

Ym
MARCUS WHITMAN

AND

THE EARLY DAYS OF OREGON

BY

WILLIAM A. MOWRY, PH.D.

HONORARY MEMBER OF THE OREGON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, MEMBER OF THE
NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC-GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY, AND OF
THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

ILLUSTRATED



5-3827
5/2/02

SILVER, BURDETT AND COMPANY

NEW YORK

BOSTON

CHICAGO

COPYRIGHT, 1901,
BY SILVER, BURDETT AND COMPANY

3

LETTER FROM DR. WHITMAN AFTER HIS RETURN
TO OREGON

FORT WALLA WALLA, November 1, 1843.

REV. DAVID GREENE,
Secretary of the A. B. C. F. M.,
Mission House, Boston.

MY DEAR SIR: I cannot at this moment say very much, as the Company's express boats are looked for hourly.

My journey across the mountains was very much prolonged by the necessity for me to pilot the emigrants. I tried in vain to come ahead at different points, but found it would be at the risk of the disaster to the emigrants of having to leave their wagons without the possibility of obtaining a sufficient number of horses to take any considerable part of their families and necessary food and clothing. By taking a light horse wagon I was enabled to come ahead from Fort Boisé. At the Grande Ronde, east of the Blue Mountains, I met a letter from Mr. Walker written at Lapwai urging me to come with speed to see Mr. and Mrs. Spalding, who were both in a dangerous state of sickness.

At this point I engaged one of the Waiilatpu (Stickus¹) to complete the piloting of the company across the Blue Mountains into the main Columbia valley, which he did in a most judicious and faithful manner, and I hired a fresh horse and guide and went direct to Mr. Spalding's. I arrived on Monday evening, 25th September. I found both Mr. and Mrs. Spalding in a fair way to recover, but Mrs. Spalding showed that few ever recover from as low a state as that to which she had been reduced. At the time I was there both their children were taken with the same disease of which it appears their parents were sick (Scarlatina). After a severe sickness all recovered, but I fear from recent letters from Mr. Spalding and from the fact of Mrs. Spalding's having had a cough for the last year that she is just tending to a pulmonary consumption. Mr. Walker was there and Mr. Geiger also, who was in charge at Waiilatpu, had been sent for. I did not stay but one night and then returned with Mr. Geiger to Waiilatpu,

¹ Dr. Eells called his name "Istikas,"

which had been left in the care of one Indian only; the wheat being in chaff and out of doors and part of the corn to be gathered by them also. In the meantime some of the advance parties of the emigrants on horseback had reached and broke open the house and left it open to the Indians, although wheat, corn, potatoes, garden vegetables, hogs and cattle were in abundance outside. After one day's rest I went to Tshimakain to attend Mrs. Eells, who had the addition of a son on the sixth of October. I left for home the same day and rested the Sabbath and reached home on Tuesday the ninth about eight o'clock in the evening.

In the meantime a large part of the emigrants had passed my house with their wagons. All came in their turns and were supplied with provisions. I soon put a small pair of (hand) mill stones running by water, so that the latter part of the emigration got grinding done. My wheat, beef, and most of my hogs and corn and many of my potatoes have been furnished them. Lieutenant Fremont's party have come last of all and are still to be supplied, for which and much of my own living I shall be obliged to call on Mr. Spalding. Mr. Geiger was alone most of the year with the Indians. Few could have done better. I have dismissed him and settled at thirty dollars for a month. I have been at Was-kopum, the station near the Dalles of the Methodist Mission, after Mrs. Whitman, whom I have brought thus far on our way home. Mr. Jason Lee was there and had provided her with a passage to that place from the Wallamette, where she had spent some time. Mr. Lee was in a most interesting religious state of mind. He had just come from a series of religious meetings among the settlers of the Wallamette, wherein they had been greatly blessed by the conversion of many of the most hardened and the reclamation of backslidden professors. He is in no way discouraged himself, but says if any of their mission have made up their minds to leave he will encourage them to go home as soon as possible. I think great good is doing by them among the settlers. Mr. Clark also has a prosperous church, but Mr. Griffin seems to be doing little or no good.

