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MARCUS WHITMAN

AND

THE EARLY DAYS OF OREGON

BY

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EXTRACT FROM LETTER OF REV. MARCUS WHITMAN
DATED WAILATPU, APRIL 8, 1844

. . . A congregation of from two to three hundred have been in attendance on the Sabbath since some time in February, besides many more who come and go and have more or less opportunity of instruction. There is nothing especially different in their attention upon religious instruction from formerly, further than an evident gradual increase in knowledge. I think there is less evidence of regard to Papal forms than formerly, notwithstanding an apparent desire on the part of some to try and make use of the difference between us to enable them to secure some selfish purpose. Some most arch grievances were brought against our course, which were based on the authority of Tom Hill, a Delaware Indian who is now in the mountains with the Nez Perces and Flathead Indians, but finding it difficult to maintain the position on such authority the individual said: "My friend, it is not Tom Hill only that says so, the Papal priests also say the same thing." The Indians say they are told that we ought to expend more liberally on them and that it is peculiarly our duty to do so. That we do not give goods for nothing and give large prices for all we get of them and break their lands for nothing. These are among their greatest grievances. They complain that they have been obliged to teach us their language and we have not taught them ours in turn. They have always, however, caused themselves to be paid for teaching us language and even then a teacher has been hard to obtain and keep. From their manner of speaking it would seem there were those who teach them to use as an apology for their foolishness and sin, that it cannot be expected so long as they are taught only in their own language, wear their usual clothing with long hair and have not regular houses to live in, that they could be changed from their old habits. All these they would fain think come in the legitimate line of our duty to provide for them by expending for their benefit. It seems to be a legitimate object with them to throw every possible difficulty in the way to benefit them and then to blame us for not having done for them all that was neces-

sary to make them not only civilized, but rich and enlightened as it were without their own effort.

Some of the emigrants wintered with us, and Mr. Looney was anxious to stay until June or September, if he could either get work in breaking land for the Indians and take his pay in horses, or if he could get land to plant for himself in peace. But they would not pay for breaking land, inasmuch as it was *their own land*, and their jealousy would not permit him to plant for himself as they fear that the Americans are going to overrun the country. They also forbid me to break a new field, as I desired lest I should make money out of their lands by supplying emigrants. They probably have a desire so far as they can to engross the profits of supplying the emigration themselves and do not wish to have competition. Last fall they must have done much more towards it than the mission, as almost the entire party had to be furnished by them and the mission for the remainder of their journey to Vancouver and Willamette, and also Lieutenant Fremont and his party. The Indians say they have been told by the Papists not to be afraid that we should leave them by their pressing us, but if we should be vexed to remove, to be calm and see us go off, having only the feeling that they are going; that Mr. Spalding and myself were not all the Americans in the world, and that more and better would come to supply our place. One of them told me that Mr. Blanchet told him if they would send me away he would send a mission among them. I tell them all plainly that I do not refuse to go away if they prefer the Papists to us, and urge them to decide if they wished me to do so, but that I should not go except at the full expression of the people, desiring me so to do. None of them as yet have been found to express such a desire. They are told all that the Delawares, Shawnees, and Iroquois know of the intercourse of Americans and Indians, as well as much more equally bad from other sources, so that their expectations are great with regard to the sale of their lands, a thing they are not opposed to do, but wish to drive a bargain. It is not strange at such a time that they are agitated.

They are very anxious to establish claims to particular tracts among themselves, which causes them to drive one and another off from their cultivated spots and which I have no doubt, is a step to prepare to have individual claims

to sell to Americans. With all this there is less disposition to disturb and perplex than might be expected. I have no doubt but the intention is to manage peaceably towards the whites. It is important that you lay the case of the mission before Congress, and obtain a grant of land for each station, for if the bill passes giving land to settlers, the stations we occupy may at once be located from beneath us. Rev. Jason Lee has gone home mostly to obtain grants to their mission.

