



Type: Magazine Article

---

## Topics of the Times

Author(s): George Q. Cannon

Source: *Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 19, No. 7 (1 April 1884), pp. 106–108

Published by: George Q. Cannon & Sons

---

**Abstract:** Speaks concerning Martin Harris's visit with Professor Anthon and David Whitmer as one of the witnesses of the gold plates.

---

tion possessed by the several orders of animals are very numerous and dissimilar. For instance, many of the higher order of animals, such as horses, cattle, deer, buffalo and others, depend for safety upon their swiftness in flight. Some others, such as the lion, tiger, jaguar and others of the same family are so ferocious that they are seldom attacked, except by man; and even he, when well armed, finds it a dangerous business to hunt these formidable creatures. Such ponderous animals as the elephant, rhinoceros and hippopotamus are able to defend themselves by their great strength. But there are many creatures that are not able to protect themselves by flight nor by their muscular power. Some of these are furnished with very peculiar means with which to guard themselves. The porcupine, for example, is covered with sharp quills which serve very effectually to protect it. The hedgehog, a small animal that is common in Europe, is clothed with spines, which can be thrown erect, at the will of the animal; it also has power to roll itself into a ball by bringing its head, tail and paws together. When assailed, it assumes this position; it is then almost impossible for its foes to unroll it, as it presents nothing but pointed spines from all sides.

The snail and the tortoise again can draw themselves within their shells at the approach of danger. The shell of the latter is so strong that it takes a tremendous weight to crush it.

At the bottom of the ocean there are hundreds of varieties of shell-fish, all of which are securely protected in their pearly dwellings.

There is a species of fish called the cuttle-fish, which discharges from its mouth a black fluid, thus discoloring the water surrounding it, so that it cannot be seen by its pursuer.

Many birds, insects and quadrupeds are enabled to conceal themselves among the leaves and foliage of the trees and vegetation in which they live. It is a providential circumstance that the color of these creatures harmonizes with the tints of the vegetation with which they are surrounded. Birds of the most brilliant plumage are generally found in tropical climes, where the foliage is always of a bright color, while the appearance of our snowbirds and sparrows very much resembles the color of the bare branches of the trees in which they flit about.

Some tribes of men in Africa seem to take advantage of this mode of concealing themselves where they will not be recognized from their surroundings. A story is told of some of these black skinned natives of the "dark continent" being pursued by white men. When they reached a place where there were some trees and brush that had been burned, and being screened for the moment from their pursuers by an intervening hill, they at once assumed positions to resemble the trunks and broken branches of trees. Some stood up in as crooked a position as possible while others lay on their backs with their feet and hands raised. When those in pursuit arrived upon the spot they were at a loss to know how the savages had disappeared. They therefore resolved to take a rest and one of the number took off his hat and placed it upon what he supposed to be a charred branch of a tree. You might imagine his surprise when he found it to be the fist of one of the negroes whom he was after. The native could not refrain from laughing at the effectual deception practiced, and thus their scheme was frustrated.

It is impossible to describe all the ways which our Heavenly Father has provided for the animal kingdom to protect themselves from danger. If we will study the works of nature we

will find many evidences of the wisdom and goodness of the Creator.

But we have said nothing in regard to the subject chosen for this sketch. In the engraving we see a pack of jackals, eying very savagely the movements of the leopard, which has sprung upon the branch of a tree to get out of their reach. They have probably chased the leopard until he is nearly exhausted, and has sought refuge by mounting the tree. It seems a bold undertaking for animals like these to attack one that is so much stronger and ferocious. But it sometimes happens that such animals will unite in great numbers to chase down and kill a tiger or leopard. The latter animals prey upon smaller and less powerful ones, hence the weaker party sometimes assembles in a large body to get rid of an enemy by running him to death. Although a tiger is able to withstand the attack of any single animal, yet when assailed by a body of comparatively weak creatures it at once takes to flight for security. This plainly illustrates the principle that there is great strength in unity. A leopard is able to destroy any number of jackals if they are not united; but when they confederate to oppose him, he must yield. The strength of the Latter-day Saints as a people lies in their unity. Were it not for this they would be a weak and insignificant handful of people, but as it is they are dreaded by the world because they are so united.

