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REV. WM. ROBERTS' ADDRESS

Before The Pioneer and Historical Society of Oregon.

DELIVERED IN THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, ON TUESDAY, MAY 19TH, 1884.

At Mr. Roberts' request the publication of his address before the Pioneer and Historical Society was delayed to give him an opportunity to place it in shape for the immortality of type. It is now presented as below, and forms an important chapter in the history of the state.

Mr. President, fellow citizens, pioneers and fellow workers in Oregon:—As a citizen of this state, and pioneer of 1847, I am invited to speak to you on this fourteenth anniversary of the society. I congratulate you on your residence in this rising empire of the northwest—a country of vast extent, healthful climate, fertile soil, mild and equable seasons, a land of plenty, unvisited by death, or tornado or pestilence, whose rivers and coasts abound in fish, vast forests are filled with timber of great value and almost fabulous dimensions, whose broad acres grow the finest wheat known on earth, and whose resources, if properly developed, are sufficient for the wants of the entire continent to-day.

As I look over this gathering, and think of the commonwealth you are building up, I am reminded of what the venerable George Bancroft said a few weeks ago: "Certainly our great United States is the child of Christianity. It may with equal truth be asserted that modern civilization sprung into life with our religion—and faith in its principles is the life boat on which humanity has at divers times escaped the most threatening perils." This venerable man was once in the cabinet of President Polk as secretary of the navy, and gave the order, as acting secretary of war, for the occupation of California, and in 1845 became minister to Great Britain. It was after a very large experience as a man of the world that he gives the testimony I have quoted above, more appropriate, it seems to me, to this northwest coast than to any other part of the Union. The address of those who have preceded me remind me of what James H. Sayles of Idaho said: "He is a most unfair preacher; he leaves nothing for anyone else to say." These men being the first in the mine, helped themselves to the biggest nuggets of historic gold, and I must content myself to give you some little gleanings along the line of personal observation for the last thirty years. No one eye witness can see the whole of an extended field of battle. In moral and social conflicts the smoke of battle may not hinder seeing, but the wide extent, the length of time, and the multiplicity of scenes may draw no one eye to see the whole conflict.

I have been perfectly cognizant of the work going on in this Pacific coast for a full generation of men, and yet no doubt many important events have escaped my notice. One fact I want to recognize, just now. We are here from all points of the compass and represent all shades of opinion handed together in society for a common object.

Let us see some points of agreement:—First—We agree as to the priceless value of good citizenship. Hence we welcome any and every good man and true woman, come they from whence they will. We don't want people as immigrants who would not be missed at home, and contented when they get here, and free, as De Quincy puts it, from the vices of lying exaggeration and prostration. Second—We agree that the manufacture of this article (good citizenship) is worthy of all encouragement. The more good, thoroughly trained children a man and a woman bring up and raise among us the better follows they are—the more we like them; the fewer hoodlums and street arabs we manufacture, the better and safer for our purses, our lives, our daughters and our names. Third—We agree that this historical society is a bond of peace and fraternity, not an arena of strife, where old grudges are fought out and where rods are kept in soak for people we don't like. For the orators of such a society to take occasion to show up the shortcomings of their fellows is not in good taste. We are a unit on that question. Fourth—We agree there are clearly marked distinctions in human conduct. A drunkard is not as good as a sober man; a thief is not as good as a citizen; an honest man; an idler, who insists the world owes him a living, is not so good as a man as the honest boy of toil, who pays his debts and earns his living before God and man. Whatever, therefore, helps us to understand this clear distinction is a help to good citizenship, and whatever obliterates these distinctions blunts the moral sensibilities, hardens the heart, encourages the dangerous elements in society, and puts in peril our safety. We are a unit on this also once more. Fifth—The conscience power of society is the safeguard of the nation. It is not your army, nor your police, nor your courts, but something back of all this—underneath all this lie the very foundations of our social system, in the deep conscientious principles and convictions of right. These we shall never surrender, and in these deep institutions of our nature lie the safety of society. Hence follows the great corollary, that he who helps to corrupt society, to train the youth in untruth and truth, to mold and educate the public conscience, is doing a great work for his fellow-men.

which had brought us safely around Cape Horn. For six weeks I explored California and then under instructions came up the coast to the Columbia river, stopping at this place a few hours and reaching Portland on the 29th of June, 215 days from New York. Such a voyage once in a man's life is a valuable experience. I am glad to have passed over it once, and could not wish to repeat it. Then were the days of the Mexican war. Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, Buena Vista, Cerro Gordo and Chapultepec claimed the public attention, while the vessels that carried R. S. Maclay to China and J. H. Wilbur and others to Oregon were unnoticed except by a few plain people who had faith enough in God and goodness to see how civilization springs into life with religion, and how wisely the Polk administration acted when it cherished and encouraged our missionary societies to send laborers to this north west coast. It may not be known to some of you that our mission stations were located by written permission of the United States government, signed by the Secretary of War. I was not one of the original missionaries, and am entitled to no credit for their heroic virtues and no blame for their mistakes. I presume they made some mistakes. It is alleged they did. I need not defend them, and certainly shall not retort on their successors. But let us look up the virtues of our predecessors and contemporaries, and cherish the precious fact that we live and are associated with some of the best men and women on the face of the earth. I shall be reminded perhaps that the bible speaks freely of the faults, and sins of men, but it says nothing of the faults of God, the infinitely wise, Jehovah, is the speaker, and I remember he has no grudge against us, but is our steadfast and unchangeable friend.

