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## Oliver Cowdery

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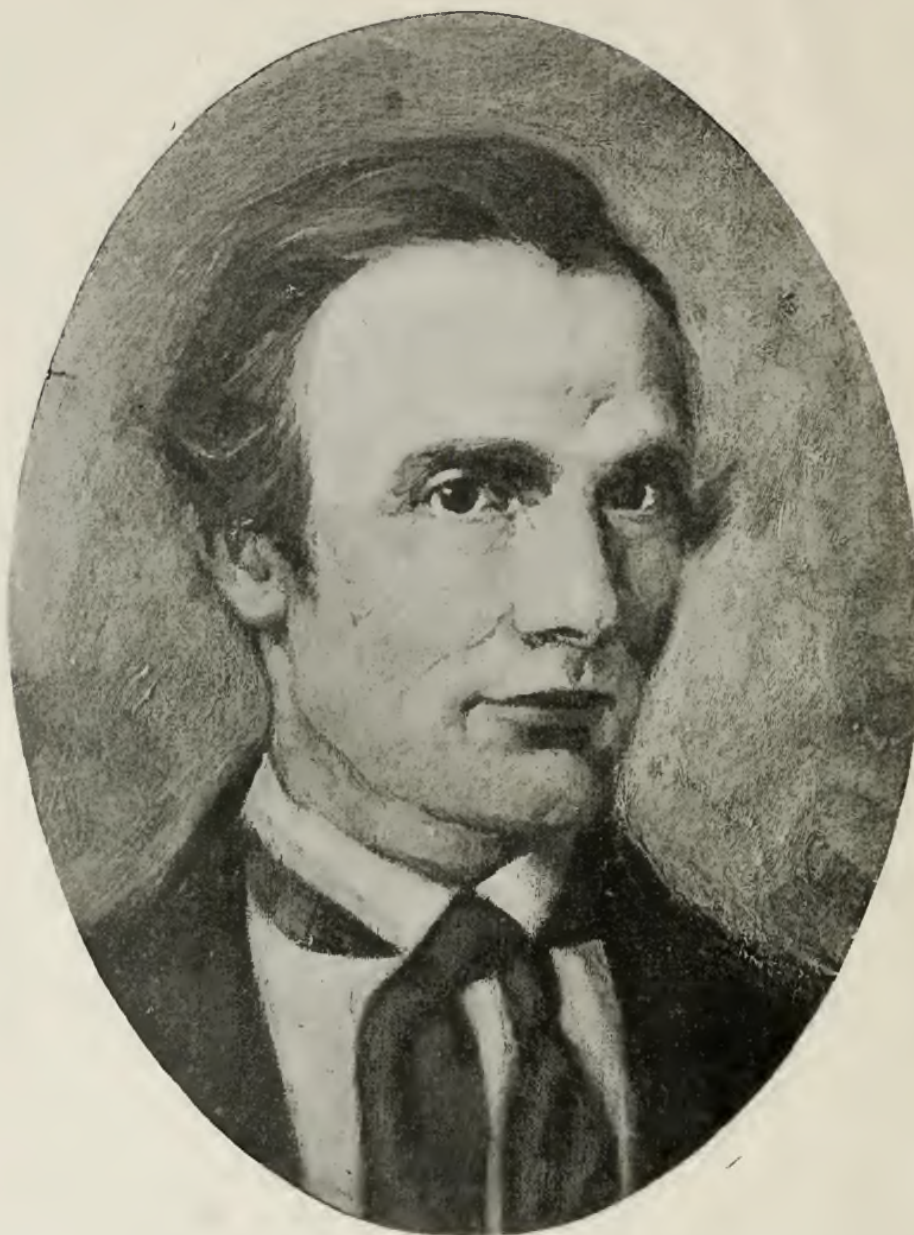
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**Abstract:** This article documents the connection of Oliver Cowdery with the Prophet Joseph Smith and the translation of the Book of Mormon.

## On the Visit of the Angel.

May 15, 1829.

