am the life, the light and the way,’ I submit this statement to the world; God in whom I trust being my judge as to the sincerity of my motives and the faith and hope that is in me of eternal life.

“My sincere desire is that the world may be benefited by this plain and simple statement of the truth.

“And all the honor to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, which is one God. Amen! DAVID WHITMER, SEN.

Richmond, Mo., March 19, 1881.

“We, the undersigned citizens of Richmond, Ray County, Mo., where David Whitmer, sen., has resided since the year A. D. 1838, certify that we have been long and intimately acquainted with him and know him to be a man of the highest integrity, and of undoubted truth and veracity.

“Given at Richmond, Mo., this March 20, A. D. 1881.

“A. W. Doniphan.

“Geo. W. Dunn, Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit.

“T. D. Woodson, President of Ray Co. Savings Bank.

“J. T. Child, Editor of *Conservator*.

“H. C. Garner, Cashier of Ray Co. Savings Bank.

“W. A. Holman, County Treasurer.

“J. S. Hughes, Banker, Richmond.

“D. P. Whitmer, Attorney-at-law.

“J. W. Black, Attorney-at-law.

“L. C. Cantwell, Postmaster, Richmond.

“Geo. I. Wasson, Mayor.

“James A. Davis, County Collector.

“C. J. Hughes, Probate Judge and Presiding Judge of Ray County Court.

“Geo. W. Trigg, County Clerk.

“W. W. Mosby, M. D.

“Thos. McGinnis, ex-Sheriff, Ray County.

“J. P. Quesenberry, Merchant.

“W. R. Holman, Furniture Merchant.

“Lewis Slaughter, Recorder of Deeds.

“Geo. W. Buchanan, M. D.

“A. K. Reyburn.”

The *Conservator* made the following editorial comments on the ‘notice.’

“Elsewhere we publish a letter from David Whitmer, sen., an old and well known citizen of Ray, as well as an endorsement of his standing as a man, signed by a number of the leading citizens of this community, in reply to some unwarranted aspersions made upon him.

“There is no doubt that Mr. Whitmer, who was one of the Three Witnesses of the authenticity of the gold plates, from which he asserts that Joe Smith translated the Book of Mormon (a *fac simile* of the characters he now has in his possession with the original records), is firmly convinced of its divine origin, and while he makes no efforts to obtrude his views or belief, he simply wants the world to know that so far as he is concerned there is no ‘variableness or shadow of turning.’ Having resided here for near a half of a century, it is with no little pride that he points to his past record, with the consciousness that he has done nothing derogatory to his character as a citizen and a believer in the son of Mary to warrant such an attack on him, come from what source it may, and now, with the lilies of seventy-five winters crowning him like an aureole, and his pilgrimage on earth well nigh ended, he reiterates his former statements and will leave futurity to solve the problem that he was but a passing witness of its fulfilment.”

Elder Edward Stevenson in a letter dated Feb. 16, 1886, and addressed to Pres. D. H. Wells, writes:

“After my visit to Independence I took a run down to Lexington Junction, 42 miles from Kansas City, and up the Lexington Railroad five miles to Richmond, Ray County, Mo., and

called on David Whitmer, desiring to see once more the only surviving witness of the visitation of the angel who commanded him with others to bear record of the truth of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and this Gospel dispensation of the nineteenth century. Eight years ago I visited him, and 52 years ago I heard him bear his testimony, as also Oliver Cowdery and Martin Harris, when I was only a boy 14 years of age, and I am a witness that each time their testimony has been by the power of God, that thrills through the whole system like a two-edged sword. David Whitmer is now just past 81 years of age, and only by a hair's breadth has escaped from a death bed. He is very feeble, his frame weighing less than one hundred pounds. In this his last testimony he said to me, 'As sure as the sun shines and I live, just so sure did the angel appear unto me and Joseph Smith, and I heard his voice, and did see the angel standing before us, and on a table were the plates, the sword of Laban, and the ball or compass.' Although so weak and feeble, yet he fired up, so that after a time I was necessarily obliged to check him and let him rest, while in turn I talked to him."

For further information in relation to David Whitmer, the reader is referred to the *Mill. Star*, Vol. 45, page 538; Vol. 48, pages 35, 341, 420, 436, etc.

