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The Last Witness

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Abstract: A poem describing David Whitmer's witness and testimony of the Book of Mormon. It was approved by David Whitmer as a factual account of his experiences.

THE LAST WITNESS.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID WHITMER, IN AUGUST, 1883.

[It is worthy of historic mention that this poem was read and approved by David Whitmer. At a subsequent visit by the author, shortly before David's death, in the presence of his grandson who was, at the time of this writing, the custodian of the manuscript of the Book of Mormon and other relics, he expressed much pleasure in the receipt and reading of said poem, and accepted and acknowledged it as authentic in its entirety.—J. H. H.]

I met an aged man the other day,
In Richmond, Missouri, in County Ray,
His step was feeble, but his eye was bright,
And in it beamed intelligence and light.

He was a living witness with eleven,
Of ministrations from the courts of heaven;
Ten of said witnesses have passed away,
And he has now but little time to stay.

Three score and ten had bleached his aged head.
His Prophet, friends, lie numbered with the dead;
He on Missouri's battlefield alone
Was left to grapple with the dread cyclone.

It swept away his home, but left intact
The room and box with Nephite records packed,
And finished up its sacreligious raid
Within the old graveyard among the dead.

It ruthlessly destroyed the tombs, which care
Of sympathetic friends erected there;
And recklessly tore up the very ground
Where Oliver's remains might once be found.

Give me the quiet valleys of the West,
Of all our broad domain, in which to rest;
For there the righteous may escape the rod
Of retribution from Almighty God.

“Pray, is it true,” I asked, “that you have been
With heavenly messengers, and have seen
The records called the plates of brass and gold,
Of which Moroni in his book has told?

“ ’Tis said you saw an angel from on high,
While other witnesses were standing by,
And that the messenger commanded you
To testify that this strange work is true.

“Not questioning your statement that I’ve read,
Or what the other witnesses have said,
Yet, I would like to know from you direct,
If we have read or heard these things correct?”

He lifted up his voice and thus replied:
“My written statement I have ne’er denied,
I saw the angel and I heard his voice,
And wondrous things that made my heart rejoice.

“This interview was sought with earnest prayer,
The Prophet and Three Witnesses were there,
But Martin, conscience-strick’n declined to stay,
And wandered off alone to watch and pray.

“I do not know the angel’s rank nor name,
Who on this great and glorious mission came,
I know that he was clothed with power and might,
And was surrounded with effulgent light.

“No tongue can tell the glory and the power
That was revealed to us in that blest hour;
The plates of brass and gold the angel took
And placed before us like an open book.

“We saw the fine engravings on them, too,
And heard the voice declare, the book is true;
No power on earth could from our minds efface
The glorious vision of this trysting place.

“We’ve done as then commanded we should do,
And testified the ‘Mormon book’ is true;
And was translated by the power given
The Prophet Joseph from the God of heaven.

“Thousands of people have been here to see
The ‘copy’ Oliver has left with me;
The characters, moreover, Martin took
Professor Anthon – words of sacred book.

'Some visit me who 'Mormonism' hate;
Some ranking low, and some of high estate,
I tell them all, as I now say to you,
The Book of Mormon is of God, and true.

"In yonder room I have preserved with care
The printer's copy and the words so rare;
The very words from Nephi's sacred book
That Martin to Professor Anthon took.

"If this be not the truth, there is no truth,
And I have been mistaken from my youth;
If I'm mistaken, you may know from thence
That there's no God, no law, no life, no sense.

"I know there is a God—I've heard his voice,
And in his power and truth do still rejoice;
Though fools may ridicule and laugh today,
They yet will know the truth of what I say.

"I've suffered persecution at the hands
Of hireling preachers and their Christian bands;
I've braved their hatred, and have them withstood
While thirsting for the youthful Prophet's blood.

"They came four hundred strong, with visage bold,
And said, 'Deny this story you have told;
And by our sacred honor we'll engage
To save you from the mob's infuriate rage.'