## TOPICS OF THE TIMES.

BY THE EDITOR.

CALL UPON DAVID WHITMER—THE MANUSCRIPT OF THE BOOK OF MORMON—COPY OF THE CHARACTERS FROM THE PLATES—VISIT TO INDEPENDENCE.

ON my return from my visit to the East I took the opportunity of calling at Richmond, Ray County, Missouri, to see the last surviving witness of the three to whom the angel exhibited the plates of the Book of Mormon—David Whitmer.

From Kansas City I took train for Lexington Junction, and there changed cars for Richmond. Upon arriving at the station I inquired of a gentleman who was standing there if he knew Mr. Whitmer. He told me that his son, David J. Whitmer, would be there presently, as he owned the omnibus which carried passengers from the station to the hotels. In a short time the omnibus drove up, and the gentleman of whom I had made the inquiry pointed Mr. Whitmer out to me. I found him very courteous, and upon informing him who I was he appeared to have been expecting me, having heard through some of the papers that I was intending to make such a visit. He said his father was growing very feeble and he did not like to have him interviewed, but he would arrange for me to see him as soon as he could.

I drove to the hotel and after dinner Mr. Whitmer called upon me and conducted me to the residence of his father. On our way there he pointed out the track of a cyclone which had visited the town in 1878, and which had left their house, or rather the room in which the manuscript of the Book of Mormon was kept, in such a condition as to astonish all the people. The roof of the house was blown off; but nothing in this room was disturbed. The glass was not even broken. This was a cause of astonishment to the neighborhood, and the family evidently ascribe the protection of the room and its contents to the fact of the manuscript being there.

David Whitmer, who was born in January, 1805, is growing feeble, but his mind is bright and apparently unimpaired. He is rather slender now and probably stood in his early manhood five feet ten or perhaps five feet eleven inches in height. I noticed in shaking hands with him that the thumb of his right hand is missing and the hand has a long scar in the center from some injury that he had received. His hair is thin and he is rather bald. His nose is aquiline. His eyes black, or a dark brown. I noticed a slight German accent or tone in his talk. The Whitmer family is of German origin, his mother, I believe, having been born on the Rhine. He has evidently been a man who in his prime must have been quite interesting, and, I should think, fine looking. I was shown a likeness of his, painted in oil, when he was thirty-two years old. This makes him appear as handsome, of marked features, rather Jewish looking, with a head of thick hair inclined to curl.

After some little conversation he inquired of me if I would like to see the manuscript, and gave his son a key and told him to bring it in. I found it wonderfully well preserved, written in different hand-writings. He says they are the writings of Oliver Cowdery, Emma Smith, Martin Harris, and, perhaps, some of it that of his brother Christian, who assisted the Prophet Joseph. This is the manuscript, Mr. Whitmer says, from which the printers set the type of the Book of Mormon, and he pointed to me where it had been cut for convenience as "copy." I noticed some printers' marks on the manuscript. Still it seemed unusually clean for "copy" that printers had handled. I commented upon the cleanness of the manuscript, and he explained that it was in consequence of the care taken of it by Oliver Cowdery in watching it while in the printer's hands. It was fastened together not as a whole, but a few sheets—probably not more than a dozen—with woolen yarn, which he said was his mother's. I examined this manuscript with great interest and with a feeling of reverence. How many associations cluster around this! What wonderful changes have occurred since the few who were interested in this work labored in its preparation under the direction of the Prophet! Everything connected with the work then was in the future. Their minds were filled with anticipation concerning the greatness of the work the foundation of which they were assisting to lay. But how little conception after all, probably, these men had, with the exception of Joseph, of the wonderful character of the work to be accomplished. Thoughts like these passed through my mind while looking at this manuscript.

