

ONE OF THE THREE WITNESSES.

INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF MARTIN HARRIS.

SALT LAKE CITY,
November 30, 1881.

Editor Deseret News:

Having been interrogated recently regarding Martin Harris, the time of his arrival in this city, and other incidents of his life, and as at the present time newspaper reporters are interesting themselves regarding David Whitmer, the only surviving witness of the Book of Mormon, now living at Richmond, Ray Co., Mo., having resided there as long as Martin Harris did at Kirtland, Ohio, which has been since 1831, 50 years ago, and 39 years previous to his removal to Utah; for these reasons I feel prompted to offer a few facts relating to his removal from Ohio to Utah, his various testimonies, and incidents of personal observation of his life for the past 48 years.

While I was living in Michigan, then a Territory, in 1833, near the town of Pontiac, Oakland Co., Martin Harris came there and in a meeting where I was present bore testimony of the appearance of an angel exhibiting the golden plates and commanding him to bear a testimony of these things to all people whenever opportunity was afforded him to do so; and I can say that his testimony had great effect in that vicinity. Martin had a sister living in our neighborhood. About this time Oliver Cowdery, one of the other three witnesses also, in company with Joseph Smith the Prophet bore the same testimony, and further, Joseph the Prophet promised those who with honest hearts obeyed the gospel should receive the Holy Ghost, and signs would follow them.

As a proof of their testimony, several of that branch of the Church, enjoyed various gifts; one, Elijah Fordham, who recently died in this Territory, spoke in tongues, and as two French travelers were passing they heard him speaking and said to a boy outside the house where they were, that he was speaking in French, bearing testimony to the gospel, he having no knowledge of that language. Martin often bore his testimony while in that neighborhood.

In the year 1869 I was appointed to a mission to the United States. Having visited several of the Eastern States, I called at Kirtland, Ohio, to see the first Temple that was built by our people in this generation. While there, I again met Martin Harris, soon after coming out of the Temple. 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 heard him bear 36 years previous. He said that it was his duty to continue to lift up his voice as he had been commanded to do in defence of the Book that he held in his hand, and offered to

prove from the Bible that just such a book was to come forth out of the ground, and that, too, in a day when there were no prophets on the earth, and that he was daily bearing testimony to many who visited the Temple.

After patiently hearing him, I felt a degree of compassion for him, and in turn bore my testimony to him, as I had received it through obedience to the gospel, and that the work was still onward, and the words of Isaiah, second chapter, were being fulfilled, that "the house of the Lord was in the tops of the mountains," and that under the leadership of President Brigham Young all nations were gathering to Zion to learn of God's ways and to walk in His paths, and that the worst wish that we had, was for him to also prepare himself and go up and be a partaker of the blessings of the House of the Lord. My testimony impressed him. A Mr. Bond, who held the keys of the Temple, and who had been present at the dedication, and then a faithful Latter-day Saint, said to me he felt as though he would have been far better off if he had kept with the Latter-day Saints, and that if I would preach in the Temple, he would open the doors to me, I promised to do so at some future time.

After my arrival in Utah in 1870, I was inspired to write to Martin Harris, and soon received a reply, that the Spirit of God, for the first time prompted him to go to Utah. Several letters were afterward exchanged. President Brigham Young, having read the letter, through President G. A. Smith, requested me to get up a subscription and emigrate Martin to Utah, he subscribing twenty-five dollars for that purpose. Having raised the subscription to about \$200, on the 19th of July, 1870, I took the railroad cars for Ohio, and on the 10th of August, filled my appointment, preaching twice in the Kirtland Temple, finding Martin Harris elated with his prospective journey.

A very singular incident occurred at this time. While Martin was visiting his friends, bidding them farewell, his pathway crossed a large pasture, in which he became bewildered, dizzy, faint and staggering through the blackberry vines that are so abundant in that vicinity, his clothes torn, bloody and faint, he lay down under a tree to die. After a time he revived, called on the Lord, and finally at 12 midnight, found his friend, and in his fearful condition was cared for and soon regained his strength. He related this incident as a snare of the adversary to hinder him from going to Salt Lake City. Although in his 88th year he possessed remarkable vigor and health, having recently worked in the garden, and dug potatoes by the day for some of his neighbors.

After visiting New York and calling to visit the sacred spot from where the plates were taken upon which the characters of the Book of Mormon were engraven, I found there an aged gentleman, 74 years old, who knew Martin Harris, and said that he was known in that neighborhood as an honest farmer, having owned a good farm three miles from that place. He farther said, he well remembered the time when the Mormons used to gather at Mormon Hill, as he termed it, where it was said the plates came from.

On the 21st of August, Martin was with me in Chicago, and at the American Hotel bore testimony to a large number of people, of the visitation of the angel, etc. The following is from the *Iowa State Register*, Des Moines, Aug. 26th, 1870:

"Elder Stevenson, of Salt Lake, together with Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses of the Mormon Bible, called at our sanctum yesterday. Mr. Harris is now in his 88th year, hale and hearty, with many interesting things to relate in reference to the finding of the tablets of the testament. We shall have occasion to mention some of these in another issue."

While in Des Moines, the capitol of Iowa, Bro. Harris had opportunity of bearing testimony to many, and at a special meeting held in a branch of our Church Bro. James M. Ballinger, President, Bro. Harris bore a strong testimony as to viewing the plates, the angel's visit, and visiting Professor Anthony, with characters from the plates, who after giving him a certificate, etc., as to the correctness of the characters, asked him to fetch the plates for him to see. Martin said that they were sealed, and that an angel had forbidden them to be exhibited. Mr. Anthony then called for the certificate, tore it up and consigned

it to the waste basket, saying, angels did not visit in our days, etc.

