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Credibility of the Witnesses

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Abstract: This series gives a biographical summary about each of the Eleven Witnesses. Sjodahl quotes portions of published testimonies of the Three Witnesses. The third part focuses on Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer.

It is very important that the class work shall not be shortened by prolonged opening exercises.

Every school should march to class rooms in an orderly manner, teachers leading.

Closing Exercises.

Marching in the same orderly manner, the classes reunite after class work.

The closing song should leave with the students a spirit of enthusiasm and love for the Sunday-school.

The closing prayer may be spoken by a child, or other member of the school.

Aim of Sunday School Work.

In opening exercises and in class work, the aim of the Sunday-school should ever be kept in mind, which is the same as that of the Father in giving His Son, and of the Son in giving His life, that whosoever follows its teachings shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Its aim is to guide all our Father's children, and particularly those who are weak and faltering, in His footsteps, around the snares and pitfalls of life; to impress upon their hearts, faith in the Almighty and in the Redeemer so deep that lives of righteousness will result; to bring into this mortal existence joy, consolation and peace; and to prepare all its members for a glorious exaltation in the celestial presence of their Creator.

CREDIBILITY OF THE WITNESSES.

J. M. SJODAHL.

(Continued from page 647).

OLIVER COWDERY, while practicing law in Michigan, being outside of the Church had an opportunity to declare himself, and did so, on that point :

“A gentleman in Michigan said to him, when he was pleading a case, ‘Mr. Cowdery, I see your name attached to this book;* if you believe it to be true, why are you in Michigan?’ The gentleman read over the names of the witnesses, and said, ‘Mr. Cowdery, do you believe this book?’

“‘No sir,’ replied Oliver Cowdery.

“‘That is very well, but your name is attached to it, and you say here that you saw an angel and the plates from which this book is said to have been translated, and now you say that you do not believe it; which time were you right?’

“Mr. Cowdery replied, ‘There is my name attached to that book, and what I have there said that I saw, I know that I saw, and belief has

*The Book of Mormon.

nothing to do with it, for knowledge has swallowed up the belief I had in the work, since I know it is true."^{*}

Before a special conference at Kanesville, October 21, 1848, when Oliver Cowdery applied for membership in the Church after an absence of ten years, he said, in part, of the Book of Mormon:

"I beheld with my eyes and handled with my hands the gold plates from which it was translated. 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."

This was Oliver Cowdery's testimony to the last—his "Farewell Address" to the Saints and the world; for on March 3, 1850, he passed away in peace at Richmond, Mo., in the home of the Whitmers.†

Martin Harris lived the last five years of his sojourn on this earth at Clarkston, Cache Co., Utah. While there, visitors came from near and far to hear him speak of his early experiences, and he was never happier than when he had an opportunity to bear his testimony. One of his visitors was Elder Ole A. Jensen, then a resident of Clarkston, but later of Fairview, Wyoming. One day in the month of July, 1875, he and others heard the aged witness repeat his wonderful story. After having related how the Prophet and the three friends went into the grove to pray and how he did not see the heavenly messenger until Joseph had interceded for him, he said:

"The angel stood before me and said, 'Look!!' When I gazed upon him I fell to earth, but I rose to my feet again and saw the angel turn the golden leaves over and over, and I said, that is enough, my Lord and my God. Then I heard the voice of God say, 'The book translated from those plates is true and translated correctly.'"

He added, solemnly:

"As sure as you are standing here and see me, just as sure did I see the angel with the gold plates in his hand as he showed them to me. I have promised that I will bear witness of this book both here and hereafter."

In a letter to President George A. Smith, dated July 9, 1875, the day before the venerable witness to the Book of Mormon died, the writer, Martin Harris, Jr., says of his father, in part:

"He was taken ill a week ago yesterday with some kind of stroke. . . . 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. . . . The last audible words he has spoken were something about the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon."

In 1869 Elder Edward Stevenson met Martin Harris in Kirtland. Elder Stevenson writes concerning the interview, in part:

^{*}Brigham Young; *Jour. of Dis.*, Vol. 2, p. 258, Judge C. M. Nielsen of Salt Lake City, while on his mission in Michigan, met a gentleman who was present in the court room when this incident happened, and he related it to Elder Nielsen, substantially as President Young told it.

†Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History*, p. 490.

“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 had heard him bear thirty-six years previously. He said it was his duty to lift up his voice as he had been commanded to do in defense of the book he held in his hand.”*

David Whitmer, in 1881, as reported in the *Richmond Conservator*, of March 25, that year, made this statement :

“Those who know me best know well 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.”

“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.”

In 1886 David Whitmer said to Elder Edward Stevenson :

“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 before us.”

On September 7, 1878, David Whitmer, in the presence of Elder Joseph F. Smith, Elder Orson Pratt, and a number of other persons, including his eldest son, a grandson, and a son of Jacob Whitmer, bore this testimony :

“He [the angel] stood before us. Our testimony, as recorded in the Book of Mormon is strictly and absolutely true.”

David Whitmer passed away Jan. 25, 1888. The day following, the *Richmond Democrat* had this in its obituary :

“On the evening of Sunday, January 22, at 5:30, Mr. Whitmer called his family and a number of his friends to his bedside, and to them delivered his dying testimony. Addressing his attending physician, he said : Dr. Buchanan, I want you to say whether or not I am in my right mind. The doctor answered, ‘Yes, you are in your right mind, for I have just had a conversation with you.’

“He then directed his words to all who surrounded him, saying:

“‘Now you must all be faithful in Christ. I want to say to you all that the Bible and the Record of the Nephites (the Book of Mormon) are true, so you can say that you have heard me bear my testimony on my death bed. . . . My trust is in Christ for ever, worlds without end. Amen.’”†

It is, I hope, sufficiently clear from this, that the three witnesses, instead of at any time retracing or in any way modifying their testimony, re-affirmed it at all times. They maintained the truth of it in the face of ridicule and persecution. They passed through the very portals of death, bearing their testimony with joy, as long as their voices could be heard by mortal ear.

**Mill. Star*, Vol. 44, p. 78.

†*Mill. Star*, Vol. 50, p. 139.