"I shall not attempt to paint to you the feelings of this heart, nor the majestic beauty and glory which surrounded us on this occasion; but you will believe me when I say that earth, nor men, with the eloquence of time, cannot begin to clothe language in as interesting and sublime a manner as this holy personage. No; nor has this earth power to give the joy, to bestow the peace, or comprehend the wisdom which was contained in each sentence as it was delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit! Man may deceive his fellow-man; deception may follow deception, and the children of the wicked one may have power to seduce the foolish and untaught till naught but fiction feeds the many, and the fruit of falsehood carries in its current the giddy to the grave, but one touch with the finger of his love, yes, one ray of glory from the upper world, or one word from the mouth of the Savior from the bosom of eternity strikes it all into insignificance, and blots it forever from the mind! The assurance that we were in the presence of an angel; the certainty that we heard the voice of Jesus, and the truth unsullied as it flowed from a pure personage, dictated by the will of God, is, to me, past description, and I shall always look upon this expression of the Savior's goodness with wonder and thanksgiving while I am permitted to tarry, and in those mansions where perfection dwells and sin never comes, I hope to adore in that day which shall never cease."—OLIVER COWDERY in the *Messenger and Advocate*, 1834.



From the painting by J. Willard Clawson.

OLIVER COWDERY.

Born October 3, 1806; died March 3, 1850.

# IMPROVEMENT ERA.

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## Oliver Cowdery.

BY JUNIUS F. WELLS.

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Upwards of a year ago, I was informed by Miss Clarissa A. Bingham, of South Royalton, Vermont, whose mother was a Cowdery, that a genealogical history of the Cowdery family, descendants of William Cowdery, of Lynn, Massachusetts, 1630, was being prepared by Mrs. Mary Bryant Alverson Mehling, and I was brought into correspondence with the latter, and afterwards with Mr. A. E. Cowdrey, the publisher, and the Frank Allaben Genealogical Company, from whose press the work is now about to be issued.

I found that they had an account of the life of Oliver Cowdery—mostly newspaper clippings—which contained many inaccuracies, and utterly failed to do his memory justice.

After considerable correspondence and personal interviews with Mr. Cowdrey and Mr. Allaben, I was authorized to prepare a biographical sketch for the book, to be used in place of the matter they had in hand. The following article is the result, after undergoing considerable amendment to meet the views of the publisher, and to harmonize it with other matter contained in the history. It establishes upon unquestioned authorities the main facts of Oliver Cowdery's connection with Joseph Smith the Prophet, in the translation of the Book of Mormon, in the organ-



ization and establishment of the Church, and the circumstances of his leaving the Church and of his return to it. And it puts upon record, concisely and truthfully, so far as it goes, the principal events of his life, by which his name and fame are secured to all futurity, without disparagement. I have felt a great desire to have this done, and am grateful for the opportunity now presented.

The portrait used here is from a fine oil painting made by J. Willard Clawson, the artist, and is now hung in the Joseph Smith Memorial Cottage, Vermont. It is from the steel engraving which I had made, in 1884, of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon, published in *The Contributor* of that year. It took, at that time, a year, and considerable diplomacy and expense, to secure this portrait from the original daguerreotype; and I believe but for it the likeness of this remarkable man would now be lost to the world.

Oliver Cowdery deserves to be remembered and honored by the Latter-day Saints. There is no doubt he faltered and fell—depriving himself, whether he realized it at the time or not, of the authority, gifts and power which the Lord had conferred upon him. He, however, did not join the enemies of the people, nor affiliate with the apostate branches, that sought to establish themselves as the Church; and he never denied “The Testimony of Three Witnesses.” For this he had the promise of the Lord: “The gates of hell shall not prevail against you; for my grace is sufficient for you, and you shall be lifted up at the last day.” Who can doubt it? He was the first person baptized in this dispensation, and he died in the faith.

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In presenting a brief history of the life of Oliver Cowdery, and his prominent part in the founding and development of the “Mormon” Church, it seems best to state at once that the doctrine of polygamy, which characterized the “Mormons” after they went to Utah, was not promulgated until years after he had left them, nor openly practiced until after his death. He removed from Wells, Vermont, at a very early age. He obtained a fair education for the times, and migrated to Western New York, where

the schools were of the most primitive order, and engaged in the profession of school teaching. He was so employed in Palmyra, in the winter of 1828-29, and while thus engaged followed the common practice of "boarding around," which led him into the home of Joseph Smith, Sr. Here he first heard of the reputed finding of the gold plates by Joseph Smith, Jr., which the latter claimed had been shown him by an angel, a topic at that time on everybody's tongue, for miles around. Oliver Cowdery\* became interested, and announced his intention of visiting young Joseph Smith and investigating the matter for himself. This was the turning point in his career.