MARTIN HARRIS,

Was born May 18, 1783, in East-town, Saratoga Co., New York, and moved with his father's family in his ninth year to the town of Palmyra, Wayne Co. In the fall of 1827 he made the acquaintance of the Prophet Joseph Smith, who at that time was severely persecuted by his enemies, he having received from the angel Moroni the holy plates, from which the Book of Mormon afterwards was translated. Martin Harris made Jo-

seph a present of fifty dollars, which enabled the latter to remove from Manchester, N. Y., to Pennsylvania.

In February, 1828. Martin Harris visited Joseph Smith at his temporary home in Harmony, Penn. The latter had copied some of the ancient characters from the plates and translated them, which he gave to Martin Harris, who made a visit to New York City and showed the characters with their translation to the celebrated Prof. Anthon, skilled in ancient and modern languages. The learned professor, after examination, spoke favorably of the characters and of the translation and proffered his assistance; but on learning from Mr. Harris that the book was given to Joseph Smith by an angel and that a part of the book was sealed, etc., he sarcastically remarked that 'he could not read a sealed book,' and then demanded back a certificate, which he had given to Mr. Harris, testifying to the correctness of the translation. After getting it back he tore it to pieces. Mr. Harris then went to Dr. Mitchell, another man of learning, who sanctioned what Professor Anthon had said respecting both the characters and the translation.

Martin Harris having returned from his tour to New York City and reported the incidents of his journey to the Prophet, went home to Palmyra, arranged his affairs and returned again to Joseph in Pennsylvania about the 12th of April, 1828. Immediately after his arrival he commenced to write for the Prophet, thus becoming his first scribe. Joseph translated from the plates and Martin Harris wrote after his dictation, which work they continued until the 14th of June following, by

which time 116 pages of manuscript were written on foolscap paper. The Prophet writes:

“Some time after Mr. Harris had begun to write for me, he began to tease me to give him liberty to carry the writings home and show them; and desired of me that I would inquire of the Lord, through the Urim and Thummim, if he might not do so. I did inquire, and the answer was, that he must not. However, he was not satisfied with this answer, and desired that I should inquire again. I did so, and the answer was as before. Still he could not be contented, but insisted that I should inquire once more. After much solicitation I again inquired of the Lord, and permission was granted him to have the writings on certain conditions, which were, that he show them only to his brother Preserved Harris, his own wife, his father and his mother, and a Mrs. Cobb, a sister to his wife. In accordance with this last answer, I required of him that he should bind himself in a covenant to me in the most solemn manner, that he would not do otherwise than he had been directed. He did so. He bound himself as I required of him, took the writings, and went his way.

“Notwithstanding, however, the great restrictions which he had been laid under, and the solemnity of the covenant which he had made with me, he did shew them to others, and by stratagem they got them away from him, and they never have been recovered nor obtained back again unto this day.”

For these doings Martin Harris was severely censured and called a “wicked man” in a revelation given through the Prophet shortly afterwards (Doc. & Cov., Sec. 3); and the Lord would not permit Joseph Smith to translate that part of the record again, because of the cunning and evil designs of wicked men. (Doc. & Cov., Sec. 10.)

After the Prophet’s removal to Fayette in the summer of 1829, Martin Harris again visited him and was permitted to be one of the Three Witnesses. Subsequently he furnished \$3,000 towards the expenses of printing the first edition of the book.

He was baptized shortly after the organization of the Church, and in June, 1831, was called by revelation to accompany the Prophet Joseph and other Elders to Missouri. (Doc. & Cov., Sec. 52.) He started on this journey on the 19th of June, and when Jackson County, Mo., two months later, was designated by the mouth of the Lord as a gathering place for the Saints--as the land upon which the new Jerusalem should be built, and where a full consecration of all properties should be required and the holy United Order of God established—Martin Harris was the first one called of God by name to set an example before the Church in laying his money before the Bishop. (Doc. & Cov., Sec. 58, Verse 35.)

He was a member of the first High Council of the Church, which was organized in Kirtland, Ohio, Feb. 17, 1834, and in 1835 he assisted in electing, ordaining and instructing the twelve Elders, who were called to constitute the first quorum of Twelve Apostles in this dispensation.

