

OLIVER COWDERY

B. H. Roberts, Comprehensive History of the Church, Vol.1, Ch.11, p.140 - p.142

In an affidavit given before A. A. Dixon, notary public in Salt Lake City, Judge C. M. Nielsen, of Utah, under date of 3rd of December, 1909, states that while on a mission in the state of Minnesota, a Mr. Barrington, a successful farmer of that state related to him the following incident in the career of Oliver Cowdery that happened in the state of Michigan, when Mr. Barrington was about twenty years of age. A murder trial was in progress in the town where Mr. Barrington then lived, and walking along the main street one day Mr. B. "noticed a great many people walking up to the county court house, and not knowing what was going on there," he says, "I became inquisitive, and made up my mind to go there also, and on entering the court room I found that the same was crowded to overflowing, but being young and strong I soon made my way up to the railing in front of the bench and jury box, and I then learned from a friend that it was a murder trial on before the court, and that the young attorney who was then addressing or making his opening argument to the jury was the county attorney, Oliver Cowdery; as soon as Mr. Cowdery closed his opening argument, the attorney for the prisoner arose, and, in a sneering way, said: 'May it please the Court, and gentlemen of the jury, I challenge Mr. Cowdery, since he seems to know so much about this poor defendant, to tell us something about his connection with Joe Smith, and the digging out of the hill of the Mormon Bible, and how Mr. Cowdery helped Joe Smith to defraud the American people out of a whole lot of money by selling the Mormon Bible and telling them that an angel appeared to them from heaven, dressed in white clothes.' After having kept on for a while in this way, abusing Mr. Cowdery, he [attorney for the defendant] began to argue the case to the jury; but all interest was shifted from the prisoner and his case and directed towards Oliver Cowdery; everybody was wondering in what manner he would reply to the accusation just made. The people did not believe, or know before this, that they had elected a county prosecutor who had been an associate of the 'Mormon Prophet,' Joseph Smith. Finally, when the defendant's attorney had completed his argument, Oliver Cowdery's turn came to reply, and everybody in the court room strained their necks to catch a glimpse of Mr. Cowdery. He arose as calm as a summer morning, and in a low but clear voice which gradually rose in pitch and volume as he proceeded, said:

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'If your honor please, and gentlemen of the jury, the attorney on the opposite side has challenged me to state my connection with Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon; and as I cannot now avoid the responsibility, I must admit to you that I am the very Oliver Cowdery whose name is attached to the testimony, with others, as to the appearance of the angel Moroni; and let me tell you that it is not because of my good deeds that I am here, away from the body of the Mormon church, but because I have broken the covenants I once made, and I was cut off from the church; but, gentlemen of the jury, I have never denied my testimony, which is attached to the front page of the Book of Mormon, and I declare to you here that these eyes saw the angel, and these ears of mine heard the voice of the angel, and he told us his name was Moroni; that the book was true, and contained the fulness of the gospel, and we were also told that if we ever denied what we had heard and seen that there would be no forgiveness for us, neither in this world nor in the world to come.'"

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Oliver Cowdery: Concerning the manner in which the plates and other sacred things were shown to him, beyond what is stated in the testimony of the three witnesses published in the first and every subsequent edition of the Book of Mormon, Oliver Cowdery, so far as I know, has left nothing on record further than what he said at a general conference of the church held at Kanesville, (now Council Bluffs, Iowa) October 21st, 1848. It was the occasion of his returning to the church after an estrangement of eleven years, and renewing his covenants and fellowship with the people of God. He arose and said:

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"Friends and Brethren: My name is Cowdery, Oliver Cowdery. In the early history of this church I stood identified with her, and one in her councils. True it is that the gifts and callings of God are without repentance; not because I was better than the rest of mankind was I called; but, to fulfill the purposes of God, he called me to a high and holy calling.