It is certainly historical that Oliver Cowdery wrote the manuscript of the Book of Mormon at the dictation of Joseph Smith, and made the printer's copy of the first edition. How his association with Joseph Smith began and continued during the period of the translation, is told by himself in one of a series of letters published in the *Messenger and Advocate*, at Kirtland, Ohio, in 1834, from which we quote in part as follows:

Near the time of the setting of the sun, Sabbath evening, April 5,

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\*OLIVER COWDERY,<sup>7</sup> (William, Jr.,<sup>6</sup> William,<sup>5</sup> Nathaniel,<sup>4</sup> Samuel,<sup>3</sup> Nathaniel,<sup>2</sup> William<sup>1</sup>), b. Oct. 3, 1806, at Wells, Rutland Co., Vt.; m. Dec. 18, 1832, in Jackson Co., Mo., to Elizabeth Ann Whitmer, b. Jan. 22, 1815, at Fayette, Seneca Co., N. Y.; dau. of Peter and Mary Whitmer. Residence (1887) South West City, Mo. He d. Mch. 3, 1850; was a teacher by profession; also practiced law.

Children of Oliver and Elizabeth:

- i Marie Louise, b. Aug. 11, 1835, at Kirtland, Ohio; m. Sept. 7, 1856, at Richmond, Mo., to Dr. Chas. Johnson, b. June 24, 1826. Residence (1887) South West City, Mo. We are indebted to Mrs. Johnson for the dates in this record of Oliver's family.
- ii Elizabeth Ann, d. May 9, 1837, at Kirtland, Ohio, aged 5 mos., 25 days.
- iii Josephine Rebecca, d. Oct. 21, 1844, at Tiffin, Ohio, aged 6 years, 7 mos.
- iv Oliver Peter, d. Aug. 13, 1840, at Tiffin, aged 5 days.
- v Adline Fuller, d. Oct. 13, 1844, at Tiffin, Ohio, aged 15 days.
- vi Julia Olive, d. July 3, 1846, at Tiffin, Ohio, aged 1 mo., 6 days.

1829, my natural eyes, for the first time, beheld this brother. He then resided in Harmony, Susquehanna county, Pennsylvania. On Monday, the sixth, I assisted him in arranging some business of a temporal nature, and on Tuesday, the seventh, commenced to write the Book of Mormon. . . . These were days never to be forgotten: to sit under the sound of a voice, dictated by the inspiration of heaven, awakened the utmost gratitude of this bosom! Day after day I continued uninterrupted, to write from his mouth as he translated with the Urim and Thummim, or, as the Nephites would have said, "Interpreters," the history or record called the Book of Mormon.

During the progress of this translation, that is from the beginning of April until some time in June, it was discovered, in the work itself, that there were to be three witnesses to whom the gold plates should be shown, and who were to testify concerning their origin and translation by inspiration, or, as it was expressed, "by the gift and power of God." Joseph Smith stated that he had been forbidden to show the plates to anyone except as thus provided. Greatly desiring to be one of these witnesses, Oliver Cowdery, together with David Whitmer and Martin Harris, who had also become associated with Joseph Smith, retired to the woods near by the home of Whitmer, in the town of Manchester, New York, for the purpose of uniting their prayers in supplication that they might be so favored. The following is told in the language of David Whitmer:

We suddenly beheld a dazzlingly bright light, which seemed to envelope the woods for a considerable distance around. Simultaneously with the light came a strange, entrancing influence, which permeated us so powerfully, that we felt chained to the spot, while we experienced a sensation of joy absolutely indescribable. At the same time there appeared in front of us a personage clothed in white, and near us a table containing a number of gold plates, some brass plates, the Urim and Thummim, the sword of Laban and other articles. We were requested to examine these things, and told that we must be witnesses of them to the world.

