

[Special Correspondence to Chicago Tribune, Dec. 15.]

DAVID WHITMER.

HE DESCRIBES THE TRANSLATION OF THE GOLDEN TABLETS AT WHICH HE ASSISTED.

David Whitmer, one of the founders of the Mormon Church, and a resident of this quaint and interesting village for almost a half century, lies at the point of death. At the family homestead are gathered the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the dying patriarch, and beside his death-bed is the devoted woman who linked her life and fortune with his more than forty years ago. When your correspondent called at the house today and was summoned into the bed-chamber where Father Whitmer was calmly awaiting the final summons, a smile lighted up the old man's countenance as he half rose and feebly pressed the visitor's hand, and then, as if overcome by the effort, his head sunk back on the pillows. When told of the visitor's mission and that he had journeyed from Chicago to prepare an historical sketch of one who had played so important a part in translating the Mormon Bible and proselyting for the Mormon Church, the request for information met with a cheerful response. Fearing, however, that the task would be too great, the family deputed a member of the household to relate the history in the presence of Father Whitmer, the narration being closely followed by him and subjected to frequent corrections and interpolations.

While yet an infant his father, who served his country through the Revolutionary War, removed with his family to Western New York and settled on a farm in Ontario County, near Watkins Glen. The father, who was a hard-working, God-fearing man, was a strict Presbyterian and brought his children up with rigid sectarian discipline. Besides a daughter, who married Oliver Cowdery, the village school-master, there were four sons—Jacob, John, David and Christian—who helped their father till his farm until they had arrived at the age of manhood. During the early part of June, 1829, Oliver Cowdery incidentally learned that a young man named Joseph Smith had found a valuable golden treasure in the northern part of the county, and imparted the information to David. They decided to investigate the rumor, and Cowdery traveled to the home of Smith for that purpose. On the road he found the community teeming with excitement over the alleged treasure, and heard several persons threatened to kill the finder unless he divided his wealth with them. When asked how they knew such a treasure had been found, several asserted that they had seen the receptacle from which it was taken by Smith. Cowdery, assured that there was more to the *vague rumors* than he had at first believed, pushed on to the home of Smith, who was living on his father's farm near Manchester. At first he found Smith to be uncommunicative, but was finally permitted to view the treasure, and was greatly impressed by the sight. In fact his wonderment was so great that he at once wrote to David to come without delay. David did so and was equally mystified.

The treasure consisted of a number of golden plates, about eight inches long and seven inches wide, about as thick as ordinary sheeting, and bound together in the form of a volume by three gold rings. A large portion of the volume was securely sealed, but on the loose pages were engraved hieroglyphics expressive of some language at that time unknown to any of the persons mentioned. Together with the golden tablets were a pair of spectacles, set in silver bows.

Mr. Whitmer then described Smith's story of the vision in which the location of the plates was revealed, with the history of the Nephites, Moroni's labor, and Smith's finding of the tablets, with which every one is familiar.

TRANSLATING THE PLATES.

Whitmer and Cowdery were greatly impressed by the recital of this strange story, and were conducted to the hill, where they personally viewed the receptacle in which Moroni, at the beginning of the fifth century, had concealed the history of his fathers. Smith also said that he had been commanded to at once begin the translation of the work in the presence of three witnesses. In accordance with this command, Smith, Cowdery, and Whitmer proceeded to the latter's home, accompanied by Smith's wife, and bearing with them the precious plates and spectacles. The house of senior Whitmer was a primitive and poorly designed structure, but it was deemed the most secure for carrying out the sacred trust on account of the threats that had been made against Smith by his mercenary neighbors. In order to give privacy to the proceeding a blanket, which served as a portiere, was stretched across the family living room to shelter the translators and the plates from the eyes of any who might call at the house while the work was in progress. This, Mr. Whitmer says, was the only use made of the blanket, and it was not for the purpose of concealing the plates or the translator from the eyes of the amanuensis. In fact, Smith was at no time hidden from his collaborators, and the translation was performed in the presence of not only the persons mentioned, but of the entire Whitmer household and several of Smith's relatives besides.