It is a fact worthy of notice in the settlement of Oregon that the church very largely antedates the government. It is a fact worthy of notice, as well as clerical, in 1834, Congress gave Oregon a territorial government in August, 1848. In March, 1833, there was published by G. P. Dissoyway, in the New York Advocate, a letter from William Walker, detailing the visit of four Flat-head Indians to General Clark at St. Louis, who had traveled 3,000 miles crossing the Rocky mountains to obtain religious information. Some trader had told them their worship was wrong, but the whites away towards the rising of the sun had a book which told them how to worship the great spirit. A national council had been called and these Indians were deputed to visit General Clark, their great father, as they called him, who had explored their country and was now superintendent of Indian affairs. Two of these same Indians died in St. Louis, the others set out for home, but nothing further is known of their history. The story created a profound sensation among the churches. A story was written by the late Dr. W. B. Fisk, president of the Wesleyan university, resulted in the selection of Rev. Jason Lee and also Daniel Lee, who together with Cyrus Shepherd and T. L. Edward, constituting the first missionary party, crossed the Rocky mountains in 1834, under the escort of Captain E. Wyeth. The Messrs. Lee and Shepherd entered heartily upon their work among the Indians, and found themselves in a harvest field where some encouragement and multiplied difficulties met them at every turn. It was soon seen that to do anything of value in the country, the mission must assume the shape of a colonization scheme in which gods, merchants, farmers and farmers, mechanics and laborer—in a word, American citizens must bear a hand, or else little or nothing could be accomplished. Reinforcements were promptly sent. In May, 1837, Dr. E. White and A. B. Beers came with their families. Others came in September of that year. In June, 1840, the great relief expedition, consisting of fifty-one persons, arrived in the Louisiana. George Abernethy was among them, who subsequently was elected governor under the provisional government for two terms. Two circumstances now arose which changed the complexion of affairs materially.

First—The missionaries laboring among the Indians found the death rate among the children most fearful. It seemed the whole race was doomed to extinction. And Second—American settlers began to come into the country, and instead of labor being demanded among the Indians, who were dying off so rapidly, special attention must be given to the emigrants coming from all the states in the Union. This state of things rendered it no longer necessary to maintain a mission colony with farms and cattle and tradesmen, and accordingly in 1843 Rev. George Gary, a man of large experience was sent out by the mission board to carefully ascertain the exact condition of the several stations, sell off cattle, horses, etc., now no longer needed in the changed condition of affairs, and thus make the most of the mission property, dismissing the secular members thereof, adapted the labors of the missionaries to the altered condition of society. When Mr. Gary had completed the business arrangements for the coming of the coast, William Roberts, accompanied by James H. Wilbur, was sent to take his place, to carry forward the work among all classes, and make the most of the labors already performed. The Dalles mission was then transferred into the hands of Dr. Whitman, representing the A. B. C. F. M., who it was believed could more effectively carry on missionary work among the Indians, while the Methodist church gave more special attention to labor among American citizens.

Scarcely three months had elapsed when the terrible massacre of Wallapa took place, and was followed by the horrors of the Cayuse war. Thus missionary labors among the Indians were rendered largely impossible by circumstances utterly beyond their control. It has become quite fashionable on these occasions to speak of the mis-

adventures as not having done the work for which they were sent to the country. So late as the "Occasional Address" for 1881 these words were used: "While I agree with the generally accepted opinion that the primary object for which the missionaries were sent to this land was an entire failure, still I think credit is not generally accorded them for the influence their presence and establishment here had in hastening and facilitating the settlement of the country." These are the remarks of a fossil, intended rather to vindicate the missionaries. But we admit no such entire failure and do not choose to adopt the opinion. The following facts appear: "The missionaries came in advance of the settlers. They did such work among the Indians as was fairly possible, certainly not as much as they could wish, and were successful in leading many of them to Christ. Scores of them were converted. For reasons already named the work was limited among these heathen people, as it always must be when a superior race come in contact with an inferior one. The common take on the views of the civilized race much more readily than their virtues. It has been a great misfortune that we have had five or six Indian wars since 1847. I was witness to a skirmish in August of that year, and the history is largely the history of Indian troubles. A party of ten men, who had crossed across the plains came into the Dalles on Sunday morning and camped near by. On Monday the immigrants said the Indians had stolen their property and they had taken a man belonging to the Indians by way of reprisal. All was excitement. As the packers came up towards the house leading the mule Eganor, the chief of the Cayuses, seized the mule, whereupon a man named Shepherd shot him. The Indians instantly killed Shepherd, and several were wounded on both sides. The white men drew off on the plain and the Indians gathered around their fallen chief. The situation was critical. The whites fled quickly. We buried the dead and cared for the wounded, and at sundown on Monday I started with a crew of Indians to bring the governor up from Oregon City to quiet up matters and heal the breach. The following Monday the governor held a council, adjusted all matters as well as possible, made an exchange of presents according to Indian customs, and thus the matter ended. But what, you inquire, caused the row? Simply this: One of the wounded whites confessed that they enticed some Indian women into their camp for lewd purposes (slaves were generally furnished for the purpose). They had stolen or taken a sack of clothing, and then followed the effort at reprisal, and the effusion of blood, and the exchange of goods on a journey to Oregon City and back, and fearful danger to the mission families, thirteen persons in all, and all to gratify brutal lust. Now, I saw the excited parties, witnessed the killing, the flight, the danger; I paid the expense of settling the difficulty, and I fully believe the man told the truth when he gave the above reason as the cause of it all. This man was shot in the arm and during the confusion he came unobserved into the mission house, where he was secreted until we would send him unobserved by the Indians down to the Willamette. Now, had you heard the story, and I fully believe the man told the truth when he gave the above reason as the cause of it all. This man was shot in the arm and during the confusion he came unobserved into the mission house, where he was secreted until we would send him unobserved by the Indians down to the Willamette. Now, had you heard the story, and I fully believe the man told the truth when he gave the above reason as the cause of it all.

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