Soon after this they gave to the world the following proclamation, which was added to the last page of the Book of Mormon, and was published in the first edition. It has appeared on the first page after the title page of all subsequent editions of the book, which has been published in more than fifteen languages,



with hundreds of thousands of copies distributed throughout the world:

*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 a 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

There were two copies of the manuscript of the Book of Mormon, both written by Oliver Cowdery, one as dictated to him by Joseph Smith, and the other a copy made for the printer's use. After the book was published, the latter copy, showing the printer's marking, remained in the possession of Oliver Cowdery until shortly before his death, when he gave it into the custody of David Whitmer.



Like searcheth the records

And it came to pass that we took the plates of brass & the  
servant of Abah & departed into the wilderness and journeyed  
unto the tent of our father & it came to pass that after we  
came down into the wilderness unto our father behold  
he was filled with joy and also my mother sarrah was ex-  
ceeding glad for she truly had mourned because of us  
For she had supposed that we had perished in the wil-  
derness and she also had complained against my father  
+ his wife that he was a visionary man saying behold  
thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheri-  
tance & my sons are no more and we perish in the  
wilderness and after this manner of language had my  
mother complained against my father and it had come  
to pass that my father spake unto her saying i know  
that i am a visionary man for if i had not seen the  
wings of ge in a vision i should not have known the  
goodness of the land of promise but behold i have obtained  
a land of promise in the which things i do rejoice  
yea and i know that the lord will deliver my sons  
out of the hands of abah and bring them down again  
unto us in the wilderness and after this manner of  
language spake my father like comfort my mother sarrah concerning  
ours while we journeyed in the wilderness (to the  
land of gerizahem to obtain the record of the jews in  
when we had returned to the tent of my father - behold  
their joy was full and my mother was comforted and she  
spake saying now i know of a surety that the lord hath  
commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness  
yea and also know of a surety that the lord hath delivered  
my sons and delivered them out of the hands of abah  
and gave them power whereby they could accomplish  
the thing which the lord hath commanded them and after  
this manner of language did she speak and it came to pass  
that they did rejoice exceedingly and did other rejoicing  
12. And it came to pass that the lord and then came like

The original copy remained in charge of Joseph Smith, who deposited it, together with other valuable papers, coins and relics, in the corner-stone of the Nauvoo House, October 2, 1841. This building was designed for a house of entertainment, where strangers might be received. It was never completed, except the first story, but part of it was roofed over, and it was occupied for many years. About 1883 it was torn down, and the contents of the corner-stone disclosed. It was found that the papers were badly damaged by exposure to the water and air, but portions of the original manuscript were intact and quite legible. About twenty pages were secured by Mrs. Sarah M. Kimball, who had been present at the laying of the corner-stone. These were taken to Salt Lake City, and given to Joseph F. Smith, the president of the "Mormon" Church, who kindly permitted a photograph to be made from one of the pages (manuscript page 8) to be used expressly in this work. Our engraving is of this page, showing the page heading reading as follows:

LEHI SEARCHETH THE RECORDS.

And it came to pass that we took the plates of brass and the servant of Laban, and departed into the wilderness, and journeyed unto the tent of our father. And it came to pass that after we had come down into the wilderness unto our father, behold he was filled with joy, and also my mother Sariah, was exceeding glad, for she truly had mourned because of us: for she had supposed that we had perished in the wilderness; and she also had complained against my father, telling him that he was a visionary man; saying, Behold thou hast led us forth from the land of our inheritance, and my sons are no more, and we perish in the wilderness. And after this manner of language had my mother complained against my father. And it had come to pass that my father spake unto her, saying, I know that I am a visionary man; for if I had not seen the things of God in a vision, I should not have known the goodness of God, but had tarried at Jerusalem, and had perished with my brethren. But behold, I have obtained a land of promise, in the which things I do rejoice; yea, and I know that the Lord will deliver my sons out of the hands of Laban, and bring them down again unto us in the wilderness. And after this manner of language did my father Lehi comfort my mother Sariah, concerning us, while we journeyed in the wilderness up to the land of Jerusalem, to obtain the record of the Jews. And when we had returned to the tent of my father, behold their joy was



full, and my mother was comforted; and she spake, saying, Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath commanded my husband to flee into the wilderness; yea, and I also know of a surety that the Lord hath protected my sons, and delivered them out of the hands of Laban, and gave them power whereby they could accomplish the thing which the Lord hath commanded them. And after this manner of language did she speak. And it came to pass that they did rejoice exceedingly, and did offer sacrifice and burnt offerings unto the Lord; and they gave thanks unto the God of Israel. (1 Nephi 4: 38; 5: 1-9.)

