

The Daily Astorian.

Vol. XIV.

Astoria, Oregon, Sunday Morning, March 6, 1881.

No. 55.

Did Dr. Whitman Save Oregon?

When I published my article with the above title in the Californian, I expected some notice to be taken of it; in fact, I was rather glad Mr. Clarke had furnished me an occasion for pointing out the truth to those who think, as I do, that a love of truth is above a devotion to an idea, whether it is religious or political.

Controversy is disagreeable to me, though for the sake of truth I might enter upon a joust, now and then, with a knight clad in such mail as is worn by W. H. Gray, who has answered my article in THE ASTORIAN of September 10th. Mr. Gray, in his History of Oregon, has asserted that Dr. Whitman did save Oregon to the United States. I clearly showed in my article that he did not. Mr. Gray now says, though Dr. Whitman may not have influenced the Ashburton treaty, his influence in "one to be made," "had the desired effect." But in his history he plainly imputes the influence to the Ashburton treaty, which was concluded before Dr. Whitman set out for the Oregon boundary. What he says is this: "Besides, he had about traded it off with Governor Simpson, to go into the Ashburton treaty, for a coal fishery on New Foundland." When it is shown that this was a blunder, he shuffles the influence onto the treaty of 1846, or some other with which the doctor had nothing to do, as neither Webster nor Tyler were parties to that treaty. So much for the treaties.

But what I now propose to show, since I have been fairly challenged, is that the thirty-seventh chapter of Gray's History of Oregon is a tissue of fictions. To begin with, he represents that the Red river emigration brought out by Governor Sim, son, was in 1842. It was in 1841. (See Sir George Simpson's Narrative, Vol. 1, page 89.) Next he represents himself as being at Wallatpu, September 1842; he was in the Willamette valley, (see chapter twenty-nine of Gray's History, page 211, and Hine's Oregon and its Institutions, page 154), where he had gone "on account of difficulties they had become fully satisfied, would ultimately destroy the mission or drive it from the country."

I propose to show what those difficulties were, by creditable witnesses. By a reference to the reports of Dr. White, as Indian agent; to Mr. Hine's Journal of Exploration to Oregon, *Whitman's Narrative*, and to Gray's History itself, it will be seen that the Indians, though selfishly inclined to except any favors and instruction at the hands of the missionaries, were often insolent and threatening, and gave serious cause of apprehension, besides being so unsettled in their habits as to make the mission work very discouraging. Mr. Smith, the missionary at the upper Nez Perce station, wrote in August, 1839, to the *Missionary Herald*, published in Boston, "the novelty of having missionaries among them is now gone, and we must work against the current, as much as in any other heathen country. Indeed, I fear, after all that has been said of the readiness of this people to receive the gospel, that the sad story that is told of the Indians on the borders of the states, will soon be told of this people also." On the 15th of September, writing from Wallatpu, Mr. Smith said, "This time has now come when we are convinced that what we do must be done quickly. Papacy is now making its appearance, and the errors of that church are beginning to be diffused among the people."

Think not this will become a self-sustaining mission. The idea is visionary in the extreme." *Missionary Herald*, August, 1840. In the same publication of September, 1841, I find the following: "Letters have been received from the missionaries, dated as late as March 28th. At some of the stations labor was going on prosperously, while at others there was no opposition, and the prospects were disheartening." A letter of Doctor Whitman's of the above date, says: "At present the people are assembled, and are in a very quiet state."

They appear never to have been as well disposed towards us, and this station, as at present. The old Cut-lap died last winter, which has removed a very troublesome cause." In *The Missionary Herald* for January, 1842, it is mentioned that the stations of Wallatpu and Tachimakain were advancing, but the Lapwai reported less favorably. In the same number for 1843 it is said, in the annual report of the American Board, "owing to the smallness of the number of the Indians to whom the missionaries composing the southern branch could have access, the unfavorable location of the Indians, the difficulty, if not impossibility of bringing them together in dense settlements, with other unfavorable circumstances, the committee have deemed it advisable to discontinue this branch of the mission, embracing the stations of Wallatpu, Clear-water and Kamiah. The Indians manifest much fickleness, sometimes conducting an insolent and savage manner, and then expressing much interest in religious instruction."