On the following day I baptized a sister to President Ballinger, in the Des Moines River. The Branch here contributed a new suit of clothes to Bro. Harris, for which he felt to bless them. On the 29th of August we landed in Ogden, and the Ogden *Junction* said:

"Martin Harris arrived (with Elder Edward Stevenson) whose name is known almost throughout the world as one of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon. They left Kirtland on the 19th of August."

August 31st Salt Lake *Herald* said:

"Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon, arrived in Salt Lake City last night, accompanied by Elder Edward Stevenson. Two members of the Des Moines Branch of the Church accompanied them to our city."

The *DESERET NEWS* of August 31st, 1870, in over one column, notices the arrival of Martin Harris last evening, 7.30, "who is in his 88th year. He is remarkably vigorous for one of his years, his memory being very good, and his sight, though his eyes appear to have failed, being so acute that he can see to pick a pin off the ground. * * * He has never failed to bear testimony to the Divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. He says it is not a matter of belief on his part, but of knowledge. He with the other two witnesses declared, and their testimony has accompanied every copy of the book, 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.' This declaration he has not varied from in 41 years; * * * We are glad to see Martin Harris once more in the midst of the Saints."

The Salt Lake *Herald*, September 3d, said:

"We had a call yesterday morning from Elder Edward Stevenson, who introduced Martin Harris, one of the 'three witnesses' to the Book of Mormon. Mr. Harris is now 88 years of age, and is remarkably lively and energetic for his years. He holds firmly to the testimony he has borne for over forty years, that an angel appeared before him and the other witnesses, and showed them the plates upon which the characters of the Book of Mormon were inscribed. After living many years separated from the body of the Church, he has come to spend the evening of life among the believers in that book to which he is so prominent a witness. Mr. Harris, who has a number of relatives in the Territory, came from the east under the care of Elder Edward Stevenson."

Monday EVENING NEWS, September 5th, 1870, contains the following:

"SABBATH MEETINGS.—The congregation in the morning was addressed by Elder Edward Stevenson, Martin Harris and President George A. Smith. In the afternoon the time was occupied by Elder John Taylor, the house was crowded to overflowing."

Martin Harris related an instance that occurred during the time that he wrote that portion of the translation of the Book of Mormon, which he was favored to write direct from the mouth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He said that the Prophet possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then used the seer stone. Martin explained the translating as follows: By aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by Martin, and when finished he would say, "Written," and if correctly written, that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place, but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraven on the plates, precisely in the language then used. Martin said, after continued translation they would become weary and would go down to the river and exercise by throwing stones out on the river, etc. While so doing on one occasion, Martin found a stone very much resembling the one used for translating, and on resuming their labor of translation, Martin put in place the stone that he had found! He said that the Prophet remained silent unusually and intently gazing in darkness, no traces of the usual sentences appearing. Much surprised, Joseph exclaimed, "Martin! What is the matter? All is as dark as Egypt." Martin's countenance betrayed him, and the Prophet asked Martin why he had done so. Martin said, to stop the mouths of

fools, who had told him that the Prophet had learned those sentences and was merely repeating them, etc.

Martin said further that the seer stone differed in appearance entirely from the Urim and Thummim that was obtained with the plates, which were two clear stones set in two rims, very much resembled spectacles, only they were larger. Martin said there were not many pages translated while he wrote; after which Oliver Cowdery and others did the writing.

Brother Harris was taught the necessity of being rebaptized. He said that was new doctrine to him. Revelations 2nd chapter was explained, that those who had lost their first love and had fallen into evils and snares, were called on to "repent and do their first works," and that rebaptism was a part of the gospel. He claimed that he had not been cut off from the Church, but said if that was required of him it would be manifested to him by the spirit. Soon after his arrival in Utah he applied for baptism, saying that the Spirit had made known to him that it was his duty to renew his covenant before the Lord.

He was also taught a principle that was new to him—baptism for the dead, as taught and practised by the ancient Saints and especially taught by Paul the Apostle in the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians: "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all, why are they then baptized for the dead?" After consideration he came and said it had been made known to him that baptism for the dead was a correct principle, for he had seen his father in vision at the foot of a ladder, and he was above and had to go down and help him up. In a short time the baptismal font was prepared, and by his request I baptized him, and President Geo. A. Smith, and of the Twelve Apostles, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Joseph F. Smith and Orson Pratt confirmed him by the laying on of hands, Orson Pratt being mouth. As soon as he was confirmed he returned into the font and was baptized for several of his dead friends—Fathers, grandfathers, &c. Then his sister also was baptized for the female relatives, and they were confirmed for and in behalf of those whom they were baptized for, by the same brethren, Jos. F. Smith being mouth. It was a time of rejoicing for all that were present.

Bro. Martin visited many of the wards, continuing to bear his testimony both of what he had beheld with his own eyes, and verily knew to be true. He publicly said that many years ago, in Ohio, a number of persons combined sought to get Martin to drink wine for the purpose of crossing him in his testimony. At the conclusion they asked him if he really believed the testimony that he had signed in the Book of Mormon to be true; he replied, no he did not believe it, but, much to their surprise, he said he knew it to be true.

Soon after receiving his blessings in the house of the Lord, he went to Smithfield, Cache Valley, and lived with his son until he left this mortal life. Just before he breathed his last he sat up in his bed holding the Book of Mormon in his hand and bore his last testimony to those who were present.

EDWARD STEVENSON.