Perhaps in some way, as we have so eminently aided the Government by being among the first to cross the mountains and the first to bring white women over, and last but not least, as I brought the late emigration on to the shores of the Columbia with their wagons contrary to all former assertions of the impossibility of the route, we may be allowed the rights of private citizens, by taking lands in the country. As the tenor of our missionary operations is so uncertain it may be well for the Board, for us to exercise the rights of citizens, in case of the Government's occupying the country.

There have been several peculiar causes of agitation among the Indians the past year, such as the introduction of laws by Doctor White as Indian Agent in the name of the American Government. He represented himself as having power to settle all difficulties between whites and Indians and to send any person out of this Upper Country, including missionaries, in case they did not teach as they ought. This brought him to be the repository for all supposed grievance both civil and religious. It is in vain to urge that the Indians adopted the laws of themselves. The principal chief said, they would have preferred their own if left to their own choice. They have become a mere form, as there are none to execute them. They wish mostly to use them to establish complaints against white men rather than punish offenders of their own people. I have no confidence in two codes of laws for one country. If the Indians are not wise enough to either give laws to their own country, both for themselves and others, or to partake with the whites in the formation of them, they must submit to the laws of the immigration that comes among them as others do. For it is evident that there should be but one code for both the native and the settler in the country.

Last fall there was a difficulty between the Indians on

the Chutes River and some of the Snakes. Some of the people from that quarter having gone to trade with the Snake Indians were killed. A party headed by Walaptu-lik, a Hains, went to avenge it, and killed several of the Snakes, returned, and danced the triumph of victory over their scalps. Two murders have since occurred. The first was the murder of a sorceress by Makai, the father of a young man that had died suddenly from the superstition that he was killed by her sorcery. The second, which took place in the immediate vicinity of this station, was by a relative of the sorceress, partly from the excitement of her death and partly from a desire to possess himself of some cattle left by one of the Indians that was killed by the Snakes, as mentioned above. Neither of these have been punished by the chiefs nor is there any prospect of its being done.

Mr. Spalding has had severe trials with regard to the action of the Indians in taking away the cultivated lands from Timothy, one of the church members. He is a fearless man to rebuke sin, and this gives him many enemies. But probably this is not all. His industry in cultivating has enabled him to have a surplus of grain to sell, which probably is a source of jealousy.

William Craig, a white man from the mountains, whose wife is a native, and a connection of Old James, the reputed owner of the valley in which Mr. Spalding's station is located, is living near the station, and has been for several years. He is said, both by Indians and others, to be the mover of the measure of the Indians to send Timothy off his land. He is busy in trying to excite the people against the laws as recommended by Doctor White, and also says much in favor of the Papists, a predilection of no long standing. The family with whom he is connected say that they are determined to obtain a Papal priest to come among them. The Indian with whom Mr. Smith had the difficulty at Hamiah, and of whom he complained so much, has shown both here and at Lapwai how much he regrets his leaving. He feels as though he made confession and recantation immediately, but that notwithstanding, Mr. Smith would go, and that ever since his heart has wept. All in that region are very anxious to have a missionary among them. Mr. Smith's teacher spoke of the hard labor required to instruct new missionaries in the language and

the length of time before they could be successful teachers. This he said in favor of cherishing those they have among them. He said he was afraid lest his people should be drawn away after the Papists, and also told me that the priest among the Flatheads had invited him to be baptized, as he was entitled to be considered a part of that tribe, not on the part of one of his parents only, but because he spoke the language also. He said to him, "No, I have been fearfully instructed in relation to baptism." He was also shown a cut in which Protestants were represented as persecuting Papists by death.

13th. Since writing the above a most barbarous murder occurred on the night of the 11th instant, a short distance from our door. The murdered was a sorcerer and became a prey to that superstition, being murdered by his intimate friends. A death having taken place in the family of a brother of the murderer, at a distance from this place, a messenger was sent to bring the news, and orders for the younger brothers to kill the sorcerer, which was promptly obeyed the same night. It was perpetrated in a public gambling scene and no one attempted to avert the blows, but all fled and left them to complete the work of death, which was done with a sword in the most shocking manner. The impress of this superstition is so strong that it seems impossible for us to make any impression on the native mind to disabuse them from the feeling that their friends are as literally killed by sorcery and with as much malice prepense as in any other case of actual murder. Hence the feeling of justice in killing them as condemned murderers; a practice which has descended from father to son.

