

## CHAPTER XII.

### DAVID WHITMER.

---

DAVID WHITMER, the second of the three witnesses, still lives. His home is in Richmond, Ray Co., Missouri. He left the Church during the dark days of persecution in Missouri and has never returned to the communion of the Saints. He even to this day holds some very bitter feelings toward the Prophet Joseph, whom he wrongfully imagines endeavored to injure him. But notwithstanding these feelings and the fact that he is not a member of the Church he has all the days of his life testified to the divine origin of the Book of Mormon. His word in this respect has never wavered.

Of late various testimonies given to visitors or written by David Whitmer have been widely published in the public newspapers. We subjoin extracts from one or two of these. The first is a portion of a statement signed by himself and dated at Richmond, March 19th, 1881:

*“Unto all Nations, Kindreds, Tongues and People, unto whom these presents shall come:*

“It having been represented by one John Murphy, of Polo, Caldwell county, Missouri, that I, in a conversation with him last Summer, denied my testimony as one of the three witnesses to the ‘Book of Mormon:’

“To the end, therefore, that he may understand me now, if he did not then; and that the world may know the truth, I wish now, standing as it were, in the very sunset of life, and in the fear of God, once for all to make this public statement:

“That I have never at any time, denied that testimony or any part thereof, which has so long since been published with that book, as one of the three witnesses. Those who know me best well know 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.

“He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear;’ it was no delusion; what is written, is written, and he that readeth, let him understand.”

The following are portions of a letter to the *Chicago Times*, detailing the visit of one of its correspondents to Mr. Whitmer, on October 14th, 1881. The statements are given as those of David Whitmer, and though exceedingly correct as a whole, sometimes, owing to the correspondent’s want of familiarity with the subject, they make the speaker fall into slight blunders on historical and other points. He writes:

“The plates from which the book was translated, supposed to be gold, were found in the latter part of the year 1827 or 1828, prior to the acquaintance on Mr. Whitmer’s part, with Joseph Smith, and he was loth to believe in their actuality, notwithstanding the community in which he lived (Ontario county, New York), was alive with excitement in regard to Smith’s finding a great treasure, and they informed him that they knew that Smith had the plates, as they had seen the place that he had taken them from, on the hill Cumorah, about two miles from Palmyra, N. Y. It was not until June, 1828, that he met the future Prophet, who visited at his father’s house, and while there completed the translation of the Book of Mormon, and thus he became conversant with its history, having witnessed Smith dictate to Oliver Cowdery the translation of the characters that were inscribed on the plates, said by Mr. Anthon, our Egyptian scholar, to resemble the characters of that ancient people. Christian Whitmer, his brother, occasionally assisted Cowdery in writing, as did Mrs. Joseph Smith, who was a Miss Hale before she was married.

“In regard to finding the plates, he was told by Smith that they were in a stone casket, and the place where it was deposited, in the hill Cumorah, was pointed out to him by a celestial personage, clad in a dazzling white robe, and he was informed by it that it was the history of the Nephites, a nation that had passed away, whose founders belonged to the days of the tower of Babel. The plates which Mr. Whitmer saw were in the shape of a tablet, fastened with three rings, about one-third of which appeared to be loose, in plates, the other solid, but with perceptible marks where the plates seemed to be sealed, and the guide that pointed it out to Smith very impressively reminded him that the loose plates alone were to be used, the sealed portion was not to be tampered with.