The work of translating the tablets consumed about eight months, Smith acting as the seer and Oliver Cowdery,

Smith's wife, and Christian Whitmer, brother of David, performing the duties of amanuenses, in whose handwriting the original manuscript now is. Each time before resuming the work all present would kneel in prayer and invoke the Divine blessing on the proceeding. After prayer Smith would sit on one side of a table and the amanuenses, in turn as they became tired, on the other. Those present and not actively engaged in the work seated themselves around the room and then the work began. After affixing the magical spectacles to his eyes, Smith would take the plates and translate the characters one at a time. The graven characters would appear in succession to the seer, and directly under the glasses would be the translation in English. Sometimes the character would be a single word, and frequently an entire sentence. In translating the characters Smith, who was illiterate and but little versed in Biblical lore, was oftentimes compelled to spell the words out, not knowing the correct pronunciation, and Mr. Whitmer recalls the fact that at that time Smith did not even know that Jerusalem was a walled city. Cowdery, however, being a school-teacher, rendered invaluable aid in pronouncing hard words and giving them their proper definition.

MORE MIRACULOUS DEVELOPMENTS.

A miracle is related by Mr. Whitmer as occurring while the translation was in progress. It seems that Smith, who was puffed up with his great importance as a confidential secretary to the Lord, displeased the Master by entering into some carnal confab in relation to the work. For this offense he was punished by having the celestial visitant, who first commissioned him to inaugurate the work, suddenly appear and carry off the plates and spectacles. In this connection it might also be mentioned that Martin Harris, one of the witnesses to the translation, a farmer in the same county, and a man of simple mind and taste, was sent by Smith with a copy of the characters to professor Anthon, a professor of languages in Columbia College, and author of several well known works, who pronounced the language inscribed on the plate Reformed Egyptian.

About this time Harris, inspired by curiosity and elation, took sixteen of the golden tablets home to show his wife, who is alleged to have stolen them from a bureau drawer and peddled them among her friends. For this offense Harris was severely reprimanded by the Lord, through Smith, but the angel afterwards recovered the plates and restored them. Smith's offense of tattling the secrets of the work among his neighbors was less readily condoned, and for a long time the work was suspended, the angel being in possession of the plates and spectacles. Finally, when Smith had fully repented of his rash conduct, he was forgiven. The plates, however, were not returned, but instead Smith was given by the angel a Urim and Thummim of another pattern, it being shaped in oval or kidney form. This seer's stone he was instructed to place in his hat, and on covering his face with the hat the character and translation would appear on the stone.

This worked just as satisfactory as the old method, but at no time thereafter was the backsliding Joseph intrusted with the precious plates. However, the entire portion of the golden volume, which the angel said might be translated, was reduced by the nimble amanuenses to readable manuscript. The other installment was withheld until the Lord could discover what effect the first had on the Gentiles. That He was not pleased with the result is manifested by the fact that the sealed portion has not yet been delivered to the world.

THE ANGEL IN THE PASTURE.

After the translation was completed Smith informed Cowdery, Whitmer, and Harris that the Lord had instructed him that the time was at hand when they should testify to all nations, tongues, and people concerning this work. These four apostles of the Lord, as they were designated, accordingly assembled in a pasture, cleared of underbrush, at a point equidistant between two public highways. About the noonday hour they were seated on a log waiting for the promised manifestations, having previously knelt in prayer. All at once the heavens seemed to open and there appeared a dazzling shaft of light beside which the light of the sun appeared dim. Through this cleft in the sky, which seemed to lead away up to the pearly gates beyond, appeared an angel, disguised as a man, bearing the semblance of a table. The angel descended to the earth, landing nearly at their feet. On this table were the plates of gold from which they had just translated the Book of Mormon, and the plates of brass on which were inscribed the commandments written by Moses, and which had been taken from Jerusalem by Nephi 600 years before Christ and afterwards transported to America. The four Apostles were then commanded to go forth among men and preach religion as set down in the Book of Mormon.

