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MARCUS WHITMAN

AND

THE EARLY DAYS OF OREGON

BY

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ILLUSTRATED



5-3827
5/2/02

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NEW YORK

BOSTON

CHICAGO

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LETTER FROM DR. WHITMAN, MAY, 1843

METHODIST MISSION AT THE SHAWNEE MANUAL LABOR SCHOOL,

May 30, 1843.

REV. DAVID GREENE,

Secretary of the A. B. C. F. M.

MY DEAR SIR : You will be surprised to see that we are not yet started. Lieutenant Fremont left this morning. The emigrants have some of them just gone and others have been gone a week and some are yet coming on. I shall start to-morrow. I regret I could not have spent some of the time spent here in suspense, with my friends at the East.

I have only a lad of thirteen, my nephew, with me. I take him to have some one to stay with Mrs. Whitman. I cannot give you much of an account of the emigrants until we get on the road. It is said that there are over two hundred men besides women and children. They look like a fair representative of a country population. Few, I conclude, are pious. Fremont intends to return by land so as to be back early in winter. Should he succeed in doing so we may be able to send you an account of the Mission and country at that time. We do not ask you to become the patrons of emigration to Oregon, but we desire you to use your influence that, in connection with all the influx into the country, there may be a fair proportion of good men of our own denomination who shall avail themselves of the advantages of the country in common with others. Also that ministers should come out as citizens or under the Home Missionary Society. We think agents of the Board and of the Home Missionary Society, as also ministers and good men in general, may do much to send a share of good, pious people to that country. We cannot feel it to be at all just that we do nothing, while worldly men and Papists are doing so much. De Smet's business to Europe can be seen, I think, at the top of the 233 page of his Indian Sketches, etc. You will see by his book, I think, that the papal effort is designed to convey over the country to the English. I mentioned in my former letter that it would be well for you to buy this book. It is to be had at the Catholic book stores.

I wish to say a few words about manufactures in Oregon, that I may remove an impression that they cannot compete with the English. First, let us take the operatives and the raw material from the Pacific Islands. It matters not at how much labor the Islander cleans the cotton, for it gives him employment and for that he gets goods, and then for his coffee and sugar and salt and cotton, etc., etc., he gets goods also. This is all an exchange trade that only a population and manufacturers in Oregon can take advantage of, because they alone will want the articles of exchange which the Islander can give. The same will hold good in relation to Indians whenever they shall have sheep, and I intend to try and have the Government give them sheep instead of money, a result not likely to be delayed long. A good man or company can now select the best mill sites and spots, and likely would find a sawmill profitable at once. I think our greatest hope for having Oregon at least part Protestant now lies in encouraging a proper intention of good men to go there while the country is open. I want to call your attention to the operation of Farnham of Salem and the Bensons of New York in Oregon. I am told credibly that secretly Government aids them with the secret service fund. Captain Howard of Maine is also in expectation of being employed by Government to take out emigrants by ship should the Oregon bill pass. You will find the addresses of Farnham and Bensons by a little inquiry and likely other facts may appear.

I hope you will send out the minister for our mission next year, also that others may come as citizens either to be employed by the mission, or to settle near us as may be agreed and as may be best after full understanding and they have opportunity to judge. I expect to draw a bill for a few dollars over a hundred to complete my outfit and pay off some arrears for the Spaniard who came in with me.

With best regard and desire fully to exercise a spirit of co-operation,

I am, Dear Sir,

Yours truly,

(Signed)

MARCUS WHITMAN.