"I wrote, with my own pen, the entire Book of Mormon (save a few pages) as it fell from the lips of the Prophet Joseph, as he translated it by the gift and power of God, by the means of the Urim and Thummim, or, as it is called by the book, Holy Interpreters. I beheld with my eyes, and handled with my hands, the gold plates from which it was transcribed. 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. It contains the everlasting gospel, and came forth to the children of men in fulfillment of the revelations of John, where he says he saw an angel come with the everlasting gospel to preach to every nation, kindred, tongue and people." (Rev. xiv). It contains principles of salvation; and if you, my hearers, will walk by its light and obey its precepts, you will be saved with an everlasting salvation in the kingdom of God on high."

With his family, he was on his way to the body of the Church located in Utah, but as some time must elapse before emigrant trains could venture upon the plains, he determined to visit his wife's friends, the Whitmers, in Missouri. While making that journey, a severe snow storm made it convenient for his family to spend several days with Elder Samuel W. Richards and family, who were temporarily residing in upper Missouri, awaiting the opening of the emigration season. That favorable opportunity was made the most of to discuss all matters of interest connected with the early history of the Church, with which Elder Cowdery was personally acquainted and Elder Richards was not. His relation of events was of no ordinary character, maintaining unequivocally all those written testimonies he had furnished to the Church and world in earlier days. Moroni, Peter, James and John, and other heavenly messengers, who had ministered to him in connection with the prophet Joseph Smith, were familiarly but sacredly spoken of, and all seemed fresh upon the memory as though but events of yesterday. His language was considerate, precise and forcible—entirely free from lightness or frivolity—such as might be expected from one who had been schooled with angels and taught by Prophets; more of the heavenly than the earthly. His only ambition seemed to be to give himself and the remainder of his life to the Church; declared he was ready and willing, if desired, to go to the nations of the earth and bear his testimony of that which God and angels had revealed—a testimony [p.251] in his personal experience of many things which no other living person could bear. His hopes were buoyant that such might be his future lot as cast with the Church, in the body of which he declared the Priesthood and its authority were and must continue to be. An overruling Providence saw fit to order otherwise. Soon after arriving among his relatives in Missouri, he was taken sick and died, in full faith and fellowship of the latter-day work, desiring the world might know that his testimony was of God." ("Contributor," Vol. 5, page 446.) Oliver Cowdery died March 3, 1850, at Richmond, Ray county, Mo. Elder Phineas H. Young, who was present at his death, says: "His last moments were spent in bearing testimony of the truth of the gospel revealed through Joseph Smith, and the power of the holy Priesthood which he had received through his administrations." **Oliver Cowdery's half-sister, Lucy P. Young a widow of the late Phineas H. Young, relates that Oliver Cowdery just before breathing his last, asked his attendants to raise him up in bed, that he might talk to the family and his friends, who were present. He then told them to live according to the teachings contained in the Book of Mormon, and promised them, if they would do this, that they would meet him in heaven. He then said, "Lay me down and let me fall asleep." A few moments later he died without a struggle.** David Whitmer testified to Apostles Orson Pratt and Joseph F. Smith in 1878, as follows: "Oliver died the happiest man I ever saw. After shaking hands with the family and kissing his wife and daughter, he said, 'Now I lay me down for the last time: I am going to my Savior;' and he died immediately, with a smile on his face." ("Millennial Star," Vol. 40, p. 774.) In an article published in the "Millennial Star," Vol. 48, page 420, **Elder Edward Stevenson gives the following testimony in relation to Oliver Cowdery: "I have often heard him bear a faithful testimony to the restoration of the gospel by the visitation of an angel, in whose presence he stood in company with the Prophet Joseph Smith and David Whitmer. He testified that he beheld the plates, the leaves being turned over by the angel, whose voice he heard, and that they were commanded as witnesses to bear a faithful testimony to the world of the vision that they were favored to behold, and that the translation from the plates in the Book of Mormon was accepted of the Lord, and that it should go forth to the world, and no power on earth should stop its progress. Although for a time Oliver Cowdery absented himself from the body of the Church, I never have known a time when he faltered or was recreant to the trust so sacredly entrusted to him by an angel from heaven."**