The first edition of the Book of Mormon was published at Palmyra, in 1829, and on the sixth day of the following April, 1830, the "Mormon" Church was organized at Fayette, Seneca county, New York. There were but six members present, though about thirty converts had been baptized previous to this date. Among those present, and the first person who had been baptized in the new faith, May 15, 1829, was Oliver Cowdery. He was an energetic disciple, and very successful in proselyting. "On Sunday, April 11, 1830," the history of the "Mormon" Church says, "Oliver Cowdery preached the first public discourse that was preached by any of our number." He, together with Parley P. Pratt and others, led the first mission to the Lamanites, as the "Mormons" called the Indians, in the fall of 1830, and spring of 1831. They went first to the Catteraugus tribe, near Buffalo; thence to the Wyandottes, near Sandusky, Ohio; and thence to Western Missouri, where they visited the Shawnees, and spent a considerable time among the Delawares. Oliver Cowdery delivered a notable discourse, pointing to the origin of the Indians as told in the Book of Mormon, to the latter tribe, which was appreciatively replied to by its chief.\*

He was always connected with the printing and publishing department, more especially, while with the "Mormons," and was entrusted with the manuscript of the Book of Commandments and with money to be used for its publication; taking it, in company with John Whitmer, to Jackson county, Missouri, in November, 1831, where the Church printing office was established. He was appointed to assist in preparing this for the press, expecting to

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\* *History of the Church*, Vol. I, page 183.

publish an edition of three thousand copies in the following May. He was, about this time, appointed at the head of seven to preside over that part of the Church in Missouri, and spent about two years in Jackson county, remaining until the uprising that ultimately drove the "Mormons" from the county. His was the first name among those commanded to leave the county. In their extremity, his associates sent him as a special messenger back to Kirtland, Ohio, to confer with Joseph Smith and the other leaders regarding the conditions in Jackson county. He did not return, as the printing office had been destroyed, but was appointed to obtain a new outfit, and was given charge of the publication called *The Evening and Morning Star*, but changed in October, 1834, to *The Messenger and Advocate*, of which he was the editor.

From this time, until the spring of 1838, Oliver Cowdery was intimately associated with Joseph Smith in developing the organization of the "Mormon" Church. He and the other two witnesses, Whitmer and Harris, selected and ordained the twelve apostles, when they were called, in February, 1835, at Kirtland, Ohio. From this quorum came the governing authority, which has continued up to the present time—the first presidency of three, and the twelve apostles.

After the "Mormons" had been driven out of Jackson county, Missouri, northward into Caldwell and Daviess counties, and during the period of continual uprising of the people against the "Mormons," differences arose, and a number of the leading converts fell away. Among these were the Whitmers and Oliver Cowdery. The latter had married Elizabeth Ann Whitmer, a sister of David, the witness, in Kaw township, Jackson county, Missouri, on December 18, 1832. She was born at Fayette, New York, January 22, 1815.

Oliver Cowdery's separation from the "Mormons" came about through dissensions with the local leaders, over questions of policy relating to their material or temporal affairs and authority; and also through prevalent jealousies and strife that had taken opportunity to work their utmost evil from the confusion incident to the breaking up and driving of the people from county to county and ultimately from the state. The continued discord resulted



finally in charges preferred by Seymour Brunson, April 11, 1838, which are here given in full, together with his reply:

*To the Bishop and Council of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:*

I prefer the following charges against President Oliver Cowdery:

First—For persecuting the brethren by urging on vexatious law-suits against them, and thus distressing the innocent.

Second—For seeking to destroy the character of President Joseph Smith, Jr., by falsely insinuating that he was guilty of adultery.

Third—For treating the Church with contempt by not attending meetings.

Fourth—For virtually denying the faith by declaring that he would not be governed by any ecclesiastical authority or revelation whatever, in his temporal affairs.

Fifth—For selling his lands in Jackson county, contrary to the revelations.

Sixth—For writing and sending an insulting letter to President Thomas B. Marsh, while the latter was 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.

Seventh—For leaving his calling to which God had appointed him by revelation, for the sake of filthy lucre, and turning to the practice of law.

Eighth—For disgracing the Church by being connected in the bogus business, as common report says.