“After the plates had been translated, which process required about six months, the same heavenly visitant appeared and reclaimed the gold tablets of the ancient people informing Smith that he would replace them with other records of

the lost tribes that had been brought with them during their wanderings from Asia, which would be forthcoming when the world was ready to receive them. At that time Mr. Whitmer saw the tablets, gazed with awe on the celestial messenger, heard him speak and say: "Blessed is the Lord and he that keeps His commandments;" and then, as he held the plates and turned them over with his hands, so that they could be plainly visible, a voice that seemed to fill all space, musical as the sighing of a wind through the forest, was heard, saying: "What you see is true; testify to the same." And Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer, standing there, felt, as the white garments of the angel faded from their vision and the heavenly voice still rang in their ears, that it was no delusion—that it was a fact, and they so recorded it. In a day or two after, the same spirit appeared to Martin Harris while he was in company with Smith, and told him also to bear witness to its truth, which he did, as can be seen in the book. Harris described the visitant to Whitmer, who recognized it as the same that he and Cowdery had seen.

"The tablets or plates were translated by Smith, who used a small oval or kidney-shaped stone, called Urim and Thummim, that seemed endowed with the marvelous power of converting the characters on the plates, when used by Smith, into English, who would then dictate to Cowdery what to write. Frequently one character would make two lines of manuscript while others made but a word or two words. Mr. Whitmer emphatically asserts, as did Harris and Cowdery, that while Smith was dictating the translation he had *no manuscript notes or other means of knowledge*, save the Seer stone and the characters as shown on the plates, he being present and cognizant how it was done.

"In regard to the statement that Sidney Rigdon had purloined the work of one Spaulding, a Presbyterian preacher, who had written a romance entitled the 'Manuscript Found,' Mr. Whitmer says there is no foundation for such an assertion. The 'Book of Mormon' was translated in the Summer of 1829, and printed that Winter at Palmyra, New York, and was in circulation before Sidney Rigdon knew anything concerning the Church of Christ, as it was known then. His attention was specially brought to it by the appearance at his church, near Kirtland, Ohio, in the Fall of 1830, of Parley Pratt and Oliver Cowdery, he being at that time a Reformed or Christian preacher, they having been sent west by the Church in New York during that Summer as evangelists, and they carried with them the printed book, the first time that he knew such a thing was in existence.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Whitmer emphatically asserts that he has heard Rigdon, in the pulpit, and in private conversation, declare that

the 'Spaulding story,' that he had used a book called the 'Manuscript Found' for the purpose of preparing the 'Book of Mormon,' was as false as were many other charges that were then being made against the infant Church, and he assures me that the story is as untruthful as it is ridiculous.

"In his youth Joseph Smith was quite illiterate, knew nothing of grammar or composition, but obtained quite a good education after he came west; was a man of great magnetism, made friends easily, was liberal and noble in his impulses, tall, finely-formed and full of animal life, but sprang from the most humble circumstances. The first good suit of clothes he had ever worn was presented to him by Christian Whitmer, brother of David.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mr. Whitmer's beliefs have undergone no change since his early manhood; he has refused to affiliate with any of the various branches that have sprung up through false teachings, and rests his hopes of the future 'in the teachings of Christ, the apostles and the prophets, and the morals and principles enunciated in the scriptures; that the Book of Mormon is but the testimony of another nation concerning the truth and divinity of Christ and the Bible, and that is his rock, his gospel and his salvation.' Seeing, with him, is believing. He is now as firm in the faith of the divinity of the book that he saw translated as he was when the glory of the celestial visitant almost blinded him with the gleam of his glowing presence, fresh from the Godhead; and the voice, majestic, ringing out from the earth to the mighty dome of space, still lingers in his ears like a chime of silver bells."

The *Deseret Evening News* at the time of the publication of his letter corrected some of the errors of this correspondent. We cannot do better than use its language :

"The first [error] is that the founders of the Nephites 'belonged to the tower of Babel.' The Nephites sprang from Nephi, the son of Lehi, who came to this land from Judea, in the reign of King Zedekiah. The Jaredites, whose history is briefly given in the Book of Mormon, were a distinct and preceding race; they descended from a colony that peopled this country after the dispersion from Babel. The term 'lost tribes' is also incorrect, as the Nephites had no identity with the lost tribes of Israel, being descendants of Joseph, the son of Jacob.