An affair of much interest took place a short time since at the Falls of the Willamette between the settlers and some Indians of the Molala tribe. The Molalas speak the same language as the Hains, and are said to have been separated from them in their ancient wars with the Snakes. It was reported that Doctor White had offered a reward of one hundred dollars for the arrest of an Indian. With this understanding Mr. La Breten and a black man went to take him as he came from the opposite side of the river from the village. They came upon him only, his companions having separated from him a short distance. When he saw he was likely to be taken he drew a pistol and was making ready to defend himself when La Breten told the black

man to fire, which was promptly obeyed and the Indian fell, but in a moment rose, not being hurt, and discharged one pistol at the colored man and missed him, and then with another closed in with La Breten and at the same time discharged the contents into his hand so as to pass up the arm and destroy the elbow joint. With the other hand he got the Indian down and the colored man forced the britch of his rifle through the skull. At this the other Indians commenced firing with their guns and arrows as they went off. The people flew to their houses for their arms at the same time and returned the fire with some effect. La Breten was taken to Vancouver, but in such a state that amputation was not attempted and he died; as also did Mr. Rogers, who was wounded as was supposed but slightly with an arrow, but whose case becoming alarming also went to Vancouver, and died with the arrow point still in his arm, as was demonstrated after death.

So early an eruption is greatly to be deplored, inasmuch as the white settlements are now so considerable, and yet illy prepared for self-defense. It is the more to be feared, lest the Hains and Molalas, who are so alike in their daring habits, should form an alliance, which by their influence might result in a general concert among the Indians.

I am now in a most cramped state, as I am lame myself and labor is most difficult to be obtained, for the wages on the Willamette are from one dollar to a dollar and half per day for common labor. My nephew bids fair to be of great service, as it is most important to have some one on whom I can rely when called from home and also at other times. Mr. Littlejohn and family are here, but his health is such that he cannot be relied upon for work. During the winter Mrs. L—— taught school one quarter for our children and those that wintered near us. We maintained English worship also on the Sabbath, and at least once a week all winter, a practice we always keep up even if we have only our own family.

A mill is most important to us here, but I do not see how I can accomplish it as the labor of mechanics must be paid at the rate of three dollars per day to begin with, starting from the Willamette and continuing until they return again.

I think this valley will be among the first to be settled by Americans. It is a most difficult point to manage such

a people preparatory to settlers, for if we tell them what is very much needed to induce them to proper care and industry it will be perverted and result in nothing good for them.

The wants of an emigration must be supplied at this point. It was my desire to aid the Indians to cultivate largely for that purpose, but as they are unwilling to pay for lands to be broken for them it cannot be facilitated. The result in my opinion will be to hasten a settlement somewhere in this vicinity for that object.

I have exceeded the limits first proposed, as a later opportunity to send and overtake the first express has offered.

With much esteem, I am yours truly,
(Signed) MARCUS WHITMAN.

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DR. WHITMAN'S LETTER TO THE HON. JAMES M.
PORTER, SECRETARY OF WAR, WITH A BILL TO
BE LAID BEFORE CONGRESS, FOR THE ORGANIZA-
TION OF OREGON

The Rev. Myron Eells obtained from the original files in the office of the Secretary of War two valuable papers. They bear this indorsement:

"Marcus Whitman, inclosing synopsis of a bill, with his views in reference to importance of the Oregon Territory, War. 382—rec. June 22, 1844."

To the Hon. JAMES M. PORTER,
Secretary of War.

SIR: In compliance with the request you did me the honor to make last winter, while in Washington, I herewith transmit to you the synopsis of a bill which, if it could be adopted, would, according to my experience and observation, prove highly conducive to the best interests of the United States generally, to Oregon, where I have resided for more than seven years as a missionary, and to the Indian tribes that inhabit the immediate country. The Government will now doubtless for the first time be apprised