Ninth—For dishonestly retaining notes after they had been paid; and finally, for leaving and 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.

#### OLIVER COWDERY'S REPLY.

FAR WEST, MISSOURI, April 12, 1838.

DEAR SIR:—I received your note of the 9th inst., on the day of its date, containing a copy of nine charges preferred before yourself and council against me, by elder Seymour Brunson.

I could have wished that those charges might have been deferred until after my interview with President Smith; but as they are not, I must waive the anticipated pleasure, with which I had flattered myself of an understanding, on those points, which are grounds of different opinions on some Church regulations, and others which personally interest myself.

The fifth charge, reads as follows: "For selling his lands in Jackson county, contrary to the revelations." So much of this charge, "for selling his lands in Jackson county," I acknowledge to be true, and believe that a large majority of this Church have already spent their judgment on that act, and pronounced it sufficient to warrant a disfellowship; and also that you have concurred in its correctness, consequently, have no good reason for supposing you would give any decision contrary.

Now, sir, the lands in our country are allodial in the strictest construction of that term, and have not the least shadow of feudal tenures attached to them, consequently they may be disposed of by deeds of conveyance, without the consent or even approbation of a superior.

The fourth charge is in the following words, "For virtually denying the faith by declaring that he would not be governed by any ecclesiastical authority nor revelation whatever in his temporal affairs."

With regard to this, I think I am warranted in saying the judgment is also passed, as on the matter of the fifth charge, consequently I have no disposition to contend with the Council; this charge covers simply the doctrine of the fifth, and if I were to be controlled by other than my own judgment, in a compulsory manner, in my temporal interests, of course could not buy or sell without the consent of some real or supposed authority. Whether that clause contains the precise words, I am not certain—I think, however, they were these: "I will not be influenced, governed or controlled in my temporal interests by any ecclesiastical authority or pretended revelation whatever, contrary to my own judgment." Such being still my opinion, shall only remark that the three great principles of English liberty, as laid down in the books, are "the right of personal security, the right of personal liberty, and the right of private property." My venerable ancestor was among the little band who landed on the rocks of Plymouth in 1620—with him he brought those maxims, and a body of those laws which were the result and experience of many centuries, on the basis of which now stands our great and happy government; and they are so interwoven in my nature, have so long been inculcated into my mind, by a liberal and intelligent ancestry, that I am wholly unwilling to exchange them for anything less liberal, less benevolent, or less free.

The very principle of which I conceive to be couched in an attempt to set up a kind of petty government, controlled and dictated by ecclesiastical influence, in the midst of this national and state government. You will, no doubt, say this is not correct; but the bare notice of these charges over which you assume the right to decide is, in my opinion, a direct

attempt to make the secular power subservient to Church direction—to the correctness of which I cannot in conscience subscribe—I believe that principle never did fail to produce anarchy and confusion.

This attempt to control me, in my temporal interests, I conceive to be a disposition to take from me a portion of my Constitutional privileges and inherent right—I only respectfully ask leave, therefore, to withdraw from a society assuming they have such right.

So far as relates to the other seven charges, I shall lay them carefully away, and take such a course in regard to them as I may feel bound by my honor, to answer to my rising posterity.

I beg you, sir, to take no view of the foregoing remarks other than my belief in the outward government of this Church. I do not charge you, or any other person who differs with me on these points, of not being sincere; but such difference does exist, which I sincerely regret.

With considerations of the highest respect, I am your obedient servant,

OLIVER COWDERY.

*Rev. Edward Partridge, Bishop of the Church of Latter-day Saints:*

The Bishop and High Council, assembled at the Bishop's office, April 12, 1838. After the organization of the Council, the above charges of the 11th instant were read, also the letter from Oliver Cowdery, as will be found recorded in the Church records of the city of Far West, Book A. 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.\*

At this period Oliver Cowdery's connection with the "Mormon" people ceased, though he never retracted his testimony concerning their rise and progress. He remained away from them for eleven years, or until about a year before his death. He lived a part of this time in Ohio, Michigan and Wisconsin, practicing law. At one time he was chosen prosecuting attorney, and, on a certain occasion, while prosecuting a criminal, the opposing attorney taunted him with his former connection with the "Mormons," and as being a witness to the Book of Mormon, hoping thus to break down his influence with the jury. He replied that he was the same man who had given his testimony to the Book of Mormon;

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\* *History of the Church*, Vol. III, pages 16, 17, 18.



that it had been before the world for years, and that he stood by it, that he could not deny it. His courage in upholding this position, contrary to his opponent's expectation, appealed favorably, rather than otherwise, to the jury, and he won his case.