"A mighty power came on me, and I spake
In words that made the guilty mobbers quake;
And trembling seized the surging crowd and fear,
But, left unharmed, I felt that God was near."

Thus spake the aged witness, of the way
The Lord commenced his work in this our day;
If men will not believe what God hath said,
They'll not believe should one rise from the dead.

Here was a man who in his youth, amazed,
Upon a messenger of heaven gazed;
Presenting plates of rich and varied size,
That filled his soul with wonder and surprise.

Not only he, but there were others, ten,
All truthful, brave and honorable men;
With same integrity have ever told
That they had seen the sacred plates of gold.

I asked a Gentile lawyer if he knew
 These witnesses as honest men, and true;
 "Well, yes," said he, "they're honest as the day,
 And I can vouch for every word they say.

"What David Whitmer says, the people know
 May be regarded as precisely so:
 He's not a man to shade the truth or lie,
 But on his word you safely may rely.

"And Mr. Cowdery, I have known him, too:
 More truthful man than he I never knew;
 And as a lawyer, he was shrewd and bright,
 And always made an honorable fight."

"Think you that Joseph Smith could them deceive,
 By forging plates could make these men believe
 That they had seen an angel of the Lord,
 And make them perjurers with one accord?"

"These men were model citizens," said he,
 "Men of sound judgment, honest, brave and free:
 Men who believed that Joseph Smith was right,
 And willing for his cause to boldly fight."

I asked a Gentile doctor, and was told
 That David Whitmer's word was good as gold.
 That "Cowdery was fairly idolized;"
 There names would ever be immortalized.

"Although it's all a mystery to me,
 I know that they were true as men can be,
 I'd stake upon their word my soul, my life,
 So would his daughter, my beloved wife.

"I seldom hear the so-called Christians preach,
 They nothing know, can therefore nothing teach,
 My wife has told me more of truth and God,
 Than taught by preachers in their grand Synod."

I interviewed an aged woman there,
 The doctor's guest, moreover, his belle-mere,*
 In youthful days, Miss Whitmer was her name,
 Now Mrs. Cowdery, of historic fame.

* Mother-in-law.

Nobility was stamped upon her face,
 Likeroyal signet of her father's race;
 And David's lineaments were plainly there,
 But moulded, it may be, with greater care.

She talked of thrilling scenes of early life,
 When Oliver and she were man and wife;
 When youthful prophets strove with all their might
 To spread abroad the Gospel's glorious light.

"I know," she said, "this work will never fail,
 Though all the nations may its friends assail,
 'Tis come, as I have heard the prophets say,
 To ever stand, though earth may pass away."

Such is the substance of an interview
 That tends to show this mighty work is true;
 And being true, 'tis folly to oppose
 The unseen power by which the Kingdom grows.

Some states have spent against it rage and fury,
 Despoiled its people without judge or jury;
 And forced them in the mountain vales to hide,
 And trust in Him who doth his people guide.

'Twas not the province of poor, erring man
 To formulate this great and glorious plan,
 Nor is it in the power of man to stay
 Its onward progress, or block up its way.

JAMES H. HART.

Bloomington, Idaho.

THE BOY WHO DOES NOT HAVE TO BE TOLD.

A tool is left out on the lawn; there is a rail off the fence; there is a lock broken from a door; there is a window pane gone somewhere. The boy who tends to these things because they need attending to without specific directions, is the boy who, other things being equal, is going to be in demand when he gets out into the great world; and it is the attention to little things and the habit of observation, which sees what needs to be done, and then does it, which makes exceedingly useful men and women. There will always be a position for such persons. There will always be a call to come up higher. It is in one sense a small thing to do little things without orders, but it is the doing of them that makes great captains, great engineers, great artists, great architects, great workers in any department, and it is the absence of this quality that makes commonplace men and women, who will always have to live under the dominion of petty orders, men and women who do nothing unless they are told to do it.