But there was a paper with this, which, if anything, was still more interesting than the manuscript. It was the characters drawn by Joseph himself from the plates for Martin Harris to take to show the learned professors, so wonderfully predicted in the 29th chapter of Isaiah. There were seven lines of these characters, the first four being about twice as large in size as the last three. In English Joseph had written over the lines the word "characters." He had spelled this word, "caractors." Though these characters had evidently been written for a long time, they were as clear and distinct as though just penned. Here was the very paper which Isaiah saw in vision about 2,600 years before, and which he called "the words of a book." How wonderfully God in His own way brings to pass the fulfillment of the predictions of his servants! To the ordinary person it might seem like a trifling thing to copy these characters and send them "to one that is learned;" but it was of sufficient importance in the mind of the Lord for him to inspire his servant Isaiah to exactly describe the occurrence. This shows how much importance

the Lord attached to these details connected with the foundation of this work and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

David Whitmer told me he was plowing when Joseph and Oliver came to him to speak about his being one of the witnesses. He already knew that the Lord had promised to show the plates to three witnesses. Joseph then informed him that he was chosen to be one of the three. They went out and sat upon a log, conversing upon the things to be revealed, when they were surrounded by a glorious light which overshadowed them. A glorious personage appeared unto them and exhibited to them the plates, the sword of Laban, the Directors which were given to Lehi (called Liahona), the Urim and Thummim, and other records. Human language cannot, he said, describe what they saw. He had had his hours of darkness and trial and difficulty since that period; but however dark upon other things his mind had been, that vision had ever been a bright and beautiful scene in his memory, and he had never wavered in regard to it. He had fearlessly testified of it always, even when his life was threatened. Martin Harris was not with them at the time Joseph and Oliver and he saw the angel; but he and Joseph afterwards were together, and the angel exhibited the plates to Martin Harris also, and he thus became a witness.

I spent several hours there, and to me they were very interesting. The old gentleman was able to stay in the room only a portion of the time; he had to retire to rest; but I had the company of his son, David J. Whitmer, and his nephew, John C. Whitmer (who is a son of Jacob Whitmer, one of the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon), while I remained.

The old jail in which the Prophet Joseph and other brethren were imprisoned at Richmond had long ago disappeared; a brick one had been built in its stead, and it had passed away, having been replaced by a stone building which now stands. The town contains, I was informed, about 3,500 inhabitants, including coal miners of whom there are a large number, there being good coal found here. I was not favorably impressed with the appearance of the country and improvements. There is not much enterprise shown, and the buildings are not of a superior kind. I have no doubt the soil is rich and produces plentifully, but there seems to be very little push among the people.

The next day I took train from Kansas City to Independence. Independence is in the midst of a very beautiful country. I was greatly pleased with the location of the city and the appearance of the country around it. It is well timbered and rolling. From Independence the view in every direction is very fine—to the north and east particularly. I walked all over the place and in doing so had the most peculiar feelings. The temple lot is about half a mile to the west of the public square on the outer edge of the town, the houses being somewhat scattered in the neighborhood. The lot has no improvements upon it excepting a wire fence and a few puny trees that somebody had planted recently. It is fenced somewhat in the shape of a flat-iron and has a road on each side of it. It appears strange that it should never have been built upon. I found the city from this point (notwithstanding it being the dead of Winter and the trees leafless) exceedingly fine. Though it is not a hill, yet the ground slopes off in every direction from this lot, particularly to the west, and less to the east than to any other point. A temple on this spot would occupy a very commanding position, and the view from it will be most magnificent; for whenever a temple shall be built the country around it will be beautifully improved.