The death of Joseph Smith, at Carthage, Illinois, June 27, 1844, had been followed by the expulsion of the "Mormons" from the state of Illinois, in 1846, and their migrating to the Missouri river and the Rocky mountains in 1847 and 1848. On February 27, 1848, Oliver Cowdery addressed a letter to the leaders of the "Mormon" Church, from Elkhorn, Walworth county, Wisconsin, indicating his intention of rejoining them. This he postponed until the fall, however, when he proceeded from his home in Wisconsin to Kanesville (Council Bluffs), on the Missouri river. The main body of the "Mormons" had gone on their wonderful pilgrimage to the Rocky mountains. A large congregation, however, remained there, awaiting an opportunity to proceed. They were under the presidency of Orson Hyde, one of the original twelve apostles, who had been ordained by Oliver Cowdery and his associate witnesses of the Book of Mormon. To this congregation Oliver Cowdery came in October, 1848. The story of his return has been told by many persons who were present. It is given in a letter written by George A. Smith, on October 31, 1848, to Orson Pratt, and published in the *Millennial Star*, Vol. 11, in 1849:

We had meetings on Saturday and Sunday, which were designed as a kind of finish to our conference. Although the weather was very unfavorable, we had nearly two thousand people on the Sabbath (October 29, 1848). Brother Hyde gave a great deal of instruction. . . . Oliver Cowdery, who had just arrived from Wisconsin with his family, upon being invited, addressed the meeting. He bore testimony, in the most positive terms, to the truth of the Book of Mormon, the restoration of the priesthood to the earth, and the mission of Joseph Smith as the prophet of the last days, and told the people if they wanted to follow the right path, to keep to the main channel of the stream; "where the body of the Church goes, there is the authority, and all those 'lo heres' and 'lo theres,' have no authority, but these people have the true and holy priesthood; for the angel said unto Joseph Smith, Jr., in my hearing, that this priesthood shall remain on earth unto the end." His testimony produced quite a sensation among the gentlemen present who did not belong to the Church, and it was gratefully received by all the Saints. Last evening myself



and Brother Hyde spent with Brother Cowdery. He told us he had come to listen to our counsel, and would do as we told him. He had been cut off from the Church by a Council; had withdrawn himself from it; stayed away eleven years; and now came back, not expecting to be a leader, but wished to be a member and have a part among us. He considered that he ought to be baptized, and did not expect to return without it. He said that Joseph Smith had fulfilled his mission faithfully before God until death. He was determined to rise with the Church, and if it went down, he was willing to go down with it. I saw him today; told him that I was going to write to you. He sends his respects to you; he says, "Tell Brother Orson I am advised by the brethren to remain here this winter, and assist Brother Hyde in the printing office, and as soon as I get settled I will write him a letter."

Soon after this, the matter of his return to the Church was taken up by the High Council, and was thoroughly discussed by its members. Some thought that he could not possibly be sufficiently repentant to entitle him to return; but Orson Hyde stood up for him—declared that the past with all its offenses should be forgotten and forgiven, and that he should be restored to full fellowship. This view prevailed, and he was so received, by re-baptism. Orson Hyde wrote of this circumstance to Wilford Woodruff, then at Cambridge, Massachusetts. Elder Woodruff's letter, sent to Orson Pratt, and published in the *Millennial Star*, Vol. 11, in 1849, contained the following:

I received a letter from Elder Hyde saying that Oliver Cowdery had come to the Bluffs with his family; had made satisfaction to the Church, who had voted to receive him into the Church by baptism; and Elder Hyde was expected to baptize him the next day. He was assisting Elder Hyde to put the press in operation for printing; expected to send forth the *Frontier Guardian* soon. I was truly glad to hear this, as Oliver Cowdery was the first person baptized into the Church, under the hands of Joseph, and is capable of doing good in the kingdom of God. I was truly glad to hear he had returned to the fold.