After this wonderful manifestation Martin Harris mortgaged his farm for \$1,500 in order to obtain funds for printing the Book of Mormon, and all four set about founding a church, which was called the Church of Christ, as commanded in the Book of Mormon. The four Apostles began preaching, and were so successful in securing converts to the new religion that a church was organized April 6, 1830.

The Book of Mormon was also given to the world that year. Concerning the converts Mr. Whitmer says that among the first adherents to embrace the new faith were many of the most intellectual and refined men and women in that locality, and the ranks were not recruited from the ignorant and sensuous classes like the Mormons of Utah. The year following the organization of the church the disciples moved to Ohio, where they had been most successful in proselyting, and a temple was erected at Kirtland. It was at this place that Sidney Rigdon and Brigham Young joined the church, and it was here that the first dissensions occurred.

Concerning Sidney Rigdon, who was said to have stolen the manuscript of the Book of Mormon, which, it was alleged, had been written by a Presbyterian preacher named Solomon Spaulding, and originally intended as a romance, Mr. Whitmer asserts that nothing could have been more improbable, as neither Smith, himself, nor the other disciples knew Rigdon until they moved to Ohio.

HE KEPT THE RECORDS.

The original manuscript from which the Book of Mormon was printed is still in Mr. Whitmer's possession, and most of it is in the handwriting of his brother Christian and his brother-in-law, Oliver Cowdery. Mr. Whitmer also has an exhaustive history of the Church, which was compiled by his brother, and an accurate copy of several plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. These records he has preserved against all temptations and in the face of death. Several years ago a delegation of Mormons came to Richmond from Salt Lake and made every overture to Mr. Whitmer in a vain attempt to gain possession of the records, but he stood aloof and declined every offer. A prominent business man of the place, at that time engaged in banking, informed your correspondent that he knows of his own knowledge that the Mormon Church would have willingly paid Mr. Whitmer \$100,000 for the documents, and that the delegation returned home thoroughly convinced that Mr. Whitmer was proof against all financial temptation so far as concerned his records.

It was while the Church was flourishing at Kirtland that the name was changed from Church of Christ to Latter-day Saints. Mr. Whitmer, who always adhered to the teachings of Mormon, left Kirtland and journeyed into the wilds of Missouri in company with one other Elder, preaching the truth as he believed it to be and exhorting men and women to Christ. Many new converts were secured, and he assisted in establishing the settlement of Jackson County, Missouri. It was here that the Ohio Mormons found refuge when driven away from Kirtland after Smith and Rigdon had been tarred and feathered.

For a while the church flourished in Jackson County, with headquarters at Independence, but when the trouble occurred between the Mormons and Missourians, the former were driven from the county into Caldwell County, where they founded a settlement and named it Far West. David Whitmer, stripped of his earthly possessions, was warned to flee for his life, and, accompanied by his family, his brothers and their families, and Oliver Cowdery, he journeyed to Ray County, where he settled at Richmond in 1838. At that time he had nothing left but a single horse and wagon and his precious records. It was then that the Danites were organized, and it is said that their formation was for the purpose of killing the Whitmers and Cowdery, they having been commanded and openly refused to obey the so-called leaders, right or wrong. The Whitmers and Cowdery then renounced the church, as conducted, but during the years they have lived in Ray County they have continued to teach the precepts according to the original church.

THE LORD'S ANOINTED.

David Whitmer engaged in teaming at his new home, and in the campaign when the militia was ordered to drive the Mormons from the State at the point of the bayonet he drove one of the military baggage-wagons to Far West. During the melee that followed he was handed a musket by the soldiery and ordered to shoot Joseph Smith, but threw the musket down, declaring he "would not harm the Lord's anointed." After that memorable event, in which Smith was taken prisoner, David returned to Richmond, and has always asserted that Joseph Smith was called and commanded by God to translate the "Book of Mormon," and that Smith, as he knew him, was a righteous, God-fearing man. Mr. Whitmer to-day clings to the religious belief of his early manhood and has never sanctioned polygamy, which he considers one of the greatest abominations of the earth. The Book of Mormon as originally translated he asserts to be without a moral blemish, and says it is eminently fit for the library of the most exacting moral philosopher. It expressly forbids polygamy, and Mr. Whitmer claims that if the population of Salt Lake would live in accordance with the strict teachings of the book it would exert a greater influence in crushing out what he terms the "viper polygamy" than any other known agency. Concerning his work in the Church of Christ he looks upon his commission to apostleship as concurrent to having had a direct message from Heaven through an angel of the Lord, and even now, at the threshold of death, he "stands by