As long as the Saints remained in Kirtland, he continued active and assisted in the public labors of the Church, but when the Saints vacated that place and removed to Missouri Martin Harris remained in Ohio. This gave rise to many conjectures that he had apostatized. But notwithstanding his long absence from the head-quarters of the Church, he never faltered nor swerved in the

least degree from the great testimony given in the Book of Mormon. It is true that he went to England in 1846, while under the influence of the apostate James J. Strang, ostensibly for the purpose of opposing the Elders laboring there, but he returned to America without doing any harm to anybody, except, perhaps, to himself. (*Mill. Star*, Vol. 8, pages 124 and 128.)

After residing for many years in Kirtland, Ohio, he finally migrated to Utah, arriving in Salt Lake City Aug. 30, 1870, in care of Elder Edward Stevenson. He located in Smithfield, Cache Co., and later in Clarkston, where he died July 10, 1875, being nearly ninety-three years of age.

A few hours before his death, when prostrated with great weakness, Bishop Simon Smith came into his room; Martin Harris stretched forth his hands to salute him and said, "Bishop, I am going." The Bishop told him that he had something of importance to tell him in relation to the Book of Mormon, which was to be published in the Spanish language, by the request of Indians in Central America. Upon hearing this, Martin Harris brightened up, his pulsation improved, and, although very weak, he began to talk as he formerly had done previous to his sickness. He conversed for about two hours, and it seemed that the mere mention of the Book of Mormon put new life into him.

His son Martin Harris, jun., in a letter addressed to Pres. Geo. A. Smith and dated Clarkston, July 9, 1875, says:

"He (Martin Harris) was taken sick a week ago yesterday, with some kind of a stroke, or life became so

weak and exhausted, that he has no use in his limbs. He cannot move, only by our aid. * * * He has continued to talk about and testify to the truth of the Book of Mormon, and was in his happiest mood when he could get somebody to listen to his testimony; if he felt dull and weary at times, and some one would come in and open up a conversation and give him an opportunity of talking, he would immediately revive and feel like a young man for a little while. We begin to think that he has borne his last testimony. The last audible words he has spoken were something about the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon, but we could not understand what it was."

At his funeral every respect that could be paid to him was manifested by the people. In dressing him, a Book of Mormon was put in his right hand and the book of Doctrine and Covenants in his left hand. On the head board of his grave was placed his name, date and place of his birth and death, with the words, "One of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon." Also their testimony.

From a letter of Elder Edward Stevenson, dated Salt Lake City, Nov. 30, 1881, and published in the *Mill. Star*, Vol. 44, page 78, etc., we make the following interesting extracts in relation to Martin Harris:

"While I was living in Michigan, then a Territory, in 1833, near the town of Pontiac, Oakland Co., Martin Harris came there, and in a meeting, where I was present, bore testimony of the appearance of an angel exhibiting the golden plates, and commanding him to bear a testimony of these things to all people whenever opportunity was afforded him to do so; and I can say that his testimony had great effect in that vicinity. Martin had a sister living in our neighborhood. About this time

Oliver Cowdery, another of the Three Witnesses, also, in company with Joseph Smith, the Prophet, bore the same testimony, and further, Joseph, the Prophet, promised those who with honest hearts obeyed the Gospel should receive the Holy Ghost, and signs would follow them.

“As a proof of their testimony, several of that branch of the Church enjoyed various gifts; one, Elijah Fordham, who recently died in this Territory, spoke in tongues, and as two French travelers were passing they heard him speaking and said to a boy outside the house, where they were, that he was speaking in French, bearing testimony to the Gospel, he having no knowledge of that language. Martin often bore his testimony while in that neighborhood.

“In the year 1869 I was appointed on a mission to the United States. Having visited several of the Eastern States, I called at Kirtland, Ohio, to see the first Temple that was built by our people in this generation. While there, I again met Martin Harris, soon after coming out of the Temple. He took from under his arm a copy of the Book of Mormon, the first edition, I believe, and bore a faithful testimony, just the same as that I heard him bear 36 years previous. He said that it was his duty to continue to lift up his voice as he had been commanded to do in defence of the book that he held in his hand, and offered to prove from the Bible that just such a book was to come forth out of the ground, and that, too, in a day when there were no Prophets on the earth, and that he was daily bearing testimony to many who visited the Temple.

