

NOTICES

Oregon War Review of Agent Metcalf's Letter of Defence

submitted by Frank Simmons

Mr. Editor:

In a late *Oregon Statesman*, there is a letter from R.B. Metcalf, whom the editor in a note informs us is a "gentleman of character and honor, kinsman of ex-Governor Metcalf, of Kentucky, and Indian Agent for Southern Oregon."

The letter purports to be written in defence of the people against certain statements going the rounds to their prejudice, and is mainly occupied with proof to show that the Indians under Old Chief "John" were aggressors in the war.

I am somewhat acquainted with the circumstances, and believing that the Indians as well as the worthy citizens of Southern Oregon have been greatly injured by such a perversion of facts as Mr. Metcalf's letter contains, I am induced to offer the following by way of correction.

I will not charge Mr. Metcalf with falsehood, but for argument's sake, admit all that he has said about the Chiefs urging the tribes to combine for war. Yet I must observe, and I believe every high-minded citizen will agree with me, how unfair to give such a one-sided account against a venerable Chief and against a people who could not write a refutation of falsehood.

Why did not Mr. Metcalf, in his account of the origin of the war, tell of the doings of both parties — how a white wretch shot the husband of the Chief's daughter because he would not give her up to his lust? How his own son was kept in irons for weeks on a charge believed to be false and, after a fair trial, was dismissed by the authorities, but taken by the lawless and cruelly put to death, and how that numbers of men made it a point for months previous to open war; to shoot Indians wherever they could do it with safety to themselves; and that the Chiefs made complaints again and again, but could get neither redress or protection; that not a house was burned, or a woman or child injured by Indians until after their homes were burnt and their families destroyed.

Why, I ask, does Mr. Metcalf keep these facts out of sight, to the prejudice of those whose interest he is bound by office and honor to protect.

Mr. Metcalf knows well that, before the Indians committed any of these outrages, an organized band of men made an attack with the avowed purpose of killing every Indian in the valley, regardless of age or sex; and that this murderous work was commenced in earnest on the morning of Oct. 8, 1855, when three ranches were burnt over and 30 of their inmates put to death, 14 of whom were women and children, — and this was done subsequent to an assurance, (a day or two previous) of peace and protection, in order the more easily to effect their destruction.

About the same time, many were killed in different parts of the valley, and Capt. Smith was threatened with an overwhelming assault by the volunteers if he opened the fort for their protection, so that the Indians had no alternative but to fight for life or be killed like brutes.

But Mr. Metcalf defends the killing of women and children by saying that, in battle, they crowd together and it can't be helped. He forgets that, at first, it was deliberately intended to kill **all**. But suppose this was not the case. How will he explain the circumstances of those three Indian women who had taken refuge on the top of Table Rock, being shot and their bodies falling over the cragged rocks, down the steep precipice below. The sight of these mangled victims as they lay writhing in agony was so shocking that it was reported that they were scared and

fell down. But Dr. Ambroze, who lived in the vicinity, informed me that they did not fall until they were fired upon.

And how will he explain the circumstance of Rice's company going to the relief of Bruce and capturing two women and an infant who, as the volunteers report, were clubbed to death, the child's brains dashed out against a tree, in retaliation for which the papers state that the Indians put to death two white captive females.

If it had been true that the editor of the *Statesman* had not published the fact that Mr. Metcalf has such high connections, and moreover is a "gentleman of honor and character," we, the citizens of Southern Oregon, should have some misgivings on that point, for everybody who has read the papers knows that it is not the custom of the women and children to crowd in conflict, but to fly for refuge. The warriors alone face their assailants, and moreover, from the mode of attack generally adopted of creeping in the dark or, as at the meadows, approaching under cover of a dense cloud and pouring their deadly fire on the unsuspecting families. The killing of women and children would be evidence of design, not chance.

I could write much more of these painful details, but enough is presented to show the wrong position which agent Metcalf has assumed and the injustice he has endeavored to inflict upon a people who, to say the least, are blamed and punished for more than they deserve.

I assure you, Mr. Editor, it is with disappointment and deep regret that I read Mr. Metcalf's letter and that I pen this review, for from his reputation as a gentleman, it was hoped the poor outcasts had in him a friend, not only because of his office, but because of his alliance by love and parentage.

It was thought the tender associations of family and kin would secure from him a just regard for their rights, especially as it was generally reported that he is a kind man and an affectionate father, unlike those monsters who treat their Indian offspring like brutes. He acknowledges the relationship and cares for their culture. Why does not Mr. Metcalf use his official power in its application on behalf of the people of his charge? Why does he allow them to be deprived of these rights "**without due process of law.**"

I suppose, Mr. Editor, you are ready to inquire, are there no good citizens in Southern Oregon, no lovers of truth and justice? I answer yes, as many in proportion as you have in your city, but the press and the power are in the hands of the enemy, and until the Indians have a "Vigilance Committee" to guard their interest, and honest thought a free expression, and good men rule the people, Oregon, like California, will groan under accumulated curses.

But there is hope; light is springing up, and the eyes of many are opening and ere long we believe the son of righteousness will shine over all the land.

Respectfully yours,

John Beeson

Beeson to Editor, 8 October 1856, in United States, Office of Indian Affairs, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-1880*, National Archives Microcopy 234, Roll 609, NADP Document D45.