"The next mistake is that 'In a day or two after David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery saw the angel and the plates, the same spirit appeared to Martin Harris.' The truth is that it was shortly after, on the same day. Martin Harris was

with Joseph, Oliver and David, but there was no answer to their prayers, until Martin, who felt that his lack of faith was a hindrance, withdrew. Then the angel appeared, and after the vision closed, Joseph Smith went to the place where Martin Harris was, a little distance off, and joined with him in prayer, when the angel again appeared, and Martin rejoicingly bore testimony that he had seen and heard as the others.

“The next error is that the seer stone which Joseph used in the translation ‘was called Urim and Thummim.’ The instrument thus denominated was composed of two crystal stones ‘set in the two rims of a bow.’ The seer stone was separate and distinct from the Urim and Thummim. The latter was delivered to the angel as well as the plates after the translation was completed; the former remained with the Church and is now in the possession of the President.”

A still later interviewer gives the following as David Whitmer’s testimony to the party of visitors of which the writer was one :

“We asked him if his testimony was the same now as it was at the time the Book of Mormon was published regarding seeing the plates and the angel. He rose to his feet, stretched out his hands and said: ‘These hands handled the plates, these eyes saw the angel, and these ears heard His voice; and I know it was of God.’”

Our concluding extract is a statement made by David Whitmer to Elders Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith, when these brethren visited him at his home in September, 1878.

In answer to Elder Pratt’s question, if he remembered the date he saw the plates, he answered :

“It was in June, 1829—the latter part of the month, and the eight witnesses saw them, I think, the next day or the day after. Joseph showed them the plates himself, but the angel showed us [the three witnesses] the plates, as I suppose to fulfill the words of the book itself. Martin Harris was not with us at this time; he obtained a view of them afterwards [the same day]. Joseph, Oliver, and myself were together when I saw them. We not only saw the plates of the Book of Mormon but also the brass plates, the plates of the Book of Ether, the plates containing the records of the wickedness and secret combinations of the people of the world down to the time of their being engraved and many other plates. The fact is, it was just as though Joseph, Oliver and I were sitting just here on a log when we were overshadowed by a light. It was not like the light of the sun nor like that of a fire, but more glorious and beautiful. It extended away around us, I cannot tell how

far, but in the midst of this light about as far off as he sits (pointing to John C. Whitmer, sitting a few feet from him), there appeared, as it were, a table with many records or plates upon it besides the plates of the Book of Mormon; also the sword of Laban, the directors—*i. e.* the ball which Lehi had, and the Interpreters. I saw them just as plain as I see this bed (striking the bed beside him with his hand), and I heard the voice of the Lord as distinctly as I ever heard anything in my life, declaring that the records of the plates of the Book of Mormon were translated by the gift and power of God.'

"Elder Pratt then asked, 'Did you see the angel at this time?'

"David Whitmer answered, 'Yes; he stood before us. Our testimony as recorded in the Book of Mormon is strictly and absolutely true, just as it is there written.'"



## CHAPTER XIII.

### MARTIN HARRIS.

**I**T is probable that many of our readers have seen Martin Harris.\* It is but a few years since he died in our midst. Though his name is signed last to the testimony of the three witnesses he was considerable older than the other two.

Martin Harris was the instrument used by the Lord to enable Joseph to print the Book of Mormon. He supplied the funds necessary to pay the printer. All of this was repaid to him, by Joseph, and as he said, "more too." We mention this because it has been falsely asserted that Joseph made Martin Harris his dupe and never paid back the money he borrowed of him.

Brother Harris was a well-to-do farmer at the time he became acquainted with the Prophet Joseph. He was respected and esteemed by his neighbors, but like all the others who had anything to do with the publication of the Book of

---

\*—Brother M. Harris, accompanied by Elder E. Stevenson reached Ogden on the 29th of August, 1870; he afterwards resided until his death at the home of his son in Smithfield, Cache county.