

THE DOCTOR IN COOS AND CURRY

Continued from page one

exchange our present pleasures with the accompanying sorrows, for the happiness of childhood—for though our sorrows are greater our sense of pleasure is also enhanced."

Another six months go by, and he tells briefly of the Fourth of July at the post, including, "... a federal salute of 13 guns at dawn of day and 31 at noon, and at 9 p. m. by five rockets from the highest point of the heads to the great admiration and astonishment of the Indians, most of whom had never seen the likes before."

Dr. Glisan gives us a picture of the pleasant days of sunshine with their cooling breezes, but he also describes the fierceness of the storms. Quite an even as the months roll by is the bi-weekly visits of the steamer—usually the "Columbia"—on its regular trips between Portland and San Francisco, stopping when weather conditions permitted. And how the folks at the post and in the town looked forward to the ship's coming, with the news from the outside world—it was already old on its arrival—the papers from Portland or from San Francisco, according to the way the ship was headed. And the New York papers, though weeks or perhaps months old on arrival, were highly prized and eagerly devoured. Sometimes the place would be a month or ever six weeks without any news from the outside world, the weather conditions being unfavorable for the landing of the ship.

Early in January, 1856, Dr. Glisan records that the "Columbia" passed down, having gone only to Astoria, "in consequence of the Columbia river being solid with ice." He adds, "This is an unusually severe winter. The back country is covered with deep snow—and we have even had a few spits at this point, and the thermometer one night as low as 20 degrees above zero, Fahr. . . . Exactly twenty inches of rain fell last month" (Dec. 1855).

The doctor tells about the three sawmills, two of them having to close during the summer, due to shortage of water (I may add here that most of the pioneer sawmills were operated by water power). The one that continued to operate was powered

by steam.

The doctor gives us a very good picture of gold mining along the beaches, with the skin-games perpetuated on the dupes who were easy prey to get-rich-quick schemes.

With regard to the Indian troubles, Dr. Glisan showed himself to be a student. He searched for fundamental causes underlying the trouble between the whites and the Indians. His discussion indicates fairness and sound judgment. He realizes that there are two sides to every question.

He also gives his views on the relative efficiency of the military army-trained soldier as compared with the hardened pioneer of the wodos or the mines, who goes in as a volunteer. The doctor sees and presents both sides of the problem.

With the rank of major (not certain, check this) Dr. Glisan spent weeks with the men in the field, or rather on the trail, in open camps, in the roughest, toughest brush and shrubbery on steep mountain sides and in deep canyons. His description of a trip from Fort Orford by trail, to Agness-Illahe-Big Bend battlefields will give a bit of an idea of their "army life." Let us quote just a few lines:

"March 14, 1856—101 men left Fort Orford this morning to act against the Rogue River Indians—myself and fifteen packers—the trail is muddy and slippery, it is exceedingly rough, and lined most of the way with thick timber . . . single file, having to wade streams (one, Brush creek, 17 times) . . . wet to the knees."

"Not being able to get a good supply of pack animals . . . we have brought with us nothing but absolute necessities . . . not even tents . . . must endure the weather whatever it may be (and just imagine what weather might be in mid-March).

But in the midst of hardships, privations and misery, Dr. Glisan seems never to have overlooked the beauties about him. He says while on the trip just mentioned: "The view from the crest of the mountain was so grand. From our present position we could see Rogue River and the ocean, were it not so foggy. The fog, which lies along the water courses, many hundred feet below us, looks very beautiful, as the sun, which is setting clear, adds to its charm. The

snow-capped mountains of the Illinois shine with brilliant splendor. Although, it is the most beautiful landscape I have ever seen." (It is interesting to note that nearly a hundred years later, Roy Mason says of the same scenery, but from a different viewpoint, "... great expanse of mountain forests, covered with low-lying clouds, which at a distance show smudgy blacks and grays and big luscious chunks of Oregon Blue."—*True Magazine*, August 1949.

But I like Dr. Glisan's description better. In addition to telling about the battles and skirmishes with the Indians, while not otherwise engaged, he gives us an interesting description of Fort Orford and its surroundings. It is interesting to note that much of the country, especially in the interior, is not greatly changed in these hundred years—the variety of trees, the beauty of the mountains, the fish in the streams—native berries and flowers—the deer and elk, the ducks and geese and gulls.

Dr. Glisan tells about his fishing trips on Elk river, and two

kinds of trout—mountain trout and salmon trout. He takes us with him on a canoe trip down the coast in an attempt to reach Brush creek, with two other men. A storm comes up; they get seasick, and narrowly escape with their lives. He takes us with him, "hatched" down with sick and wounded men, under deck, in the "dreadfully small" schooner Gold Beach, on their perilous journey over the treacherous Rogue bar, up the coast at night, to Fort Orford.

In this brief paper, I have not attempted to relate Dr. Glisan's description of the military engagements with the Rogue River Indians. That must wait until another time, or for another writer.

To sum up briefly, then, it appears to me that Dr. Rodney Glisan has made a real contribution to the literature of Coos and Curry counties. Not only in his *Journal of Army Life*, a reliable original source of information about the Rogue River Indian wars of the '50s, but it also gives us a fascinating picture

of that something which even to this day makes people want to come again and again to this part of the Oregon coast.

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