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Since the above was written, I have had opportunity to examine the general report of the presiding authorities at Kanesville, covering incidents from October 14, 1848, to April 5, 1849, sent to President Brigham Young, and signed by Orson Hyde, George A. Smith and Ezra T. Benson, and Robert Campbell, Clerk.

From it I have quoted the following to complete the historical account of Oliver Cowdery's return to the Church:

About this time Brother Phineas Young and Oliver Cowdery arrived. At the request of President Hyde, Brother Oliver Cowdery made an address to the congregation. Bore his testimony to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the truth of the work in the last days, in the same manner as he used to do, previous to his apostasy. He said that he was surprised to see such a sea of strange faces before him, and all brethren; that the priesthood was with this people, and the Twelve were the only men that could lead the Church after the death of Joseph; and that every man that wished to do right would follow the main channel of the stream. And requested the Saints to go on in the good way, and seemed to possess an excellent spirit. \* \* \* Conference adjourned. A few days after Brother Oliver called on us. We had a lengthy and agreeable interview. He wished to know our feelings towards him. Said he was willing to take our counsel. Had not come for place or office, but only wished to be one among us, and live with the Saints. And if "Mormonism" goes up, I want my name to go up with it, and if it goes down, my name goes down with it, and I am willing it should. We advised him to be rebaptized. He said he had been cut off from the Church by a bishop and twelve councilors. Had been out of it a number of years, and considered it right he should return by the door. He made some explanations in relation to the letter which appeared in the *Ensign of Liberty*. We invited him to attend the High Priests Quorum on the first Sunday in November, (November 5th), the High Council and Bishop Knight being present. Brother Cowdery made some statements, wishing to be received back into the Church. Councilor William Snow, president of the High Priests quorum wished some explanations in relation to certain items which appear in a letter over the signature of Oliver Cowdery, in relation to himself and David Whitmer; and named the following: "True it is our right gives us the head." \* \* "We have the authority and do hold the keys." He (Oliver) stated that this was a private letter to his brother-in-law David Whitmer, and never was intended for the public eye, and was printed without his consent and knowledge; and that since that time has changed his views on the subject. President Snow enquired what had produced that change, as he presumed the letter contained his sentiments at the time it was written, as it was to a confidential friend. Brother Oliver replied: "When I wrote that letter I did not know of the revelation which says, that the keys and power conferred upon me, were taken from me and placed upon the head of Hyrum Smith, and it was that revelation

which changed my views on this subject.\* I have not come to seek place, nor to interfere with the business and calling of those men who have borne the burthen, since the death of Joseph. I throw myself at your feet, and wish to be one of your number, and be a mere member of the Church, and my mere asking to be baptized is an end to all pretensions to authority." He was received by the unanimous vote of the quorum, and all present; and was subsequently baptized and confirmed by President Orson Hyde.

In reply, the First Presidency wrote President Orson Hyde, July 20, 1849, the original letter being in the handwriting of Daniel H. Wells:

We understand that Brother Cowdery has come into the Church, and that his feelings are right. We are glad of this, and trust he will ever more be one with us. We would like to have him accompany Brother Babbitt to Washington, and for him to receive assistance from the brethren through your influence to accomplish this object.

After finishing his work in setting up the press and starting the *Frontier Guardian*, Oliver Cowdery visited his wife's relatives, the Whitmers, and other friends. Upon the way, he stopped in Upper Missouri, and spent some time with Samuel W. Richards, to whom he repeated his testimony, in a signed statement, January 13, 1849. He was not well at that time, and his malady, thought to be incipient pneumonia, developed into consumption, from which he died at Richmond, Ray county, Missouri, on March 3, 1850.

Phineas H. Young, who married Oliver's sister, was present at his deathbed, and in a letter addressed to President Brigham Young, in the Great Salt Lake Valley, from Kaneshville, April 25, 1850, he says: "Brother Oliver Cowdery is dead. His last testimony will never be forgotten by many. He said to his friends there was no salvation but in the Valley, and through the Priesthood there."

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\* That he [Hyrum] may act in concert also with my servant Joseph, \* \* \* and be crowned with the same blessing, and glory, and honor, and Priesthood, and gifts of the Priesthood, that once were put upon him that was my servant Oliver Cowdery.—Doc. and Cov. 124: 95.