Mrs. Whitman's health has been poor for the last year, but from the care of Doctor Barclay at Vancouver (principally), and Doctors Tohmie, White and Babcock, she is somewhat relieved but not recovered. The Indians have succeeded well in cultivating and never treated me and the

mission better than at present. The Waiilatpu have also been most kind to the emigrants, notwithstanding the excitement of last winter and spring. Some of the Indians between this post and the Dalles have been very thievish and saucy to the emigrants. They are, however, of the poorest, lowest and least formidable class of Indians.

Lieutenant Fremont has gone below to Vancouver with the intention to return by the fifteenth instant and make his way at once back by the head of the Missouri to the States this fall and winter, in which case I shall write by him; but it seems to me he may still charter a small American brig which is in the river below and go down to Panama and cross the Isthmus and from thence reach the United States. The prospective help of the mission this year is one man, hired by Mr. Spalding, and one man and family and a school teacher, whom I have selected from the emigrants and sent to that station. At Waiilatpu I expect Mr. Littlejohn will take the land now in cultivation on shares, the station to keep the fences in repair and furnish seed, tools and team, and receive two thirds of the crop. There are two other families who stop with us for the winter to whom I intend to give employment by the job in cutting and splitting rails, making fences and breaking new land. We have not found any yet to go and assist Mr. Walker or Eells, but hope we shall be able to do so soon. We hope you will be able to send us a minister for Waiilatpu who will be an able, warm-hearted minister for the English language, and well fitted to come in contact with frontier men such as are likely to come from Missouri, Arkansas and other western or southern states. This must be in addition to his native instructions and qualifications to come in contact with Papacy. It is asking but little to request two ministers for this language, for in case of the removal or death of Mr. Spalding or myself the knowledge of the language would be limited to so few that little could be done. The Indians where Mr. Smith was want a missionary. You will do as you think best about encouraging laborers and teachers to come as emigrants and labor a time for the mission. There can be no doubt but settlers will settle in this upper country, and what we very much want is good men to settle, two, three or four in a place, and secure a good location and hold a good influence over the Indians and sustain religious institutions as a nucleus for society and

keep back papacy. Through your agents an influence to favor this could go through New England and New York without at all becoming a source of sectarian jealousy or exciting the papists to greater effort. It may be said without fear of disappointing the emigrant from these states, that in the middle mission of Oregon by the herding system he can keep the year round one thousand sheep as cheaply and easily as he can keep one hundred where he now lives.

The Home Missionary Society ought to be called on to care for Oregon, the Methodists will gather all the first fruits of the settlements, and Congregationalists and Presbyterians will all as of necessity look to them for religious institutions. An early provision ought to be made for schools in this country. Unless the Board gets a special grant of the land the mission occupies, it will be likely to be taken from the mission by pre-emption whenever Congress takes possession of the country and grants land to settlers. I regret much that I was obliged so soon to return to this country, but nothing was more evidently my duty. Great inconvenience has occurred and expense by my absence as well as my expense, yet I do not regret having visited the States, for I feel that this country must either be American or else foreign and mostly papal. *If I never do more than to have been one of the first to take white women across the mountains and prevent the disaster and reaction which would have occurred by the breaking up of the present emigration, and establishing the first wagon road across to the border of the Columbia River I am satisfied.* I cannot feel that we can look on and see foreign and papal influence making its greatest efforts and we hold ourselves as expatriated and neutral. I am determined to exert myself for my country and to procure such regulations and laws as will best secure both the Indians and white men in their transit and settlement intercourse. Mr. Spalding thinks a good work of grace was bestowed on the Indians of his station last winter and he admitted a considerable number to the church. He has expressed a much better state of feeling towards the members of the mission and the Board since his sickness, the reception of your letter and my return, than ever before.

With best regard and fullest confidence,

I am, yours truly,

(Signed)

MARCUS WHITMAN.