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Oliver Cowdery

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Abstract: This series presents a sketch of the life of Oliver Cowdery, in an attempt to dispel inaccuracies previously published. Though he faltered and fell, he should be honored, for he never joined the Church's enemies nor did he deny his testimony of the Book of Mormon as the work of the Lord. Cowdery was the scribe for most of the Book of Mormon and was one of the Three Witnesses. The third and final part discusses Cowdery's return to the Church and later life.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS'
MILLENNIAL STAR.

[ESTABLISHED 1840.]

“Half truths are often more calumnious than whole falsehoods. It is not even necessary that a word should be distinctly uttered; a dropped lip, an arched eyebrow, a shrugged shoulder, a significant look, an incredulous expression of countenance, nay, an emphatic silence, may do the work.”

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OLIVER COWDERY.

BY JUNIUS F. WELLS.

(Concluded from page 229.)

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.”

Since the above was written, I have had opportunity to examine

the general report of the presiding authorities at Kaneshville, 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 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 evermore 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."

* 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.

THE WAY OF THE LIGHT-BEARER.

To those who are engaged in misrepresenting and slandering the Latter-day Saints we commend the following taken from a recent issue of the *Twentieth Century Magazine*, by the editor, Mr. B. O. Flower:

"A nation may boast of the wealth and splendor of Babylon,