“After patiently hearing him, I felt a degree of compassion for him, and in turn bore my testimony to him, as I had received it through obedience to the Gospel, and that the work was still onward, and the words of Isaiah, second chapter, were being fulfilled, that ‘the house of the Lord’ was in the tops of the mountains, and that under the leadership of President Young all nations were

gathering to Zion to learn of God’s ways and to walk in his paths, and that the worst wish that we had, was for him to also prepare himself and go up and be a partaker of the blessings of the House of the Lord. My testimony impressed him. A Mr. Bond, who held the keys of the Temple, and who had been present at the dedication, and then a faithful Latter-day Saint, said to me he felt as though he would have been far better off if he had kept with the Latter-day Saints, and that if I would preach in the Temple, he would open the doors to me. I promised to do so at some future time.

“After my arrival in Utah in 1870, I was inspired to write to Martin Harris, and soon received a reply, that the Spirit of God, for the first time prompted him to go to Utah. Several letters were afterwards exchanged. Pres. Brigham Young, having read the letters, through Pres. Geo. A. Smith requested me to get up a subscription and emigrate Martin to Utah, he subscribing twenty-five dollars for that purpose. Having raised the subscription to about two hundred dollars, I took the railroad cars for Ohio, on the 19th of July, 1870, and on the 10th of August, filled my appointment, preaching twice in the Kirtland Temple, finding Martin Harris elated with his prospective journey.

“A very singular incident occurred at this time. While Martin was visiting his friends, bidding them farewell, his pathway crossed a large pasture, in which he became bewildered. Dizzy, faint and staggering through the blackberry vines that are so abundant in that vicinity, his clothes torn, bloody and faint, he lay down under a tree to die. After a time he revived, called on the Lord, and finally at 12 o’clock midnight found his friend, and in his fearful condition was cared for and soon regained his strength. He related this incident as a snare of the adversary to hinder him from going to Salt Lake City. Although in his 88th year he possessed remarkable

vigor and health, having recently worked in the garden, and dug potatoes by the day for some of his neighbors.

"After visiting New York and calling to visit the sacred spot from where the plates of the Book of Mormon were taken, I found there an aged gentleman, 74 years old, who knew Martin Harris, and said that he was known in that neighborhood as an honest farmer, having owned a good farm three miles from that place. He farther said he well remembered the time when the Mormons used to gather at Mormon Hill, as he termed it, where it was said the plates came from.

"Aug. 19, 1870, in company with Martin Harris, I left Kirtland for Utah, and on the 21st he was with me in Chicago, and at the American Hotel bore testimony to a large number of people, of the visitation of the angel, etc. * * *

"While in Des Moines, the capitol of Iowa, Brother Harris had opportunity of bearing testimony to many, and at a special meeting held in a branch of our Church (Brother Jas. M. Ballinger, President) Martin Harris bore testimony as to viewing the plates, the angel's visit, and visiting Professor Anthon.

"On the following day I baptized a sister to Pres. Ballinger, in the Des Moines River. The branch here contributed a new suit of clothes to Brother Harris, for which he felt to bless them. On the 29th of August we arrived in Ogden, and the following day in Salt Lake City. Two members of the Des Moines branch of the Church accompanied us to Utah."

On Sunday, Sept. 4, 1870, Martin Harris addressed a congregation of Saints in Salt Lake City. He related an incident which occurred during the time that he wrote that portion of the translation of the Book of Mormon which he was favored to write direct from the mouth of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and said that the

Prophet possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then used the seer stone. Martin explained the translation as follows: By aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by Martin, and when finished he would say, "Written," and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place; but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraven on the plates, precisely in the language then used. Martin said that after continued translation they would become weary, and would go down to the river and exercise by throwing stones out on the river, etc. While so doing, on one occasion, Martin Harris found a stone very much resembling the one used for translating, and on resuming their labor of translation, he put in place the stone that he had found. He said that the Prophet remained silent, unusually and intently gazing in darkness, no traces of the usual sentences appearing. Much surprised, Joseph exclaimed, "Martin! What is the matter! All is as dark as Egypt!" Martin's countenance betrayed him, and the Prophet asked Martin why he had done so. Martin said, to stop the mouths of fools, who had told him that the Prophet had learned those sentences and was merely repeating them, etc.

Martin said further that the seer stones differed in appearance entirely from the Urim and Thummim obtained with the plates, which were two clear stones set in two rims, very much resembling spectacles, only they were larger. Martin said,

there were not many pages translated while he wrote, after which Oliver Cowdery and others did the writing.

