

# TESTIMONY OF OLIVER COWDERY

## Judge C. M. Nielsen Relates a Remarkable Experience in The Mission Field.

## PROSPEROUS FARMER'S STORY

### How Traveling Elder, Penniless and Hungry, Encounters a Stranger Who Refutes Some Stock Statements.

Elder C. M. Nielsen delivered an unusually interesting address at the Twenty-fourth ward meetinghouse Sunday evening relative to a remarkable speech made by Oliver Cowdery while prosecuting attorney in Michigan, some years after he had left the Mormon Church. Cowdery was prosecuting a criminal case against a murderer. At the conclusion of his opening speech, the attorney for the defendant arose and instead of devoting his time to the case in hand, with sarcasm and in bitter speech charged Cowdery with having defrauded the American people by foisting a hateful religion, Mormonism, upon them, and defied Cowdery to deny it. Cowdery's calm, dispassionate acknowledgement was the subject of Elder Nielsen's address, which in part was as follows:

"Those who have received the gospel with the laying on of hands for the reception of the Holy Ghost have a testimony independent of what any other person may say of the truth of this work and the divinity of the Book of Mormon. But we have in our midst a rising generation of young men and young women who have had few of the experiences of life, and have not had a testimony of the power of God as those of us who have been tried in the missionary field and at home.

"It has been like a missing link in the life of Oliver Cowdery as to what he did for a certain number of years from the time he left the Church until he came back and appeared at Council Bluffs in 1849. There were 11 years of which we have little or no record of his doings.

"It has been circulated among our enemies that Oliver Cowdery had denied his testimony of the divinity of the Book of Mormon. Affidavits have been made and published in eastern states that Oliver Cowdery asked to be received into some church as a member; that before that church would receive him he was required to make confession of his connection with that terrible religion called Mormonism, and his own testimony regarding the Book of Mormon and his having said he saw an angel from heaven. My friends, I do not believe he ever made such denial of his testimony. But our elders have had this to meet, and for that reason I am going to tell you something here tonight that will be of interest to you.

"But, for argument's sake, say Oliver Cowdery did recant his testimony, which I do not admit—what then? Is he greater than John the Baptist, who doubted Jesus when trials and troubles came upon him and he was in danger of having his head cut off to satisfy a woman? Is Oliver Cowdery greater than Peter, who in the hour of his trials denied Christ a second and third time, even cursing and swearing when accused. See Matthew, 16th chapter. Not one of his disciples acknowledged him. Suppose, as our enemies have tried to make it appear, that Oliver Cowdery did deny these things before the Methodist church, it was in a day when the life of a Mormon was thought of little more consequence than a rabbit running about in the sagebrush. Both the Old and the New Testament show us that when the spirit of God was withdrawn from men they shrank in fear of losing their lives and denied what they knew to be facts.

### MISSIONARY EXPERIENCE.

"In the year 1834, I was traveling as a missionary in Minnesota. I had most of the eastern part of the state to myself. I was without purse or scrip and one night slept in a hay stack. Next day I came to a city and wandered up and down the streets. I had no money, no friends and didn't know where to go. I passed a large store called the Emporium, something like our Z. C. M. I. I was attracted by it, but didn't know why. There were about 25 teams hitched near the place, owned by farmers in town on business. Something told me to 'Go over and see a certain man.' The street was full of people and I wondered which man. Then one man seemed to me as big as three ordinary men. The spirit whispered: 'Go over and speak to him!' I hesitated to approach this entire stranger, but the same voice came to me a second and a third time. Then I went.

"He was a prosperous looking farmer with a fine two-seated buggy, which he was ready to enter, and was a prominent man, I afterwards learned. Not knowing what else, I said: 'How far are you going?' 'Home; where are you going?' 'I have no certain place; I am from Utah.' 'You are not a Mormon, are you?' he asked, anxiously. 'Yes.' 'Then God bless you!' he replied, reaching out his arms and dropping the lines. 'Get into this buggy as fast as you can. When we get home, my wife will rejoice as I rejoice now. I will then explain all. But you are not a Josephite, are you?' 'No, I'm a real live Mormon from Utah.'