that pure republic, established by Christ on earth and given to the world in its original idiom, the Book of Mormon." Through the mediumship of Joseph Smith he says he received many messages from Heaven which convinced him of his divine calling. The text of these messages he refuses to relate, claiming that the promises of the Lord to his Apostles should be secretly locked in the breast and not blatantly betrayed to carnal minds, but, he says, they were miraculous in their fulfillment and have stood the test of his reasoning through a long life of effort and experience.

A GOOD CITIZEN.

As a citizen of Richmond he stands deservedly high, having filled the office of Mayor and Councilman. Upright in his dealings with men and just towards all, he has progressed gradually with the country until he and his children have secured good business standing and are regarded among the best citizens of Ray County.

Of those who took part in the original translation, Joseph Smith was shot by a mob in 1844; Oliver Cowdery died in this county thirty years ago, leaving a wife and daughter, both of whom are yet living and reside in Silver City, Mo. John Whitmer, a prosperous farmer, died at Far West in 1878, leaving children and grandchildren. Jacob Whitmer passed away many years ago, and his son, John C., a white-haired Elder of the Church of Christ, continues to preach the religion of his father in and about Richmond.

David Whitmer has two children, a son and daughter. The son, David J., is without issue. The daughter, Mrs. Julius Schweich, resides here and is the mother of two children, both of whom have children. George, the eldest of Mrs. Schweich's children, is a shrewd business man and is associated with his uncle, David J. Whitmer, in the livery business. His sister, Josie, is the wife of J. R. Van Cleave, private secretary to the Collector of Customs at Chicago.

"PUTTING AWAY."

THE GRAND JURY ASKS A QUESTION, AND JUDGE POWERS ANSWERS, BUT FAILS TO ENLIGHTEN THEM.

The Grand Jury of the First District Court, after an absence of several days appeared before Judge Powers yesterday morning and reported that they had found no indictments, but wished some instructions, whereupon (according to the *Ogden Herald*) they presented an address which read as follows:

OGDEN, Utah, Dec. 23, 1885.

To the Honorable O. W. Powers, Judge of the First District Court:

The grand jury most respectfully ask to be instructed on the following point: Assuming that the Edmunds law contemplates the putting away by the husband of one or more of his polygamous wives in order that he may live within the requirements of said law, is it necessary that the act should be done publicly? And if so, what would constitute reasonable publicity?

Very respectfully,
J. W. McNUTT, Foreman.

Following is the reply of his honor: *Gentlemen of the Grand Jury:*

The query you put to the Court is substantially the same as was asked the Supreme Court of the United States by the attorney for the defendant in the case of the United States vs. Angus M. Cannon, which was recently decided.

The Supreme Court of the United States declined to answer the question: declined to state how a man who had polygamous wives could live and live within the law, but said he must not live in a way that would cause the outside public to believe from his actions and conduct that he was living or associating with the women as his wives. As to whether or not the act of putting away be done publicly, I think it hardly necessary to answer, for, if a man puts away his wives, ceases to live with them or associate with them in a manner that causes the public to believe that he is not living with them as wives, whether it is done publicly (the putting away), or whether it is done privately, makes no difference. In other words, it would make no difference as to a man's guilt if he should from the house-tops declare that he had put away his plural wives, but should continue by his acts—should continue by his conduct to cause the public generally to believe that he was living with the women as a husband lives with his wives. The whole intent and matter of the Edmunds Law is to do away with the evil example of living in polygamous marriage—the example that is set before the public—and whenever a man by holding out women as wives, by associating with them as a husband associates with his wives, by conducting himself toward them as a husband conducts himself toward his wife he is guilty under the law. So the manner of putting away has but little to do with it; it is the conduct; it is the outward appearance; it is continuing to a sociate or live as husband and wife; it is causing the public to believe that these parties are so living. Upon that act, of course, before you can find an indictment you