In an article written by Elder Edward Stevenson and published in the *Mill. Star*, Vol. 48, pages 367 and 389, the following additional particulars are given :

“Many interesting incidents were related by Martin on our journey (from Ohio to Utah in 1870), one of which I (Stevenson) will relate. He said that on one occasion several of his old acquaintances made an effort to get him tipsy by treating him to some wine. When they thought he was in a good mood for talk, they put the following question very carefully to him: ‘Well, now, Martin, we want you to be frank and candid with us in regard to this story of your seeing an angel and the golden plates of the Book of Mormon that is so much talked about. We have always taken you to be an honest, good farmer and neighbor of ours, but could not believe that you ever did see an angel. Now, Martin, do you really believe that you did see an angel when you were awake?’ ‘No,’ said Martin, ‘I do not believe it.’ The anticipation of the delighted crowd at this exclamation may be imagined. But soon a different feeling prevailed, when Martin Harris, true to his trust, said, ‘Gentlemen, what I have said is true, from the fact that my belief is swallowed up in knowledge; for I want to say to you that as the Lord lives I do know that I stood with the Prophet Joseph Smith in the presence of the angel, and it was in the brightness of day.’ Martin Harris related this circumstance to me substantially as I give it, adding that, although he drank wine with them as friends, he always believed in temperance and sobriety.

“While on our journey, and more particularly at the Des Moines River, at the baptism of the woman spoken of, I took occasion to teach Brother

Martin the necessity of his being re-baptized. At first he did not seem to agree with the idea, but I referred him to the scriptural words, ‘Repent and do the first works,’ having lost the first love, etc. (Rev., 2, 5.) Finally, he said if it was right, the Lord would manifest it to him by His spirit, and He did do so, for Martin, soon after his arrival in Salt Lake City, came to my house and said the spirit of the Lord had made it manifest to him, not only for himself personally, but also that he should be baptized for his dead, for he had seen his father seeking his aid. He saw his father at the foot of a ladder, striving to get up to him, and he went down to him taking him by the hand and helped him up. The baptismal font was prepared, and by arrangement I led Martin Harris down into the water and re-baptized him. Five of the Apostles were present, viz., John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Orson Pratt, Geo. A. Smith and Joseph F. Smith; also J. D. T. McAllister and others. After baptism, Orson Pratt confirmed him, being joined with the rest of the brethren, by the laying on of hands; after which he was baptized for some of his dead friends, and to add to the interest of the occasion, Martin’s sister also was baptized for their female friends. * * * I wish to add that Brother Harris having been away from the Church so many years did not understand more than the first principles taught in the infantile days of the Church, which accounts for his not being posted in the doctrine of the Gospel being preached to the spirits who are departed, which was afterwards taught by Joseph Smith, the Prophet. * * *

“The economy of Martin Harris was particularly illustrated on the occasion of our visit to the Fifteenth Ward of Salt Lake City. The meeting was crowded, as usual, with those anxious to see him and to hear his constant, undeviating testimony. Sister S. M. Kimball, of the Fifteenth Ward, eminent in the Relief Societies,

on their behalf offered to have a new set of artificial teeth made for Brother Harris, to which he replied, 'No, sisters, I thank you for your kindness, but I shall not live long. Take the money and give it to the poor.' This calls to my mind a little incident or two that he related to me while we were on our journey from Ohio to Utah. He said that Joseph Smith, the Prophet, was very poor, and had to work by the day for his support, and he (Harris) often gave him work on his farm, and that they had hoed corn together many a day, Brother Harris paying him fifty cents per day. Joseph, he said, was good to work and jovial and they often wrestled together in sport, but the Prophet was devoted and attentive to his prayers.

"Brother Martin Harris gave Joseph \$50 on one occasion to help translate the Book of Mormon. This action on the part of Martin Harris, so displeased his wife that she threatened to leave him. Martin said that he knew this to be the work of God, and that he should keep the commandments of the Lord, whatever the results might be. His wife, subsequently, partially separated from him, which he patiently endured for the Gospel's sake. * * *

"At an evening visit of some of my friends at my residence in Salt Lake City, to see and hear Brother Harris relate his experience (which always delighted him), Brother James T. Woods, who is now present while I am writing this article, reminds me that himself and G. D. Keaton were present on that occasion, and asked him to explain the manner in which the plates, containing the characters of the Book of Mormon, were exhibited to the witnesses. Brother Harris said that the angel stood on the opposite side of the table on which were the plates, the interpreters, etc., and took the plates in his hand and turned them over. To more fully illustrate this to them, Brother Martin took up a book and turned the leaves over one by one. The angel declared that the Book of

Mormon was correctly translated by the power of God and not of man, and that it contained the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Nephites, who were a branch of the lost sheep of the House of Israel, and had come from the land of Jerusalem to America. The witnesses were required to bear their testimony of these things, and of this open vision to all people, and he (Harris) testified, not only to those present, but to all the world, that these things were true, and before God whom he expected to meet in the day of Judgment he lied not. Brother Woods testifies that he was present at the time above mentioned, and to him it was marvelous to see the zeal that was manifested by Martin Harris, and the spirit of the Lord that accompanied his words.