The italics in the above quotation are my own, to point out the occasion of Doctor Whitman's sudden visit to

the east. Owing to the bad conduct of the Indians, and hopelessness of the mission among them, and the expense, being situated far inland, and in no sense self-supporting, the board had determined to concentrate all its forces at Tachimakain and abandon Wallatpu and Lapwai. A correspondence had been going on about it, and Mr. Smith, Mr. Rogers, and Mr. Gray had already left the upper country, there being only Whitman and Spaulding with their wives, and one or two employees at the southern missions, and Walker and Ellis at the Tachimakain.

Just at this critical moment, Doctor Whitman being naturally averse to giving up his improvements at Wallatpu, there arrived in the fall of 1842, the first Oregon immigration—a company of "one hundred and eleven persons, some forty-two families," according to Gray, under the leadership of Dr. White. This opportune arrival, added, to Doctor Whitman's mind, the knotty problem. American immigration overland had set in. Now, he could have assistance and moral support, with social intercourse; and now the mission could be made self-supporting—for all the travel over that route would have to purchase supplies, which he could furnish. He saw his opportunity, and grasped it. He knew the order would come in the spring to quit Wallatpu. This he determined not to do. All that agreeable and patriotic fiction of Mr. Gray's, about being at the fort and hearing of the Red river emigration, must fall to the ground, for instead of starting for the states in twenty-four hours after hearing of their arrival at Colville, he had had a whole year in that to get ready, and it is not probable would have thought of going, but for the arrival of Dr. White's party, and the prospect it opened up—for these immigrants assured him that others would follow, in larger numbers, the succeeding year.

Taking in the whole prospect opened up by the arrival of Dr. White's party, and having no time to lose, Dr. Whitman called a meeting of the missionaries, at which he announced his determination to go east and lay the case before the board in person. Under date of April 1st, 1847, Dr. Whitman said: "I pointed out to our mission the arrangements of the papists to settle in our vicinity, and that it only required that these arrangements should be completed, to close our operations." It is said that he met with opposition from the other members—but of that I know nothing, and do not wish to go outside of that which can be proven. At all events, he started for the states early in October (I think the 3d), having persuaded Mr. Lovejoy to accompany him. At Fort Hall the Hudson's Bay company's agent advised him to take the southern route, as safest in the winter season; and he did so, going by Taas and Bents fort. At the latter place Mr. Lovejoy left him, and he proceeded with some traders to the Missouri border, and arrived at his destination "early in the spring." (See Gray's picture of his arrival in Washington "in the dead of winter," on page 314 of his history.) There is no proof anywhere that he went to Washington, though it is probable enough, as all Americans having been in Oregon were welcomed by the government as a means of information, and we are told in the *Missionary Herald*, September, 1843, the following:

"It was stated in the last annual report that the Southern branch of this mission had been discontinued. At a special meeting of the mission it was thought advisable that Doctor Whitman should personally communicate the condition and prospects of these stations to the practical committee. After a long and tiresome journey he reached Boston, 20th in the spring; and upon hearing the representation which he made, it was resolved to sustain the operations of the mission without any material change. Were the prospect of benefiting those for whom it was more especially established even less than it is, there are other considerations which would justify its continuance. Aside from its influence on the Indians, the emigrants who are now crossing the Rocky Mountains in companies containing sometimes hundreds of souls, will be in a deplorable condition, if they find in their new homes nothing better than brotherhood in ruin. Another object of Doctor Whitman, in making the above mentioned visit, was to promote additional labors. He desired also to induce CHRISTIAN FAMILIES to emigrate, and settle in the vicinity of the different stations."

Now it will be observed that in this declaration of the motive of Doctor Whitman's visit, it is asserted that an emigration had already begun; that Doctor Whitman was not certain of taking back with him any "Christian families," and that he did not set out on his return until June. These assertions, of course, it must be allowed, upset Mr. Gray's statement concerning the instrumentality of Doctor Whitman in raising the emigrating company of 1843. That emigration was a month on its way, with wagons and stock, before he left his old home to return to Wallatpu. Hon. Jesse Applegate, whom Mr. Gray mentions as one of those who had "abandoned the idea of coming to Oregon because of the representations from Washington that every attempt to take wagons

and ox-teams through the Rocky and Pine mountains, to the Columbia had failed," but who was told by Doctor Whitman "that his only object in crossing the mountains in the dead of winter, at the risk of his life, and through untold sufferings, was to take back an American emigration that summer, through the mountains to the Columbia, with their wagons and teams," denies the truth of these assertions, and so do others of the persons named by Mr. Gray.