But as it is, it called forth my admiration. Independence is about four miles distant from and to the south of the Missouri river. The city contains, I am told, about 6,000 or 7,000 people, and I was struck with the great number of churches for the size of the place. I was told that there were about 500 people living there who call themselves "Mormons." They seemed to get along very well with the rest of the inhabitants, for the reason, I was told, that their movements had a tendency to enhance the value of real estate there. The location of Independence is one of the most beautiful I ever saw, and in the Summer time the country must be very inviting. There is a park-like scenery about the place that makes it very attractive, and no end of fine locations for dwelling houses or public buildings. Independence itself, as a town, did not please me particularly. The streets are only moderately wide and the houses are mostly frame, though there are also some very fine brick structures. It is a growing city and good hopes are indulged in concerning its future. There will be great changes doubtless take place before the word of the Lord respecting the erection of a temple there will be fulfilled. Already the old mobaocratic families who helped to expel the Saints have been greatly thinned out, and but few are left.

## Our Theological Class.

### SESSION SIXTH.

BY URIEL.

WE will now take up the subject of repentance. To repent is to have a godly sorrow for wrongs done. We have all been guilty, more or less, of disobedience, covetousness (which is idolatry) fault-finding, bad habits, discontentedness, insolence, heresies, pride, self-will and lightmindedness, with many other sins that have prevented that purity of heart so essential to make a success in the science of theology. If we have been guilty of bad habits, repentance will cause us to quit them. We will by this principle cease to find fault and try to school ourselves to be satisfied, kind and considerate, to have regard for the feelings of others and to be as cheerful as possible under all circumstances.

Repentance improves our character and makes us more bright and useful in all the walks of life. We are given to understand that this principle was taught to our progenitor, Adam. God taught him the necessity of repentance, telling him that if he would turn unto Him, hearken unto His voice, believe, repent of all his transgressions and be baptized, that he should receive the choicest knowledge. Adam asked, "Why is it that man must repent?" The Lord answered, "Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the garden of Eden. Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world." The Lord said, "Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good. And it is given unto them to know good from evil: wherefore they are agents unto themselves, and I have given unto you another law and commandment.

Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in no wise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in His presence; for, in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is His name; and the name of His Only Begotten, is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge who shall come in the meridian of time" (see *Pearl of Great Price*, page 16).

This principle is taught throughout the whole history of God's dealings with the people who have lived upon this earth. Whenever they strayed from His ways, and drifted into idolatry, heresies and false doctrine, and He determined to make an end of sin by punishing the people for their wickedness, He revealed Himself to one of His children upon the earth, who had been before appointed unto this honor and sent him forth to preach faith and repentance, so that the inhabitants of the earth might be left without excuse.

Let us refer to the prayer that was offered up by Solomon at the dedication of the temple (*I. Kings viii*, 46-49), "If they sin against Thee (for there is no man that sinneth not), and Thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captives unto the land of the enemy, far or near; yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto Thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; and so return unto Thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies which led them away captive. \* \* \* Then hear Thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven." Solomon knew the value of this true repentance. It was not only to be sorry for wrongs done but turning unto the Lord with "all their heart, and with all their soul." This is the repentance that God taught (see *Ezekiel xviii*, 27), "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive. Because he considereth and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed." This is true repentance.

When John the Baptist, the fore-runner of Jesus Christ, commenced his ministry, in the "wilderness of Judea," he called upon the people to repent, saying, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In like manner, when Jesus Christ, after being "tempted of the devil," "began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (*Matthew iii*, 1, 2, and *iv*, 17). And when He called the twelve and sent them forth to preach, "They went out and preached that men should repent" (*Mark vi*, 12). Again, after His resurrection when He visited His disciples, as related by the historian Luke in his twenty-fourth chapter, from the forty-fifth verse, "Then opened He to their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things."

This principle was advocated throughout all the ministry of the Apostles and Elders who were preachers of righteousness and those who believed their preaching, repented and commenced living a better life. And in these last days, when the Father commenced His work by the restoration of the gospel, in a revelation given unto Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith, in April, 1829, the same principle was advocated. The Lord