"That Martin Harris was very zealous, somewhat enthusiastic, and what some would term egotistical, is no doubt the case; but the Lord has shown this generation that He can carry on His work independently of all men, only as they live closely and humbly before Him. I will give one or two instances of Martin's enthusiasm. When President Geo. A. Smith and others of us were being driven by John Henry Smith in a carriage to take a bath in the Warm Springs, near Salt Lake City, while passing over a high hill President Smith directed the curtains of the carriage to be raised, giving a magnificent view of the city below. The immense Tabernacle and the Temple—and in fact the beautiful city in full view—looked wonderful to Brother Harris, who seemed wrapped in admiration and exclaimed, 'Who would have thought that the Book of Mormon would have done all this?' On one occasion, while celebrating a baptism, several persons being in attendance, Brother Harris with joyful feelings said, 'Just see how the Book of Mormon is spreading.' Having been absent so long from the body of the Church and considering his great age, much charity was necessarily exercised in his behalf.

His abiding testimony, and his assistance with his property to publish the Book of Mormon, have earned a name for him that will endure while time shall last. Soon after he had received his endowments and performed some work for his dead, he retired to live with his son, Martin

Harris, jun., at Smithfield, Cache Valley, where he was comfortably cared for in his declining old age. On the afternoon of his death he was bolstered up in his bed, where, with the Book of Mormon in his hand he bore his last testimony to those who were present."

PLURAL MARRIAGE.

As a number of apostates and other opponents of the truth are continually attempting to deny certain facts connected with the introduction of plural marriage among the Latter-day Saints by Joseph Smith, the Prophet, it has been deemed proper, in connection with our other historical labors, to compile and republish in the RECORD the following statements, testimonies, affidavits, etc., from truthful and reliable parties, who have been eye and ear witnesses to the circumstances and incidents of which they speak; and also to add new proofs and testimonies to those already made public. By way of introducing the subject we quote the following from a communication written by Pres. Jos. F. Smith and published in the *Deseret News* of May 20, 1886:

"The great and glorious principle of plural marriage was first revealed to Joseph Smith in 1831, but being forbidden to make it public, or to teach it as a doctrine of the Gospel, at that time, he confided the facts to only a very few of his intimate associates. Among them were Oliver Cowdery and Lyman E. Johnson, the latter confiding the fact to his traveling companion, Elder Orson Pratt, in the year 1832. (See Orson Pratt's testimony.) And this great principle remained concealed in the bosom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the few to whom he revealed it, until he

was commanded, about 1842, to instruct the leading members of the Priesthood, and those who were most faithful and intelligent, and best prepared to receive it, in relation thereto, at which time, and subsequently until his martyrdom, the subject, in connection with the great principles of baptism, redemption and sealings for the dead, became the great themes of his life, and, as the late Pres. Geo. A. Smith repeatedly said to me and others, 'The Prophet seemed irresistibly moved by the power of God to establish that principle, not only in theory, in the hearts and minds of his brethren, but in practice also!' he himself having led the way. While this doctrine was thus being taught by the Prophet to those whom he could trust—those who had faith, righteousness and integrity, to believe and accept it, with all its consequences (which are no trifling things), it remained an 'unwritten law' and commandment of the Almighty to the faithful *only* of His Saints, designed to be enlarged as intelligence and fidelity to the laws of God increased, until the 12th day of July, 1843, when a *portion* of the revelation was written in the manner, and (at that time) for the purpose set forth in the statement of Elder Clayton, now submitted to the world, and as indicated in the revelation itself, as follows: 'And now, as pertaining to this law, verily, verily I say unto you, *I will reveal more unto you hereafter*, therefore let this suffice for the present.' (Verse 66.)

"Let all the Latter-day Saints *know*