Mr. Applegate, in his article "A Day with the Cow Column," attempted to show the true relation of Dr. Whitman to the emigration of 1843, without openly assailing Mr. Gray's statements but he was too careful in his method. A year or two ago he sent me a copy of Gray's History with marginal notes. On page 289 he wrote: "I never saw Dr. Whitman, nor knew he was in the country, until he overtook me on the Platte." Also this: "From the time he overtook the emigration until he left it, at Fort Hall, Dr. Whitman made my camp his headquarters. Everything concerning Oregon, and its future was talked over between us. I understood his visit to the states was to obtain help from his board to counteract Catholic influence—the political part being incidental. That he was the prime mover in getting up the emigration of 1843, is not true."

On page 291, Mr. Gray says: "He asked not, nor expected a dollar as a reward, from any source; he felt himself abundantly rewarded when he saw the great wagon route over the mountains established, and Oregon in a fair way to be occupied with American settlements," etc.

On which Mr. Applegate remarks: "All this is true of Dr. Whitman; but his coadjutors, Walker and Ellis, were at his station, and obliged him to ask every emigrant for pay for pilotage. I paid forty-five dollars."

No wonder he felt himself abundantly rewarded for piloting a company over a road he was obliged to travel, and which returned the favor by furnishing him and his sole companion Perrin Whitman, with subsistence and protection—for that is what they did. Besides the pilotage money, he had a market for all the grain raised at several missions, and all they could procure at Fort Colville. He sold Spanish beef cattle to the emigrants, and retained two for one of their American stock, at that time too poor to kill, but worth in the Willamette valley one hundred dollars each. This was making the mission self-supporting, and was worth a visit to the states. Dr. McLaughlin, against whom Mr. Gray constantly insinuates evil, when he found that Mr. Applegate had left his cattle at Walla-walla and agreed to take the company's cattle in exchange, would not allow him to keep his own, and returned them to him after wintering them at the fort. From 1843 to the time of the Wallatpu tragedy, although the Indians were no better than before, there was no talk of abandoning the southern missions except that which related to the hostility of the Indians who were jealous of their financial prosperity, and distracted with religious quarrels.

I would not be understood as saying anything disrespectful of the mission, or its objects. From all I can learn of Doctor Whitman, he was a manly man, and held in esteem by all classes. He was the victim of circumstances. If like Smith, Rogers and Gray, he had consulted his personal safety rather than the success of an undertaking, he would have quitted Wallatpu in time to avoid what occurred. I regard it as a shame that, for all these years his bones, and those of his wife, and a dozen of American citizens have lain in one rude mound without decent sepulture. A monument should be erected memorializing the event, and the high character of the principal victims. But I object to deceit or misrepresentation. Let the truth stand.

I do not pretend to say what was the object of Mr. Gray in adopting the fiction which he has imposed upon the world as history. But this I do say, and can substantiate it; that until Mr. Gray, about 1866, set this story afloat, nobody had ever heard of it. It was a very pleasing and seductive tale, and caught the attention of the public readily. I was about that time picking up notes on Oregon matters, and in the River of the West I incorporated an abstract from Gray's historical articles, supposing, as everybody else did, who was not familiar with the subject, that because Mr. Gray had been a member of Doctor Whitman's mission, he knew what he was talking about. One error I discovered at the time, and related to—concerning the Ashburton treaty; but as to the rest, I was not prepared to say it was not so. It is different now; for I have carefully studied every fact of Oregon history and have my own opinions, backed by the evidence. Others, in the same way, but with less caution, copied Gray's story; especially the religious papers. Even old Oregonians, in whose minds events of more than twenty years before, were growing dim, took the story on credit, and repeated it as truth. As careful a collector as Elwood Evans, fell into the snare. We talked the matter over together, and hunted up the documents, and are both of the same opinion.

When Peter H. Burnett published his *Recollections* I called upon him at

his bank, and referring to this matter—He having done just what I did, taken Gray's story for fact—asked him to tell me something from his own knowledge, about Doctor Whitman's instrumentality in saving Oregon. He was confounded, for he could not, when he came to search his memory, recollect any knowledge of the matter. "Did you ever hear Doctor Whitman allude to Webster?" I asked. He could not recollect that he had; in short he found that he, as a hundred other writers and speakers had done, had simply adopted Gray's story. Not only that, in regard to Webster, but he had persuaded himself that Whitman was actually at the rendezvous in Missouri in May, when he was at that time in the state of New York.