"Reaching the home, he called, 'Mother, here's a real live Mormon elder.' I'm afraid I didn't look very fine, as I had slept in a haystack the previous night. They took me by the hand and led me into the house. I was very hungry and begged for something to eat. After my hunger was satisfied, they called in their sons and daughters and we sat around the table. My new found friend then said:

### FARMER TELLS HIS STORY.

"Now, young man, you thought it strange how I acted when you spoke to me. When I get through you will realize the importance of your coming to us. When I was 21 years of age, I was working my father's farm in Michigan. I had worked hard on the farm that summer and decided to take a day off, so went to the city. Near the courthouse I saw a great many people assembling, and others walking that way, so I went over to see what was up. There was a jam in the courtroom, but being young and strong, I pushed my way close up to the center, where I found the prosecuting attorney addressing the court and jury in a murder trial. The prosecuting attorney was Oliver Cowdery, and he was giving his opening address in behalf of the state." (After he was cut off from the Church, Oliver Cowdery studied law, practicing in Ohio, Wisconsin and then Michigan, where he was elected prosecuting attorney.) "After Cowdery sat down the attorney representing the prisoner arose and with taunting sarcasm said: 'May it please the court and gentlemen of

the jury, I see one Oliver Cowdery is going to reply to my argument. I wish he would tell us something about the Mormon Bible; something about that golden Bible that Joe Smith dug out of the hill; something about the great fraud he perpetrated upon the American people whereby he gained thousands of dollars. Now he seems to know so much about this poor prisoner. I wonder if he has forgotten all about Joe Smith and his connection with him.' The speaker all the while sneering and pointing his finger in scorn at Cowdery in the hope of making him ridiculous before the court and jury.

"Everybody present began to wonder if they had been guilty of making such a mistake as choosing a Mormon for prosecuting attorney. Even the judge on the bench began looking with suspicion and distrust at the prosecuting attorney. The prisoner and his attorney became elated at the effect of the speech. People began asking, 'Is he a Mormon?' Everybody wondered what Cowdery would say against such foul charges.

### OLIVER COWDERY'S REPLY.

"Finally Oliver Cowdery arose, calm as a summer morning. I was within three feet of him. There was no hesitation, no fear, no anger in his voice, as he said: 'May it please the court, and gentlemen of the jury, my brother attorney on the other side has charged me with connection with Joseph Smith and the golden Bible. The responsibility has been placed upon me, and I cannot escape reply. (If he had denied it before, why not deny it now?) Before God and man I dare not deny what I have said, and what my testimony contains and as written and printed on the front page of the Book of Mormon. May it please your honor and gentlemen of the jury, this I say, I saw the angel and heard his voice—how can I deny it? It happened in the day time when the sun was shining bright in the firmament; not in the night when I was asleep. That glorious messenger from heaven, dressed in white, standing above the ground, in a glory I have never seen anything to compare with the sun insignificant in comparison, and these personages told us if we denied that testimony there is no forgiveness in this life nor in the world to come. Now how can I deny it—I dare not; I will not!'"

The man who related this to me was a prominent man in that state; he was a rich man, a man who has held offices of trust from the people—a man of respect, one when you look into his face you will not doubt. To strengthen his statement this man, who knew nothing of Mormon history, said Oliver Cowdery mentioned something he wanted me to explain, that the angel took back a part that was not translated. We know this and that part of the golden plates then withheld will be revealed at some future time.

### HAD NO PEACE.

"Since I heard Oliver Cowdery speak," continued my host, "I have not had peace for these many years. I want to know more about your people. I felt when I listened to Oliver Cowdery talking in the courtroom he was more than an ordinary man. If you can show us that you have what Oliver Cowdery testified to, we shall all be glad to receive it." He and his whole family embraced the gospel and came to Utah.

Our heavenly Father never revealed any keys or powers to administer to the Prophet Joseph Smith when he was alone. He always had witnesses. When John the Baptist came, there were Joseph and Oliver; when Peter, James and John appeared, there were these same two witnesses. In Hebrew, Matthew and Corinthians we learn that testimony must be out of the mouths of two or three witnesses. When the Lord has anything of importance to reveal to the world there are living witnesses, sufficient to bring condemnation should the word be rejected.

In Nov. 1848, Oliver Cowdery, before a high council at Council Bluffs, called for the purpose of considering his case, said: "Brethren, for a number of years I have been separated from you. I now desire to come back. I wish to come humbly and to be one in your midst. I seek no station. I only wish to be identified with you. I am out of the Church. I am not a member

of the Church, but I wish to become a member of it. I wish to come in at the door. I know the door. I have not come here to seek precedence. I come humbly, and throw myself upon the decisions of this body, knowing, as I do, that its decisions are right, and should be obeyed."