should be satisfied from the evidence that the facts are such as would cause a conviction by a trial jury, and be satisfied as I say, from the facts, that the conduct of the man is a public reproach; in other words, that it causes the public to believe he is associating with women as a husband associates with his wife. The mere act of putting away wives is of no materiality; the mere act of separation is of no materiality unless it be followed up by separation. The mere change, or change of circumstances, does not make an excuse. A man may, in a very public manner, in church, or in a public meeting, or at any public place, with his wives drawn about him, declare he had put them all away except his lawful wife, might place them in different houses and still he might, by his outside conduct be, to all intents and purposes, living and associating with them as a husband lives and associates with his wives. He must so live that he will not cause the outside world to believe he is living with them as wives or holding them out as wives.

I had occasion to remark in the case of the United States vs. A. M. Musser that a husband who had been divorced from his wife could not be expected to continue wifely relations with her and still he might continue friendly relations and while possible he would be compelled to support her and her children. Still he could act no longer toward her as his wife. So since the passage of this Edmunds law, where the fact of polygamous cohabitation has appeared a man cannot longer cohabit that is hold out, associate with or live, as a husband, with the women to whom he has been previously married.

OGDEN ITEMS.

OGDEN CITY, Utah,
December 22, 1885.

Editor Deseret News:

"MERRY CHRISTMAS"

is drawing near very rapidly, and great preparations are being made to celebrate the event with as much spirit and eclat as in former years, according to the ability of the people here. But either fortunately or unfortunately the great majority of our citizens have not so much cash to spend this season either in exchanging the compliments of the season or replenishing the festive boards to the extent that many have done in other times. Not that there is any lack of the substantial necessities of life. These are plentiful, and the poor are already provided for from the bounty and liberality of those who have abundance and to spare.

The Bishops and their assistants of the several Wards here have been dispensing earth's bounties to those who are unable to provide for themselves, so that they will lack for no good things to make their hearts glad on the natal day of the world's Redeemer.

Last year, Ambrose Greenwell, of the firm of Greenwell & Sons, gave for the needy of the Wards of Ogden and West Weber, two good heaves, four sheep and numerous other articles, and this year he is

DOING MORE THAN DOUBLE

what he did last. The tithing office in this place has furnished a large number of chickens, etc., which have now found their way to the homes of the poor. The members of the Ladies' Relief Society, with their characteristic zeal and diligence have been, and still are at this writing, visiting the homes of the widows, the fatherless, the sick and the indigent, and, like ministering angels, as they certainly are, leaving numerous blessings in the domiciles of the worthy poor they return from their missions of mercy with the heartfelt gratitude, and genuine prayers and blessings of those to whom they have rendered timely assistance, and experiencing that in all these labors of love it is more blessed to give than to receive, and that the consciousness of having discharged their obligations to their unfortunate neighbors is worth to them more than the

PLAUDITS OF MILLIONS.

The black diamond also has been freely distributed to those who need it. Among those who have liberally contributed in this direction is our young fellow-citizen Mr. Geo. W. Driver, who gave seven tons of coal to help cook the food and warm the hearths and homes of the aged and others. Many others of our worthy citizens came forward with open hands and hearts and contributed handsomely for the same generous purpose.

The displays in the mercantile establishments are full, and are arranged with much skill,

TASTE AND ELEGANCE,

calculated and intended to attract the attention of the visitors and induce them to step in and purchase. Nor are these appeals in vain. The stores are crowded with people here and from the country, making their Christmas purchases.

To-day the weather is fine, and very warm for the season of the year. It is more like spring than Xmas. For a week past the atmosphere has been very humid. We have been visited with frequent warm showers of rain, especially last night, for about an hour it

CAME DOWN IN TORRENTS,

such as we have not witnessed for a long time before. The result is, that some of our streets are in a fearful