These circumstances remind me of what I once heard an intelligent man say about evidences in court, that no two witnesses who had seen the same thing, told the same story about it, and that people often swore to lies. I resolved to go by the book in treating of historical matters, and made a thorough search in the American papers for everything relating to the treaties affecting the boundary between the British possessions and the United States, with the result given in my article in the Californian. Had I found the least intimation that Dr. Whitman had ever influenced in any way directly or indirectly, the adjustment of our affair with Great Britain, I should have done him the justice to say so. But I hold that truth is justice, and that saying a man has performed an act that he never did perform, imputing to him motives that he never possessed, is an insult to his memory, because being dead he cannot contradict a falsehood which attaches itself to his name, and he is made to bear the shame of being proven an impostor.

It may be as well mentioned here that it is not myself alone who accuses Mr. Gray of robbing. Any one thoroughly investigating the subject must do the same. Hon. Elwood Evans was good enough to forward to me a letter received by him from a searcher after the truth, a gentleman in whose hands the papers of Mr. Spaulding were placed "with the request that he would vindicate the character and services of Dr. Whitman, and that of the Protestant missions in Oregon, from the aspersions of the Jesuits." This gentleman is the Rev. J. G. Craighead, D. D., for fourteen years editor of the *New York Evangelist*.

He says, "I have spent most of the past two months of Washington, looking into the subject." Further, let me ask, on what authority the many statements rest, among others that of yours, on page twenty-five of the Senate Document mentioned, that it was Doctor Whitman's journey east in the winter of 1842-3, and his representations to the president and Mr. Webster that saved the rest of Oregon from being a different search in the state department does not reveal more. I cannot see how it directly influenced any treaty negotiations. In Webster's Works, Vol. 2, page 78, I find, "the government of the United States has never offered any line south of the Columbia, with the navigation of the Columbia, and it never will." In Vol. 41, page 247, of John Quincy Adams' Works, he says, "My own opinion is that this offer of degrees, should never again be made, nor accepted if offered by Great Britain." Not in the official correspondence between the two governments can I find any reference to any negotiations in progress respecting this boundary question, between the last treaty in 1842, and early in 1846, in June of which year the present boundary was settled by Mr. Buchanan, except the modification of the water clause (Haro) made by Emperor William of Germany, in 1871. Moreover I am assured by the highest authority in the state department that no treaty was in progress from 1842 to June 1846, or under discussion. I am at a loss then to account for the statements, and particularly for the oft repeated one that Mr. Webster was about to "swap off a large part of Oregon, for some cool fisheries near Cape Cod." (See Senate Document, page 22) and that Doctor Whitman's influence with him and the president was such as to delay, and change the terms. Nor can I find from any word or living source of information, any reference to such a proposed barter, giving land on the Pacific coast, for a cool fishery. If you can throw some light on this dark subject, I will be obliged, and I think the cause of truth served.

Thus has Mr. Craighead, a Presbyterian of high standing, saved me the trouble of replying to Mr. Gray's assertion in THE ASTORIAN that Dr. Whitman prevented the signing of a treaty in progress subsequently to the Ashburton treaty. I have the fullest confidence that every fair minded person, however disappointed in having to change his conclusions, will be glad of this exposure of a fraud. Especially should Washington territory be glad—because, if a monument is to be erected to the memory of Dr. Whitman and his wife, Narcissa Whitman, it should have for its cornerstone and foundation, truth. It would be a very mortifying discovery to make after inscribing a certain legend upon its side, that such legend was entirely unauthorized by fact, and would expose the territory to unnecessary ridicule.

Since I, myself, and such writers as Elwood Evans, Gov. Burnett, Dr. Atkinson and scores of others have repeated this story on authority of Mr. Gray, Mr. Clark should not feel himself singled out as a conspicuous dupe by my article in the Californian. I had a long time been meditating

taking up the subject, but dreading the controversy to which it might lead; but when Mr. Clark's article appeared, repeating the same romance, I thought it was time to make the first protest. In reply to Mr. Gray's review of my article, in which he flatteringly relegates me to a class of "pamphlet writers and newspaper romancers," I have made this further protest, with the assurance that although I think the case is made clear by what is here written, my proofs are not by any means half exhausted, though the space usually accorded to newspaper contributions was more than exhausted some time ago.

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