

CHAPTER XXIX  
Marcus Whitman

1802-1847

WHEN we bought California from Mexico it gave us more than one thousand miles of sea-coast on the Pacific, but we already had six hundred miles of coast farther north.

That country was called Oregon, and this is the way we obtained possession of it.

Long before the year 1800, Captain Gray, of Boston, discovered the mouth of a great river, and sailed his vessel over the bar at its entrance and fifty or sixty miles up the river. Here he landed, traded with the natives, and obtained fresh water for his vessel. He took possession of the country in the name of the United States, and named the river after his ship, the Columbia.

Some years later, an expedition was sent out by President Jefferson to explore the country, under command of Captains Lewis and Clark. They crossed the Rocky Mountains and went down the Columbia River to its mouth, where they passed the winter and returned the next summer. This exploring expedition gave us another claim to the country.

Afterward, a permanent settlement was made at Astoria, near the mouth of the Columbia River. This settlement was

made by John Jacob Astor for the purpose of carrying on the fur trade with Indians of that section.

President Monroe purchased Florida from Spain, and in the treaty of purchase the boundary between the United States and the Spanish provinces was defined. Between the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, the line ran along latitude 42°. South of that line were the Spanish provinces, and to the country north of that line Spain yielded to us her claims.



THE OLD "OREGON COUNTRY."

England, however, had laid claim to this territory and hence a dispute arose between us and the British government as to which should have the Oregon country. Time passed on, and that question was not decided for many years.

Finally, American missionaries were sent out to the Oregon country to teach the Indians the Christian religion. Following in the train of the missionaries were many settlers. A British company bought the fur business which had been established at Astoria, so that many Canadians and other subjects of Great Britain also settled in that region.

Among the American missionaries to the Indians was Dr. Marcus Whitman, a native of the State of New York, not a clergyman but a physician. With Whitman and his wife went Rev. Mr. Spaulding and his wife. Mrs. Whitman and Mrs. Spaulding were the first white women to cross the Rocky Mountains.

After living there six years, Whitman became satisfied that the English people in the fur trade were laying plans to

secure that territory for Great Britain and themselves. He therefore made a most perilous journey on horseback from Oregon to the city of Washington and told the President, his Cabinet, and members of Congress what a valuable country Oregon was, and urged our government not to consent to part with it.

Then, in the spring following, he returned to Oregon with a large company of emigrants, who settled in the valley of the Columbia. Others followed in large numbers so that the Americans had a majority of the people in that region.

This "ride for Oregon" by Dr. Whitman was a most remarkable one, and has become famous. He consulted with his brother missionaries at a meeting held at his station on the Walla Walla River, in the present State of Washington. They agreed that he should go East, and gave him letters to carry.

Five days later he started on his long and dangerous journey with but a single companion. In eleven days he reached Fort Hall, in southeastern Idaho, having covered a distance of four hundred miles.

After resting a day or two and taking a guide, he pushed forward, not directly east through the South Pass, because in that section the snows were very deep and two tribes of Indians were at war with each other. He therefore followed an old Spanish trail, southeasterly through the corner of Utah, across Wyoming and Colorado to Santa Fé, New Mexico. This route added about a thousand miles to the length of the journey.

Throughout this section his sufferings were severe. It required a very brave man with great endurance to perform such a trip at that early day through that barren country, on horseback, in the dead of winter. He must cross wide and

deep rivers, in some cases by fording and sometimes by swimming, while his path lay over almost impassable mountains, hardly yet ever traversed by man.

When they reached the Grand River they found it about a hundred and fifty or two hundred yards wide, frozen over about one-third the way across, on each side, and in the centre a rapid, angry stream of deep water. The guide told them that it would be very dangerous to cross there.

But Dr. Whitman was not the man to be stopped by anything short of an impossibility. He rode out on the ice to its edge, and, although the weather was intensely cold, he called upon his companions to push off his horse into the stream. They did so, and down they went, completely under the water, horse and rider, but soon came up, and, after buffeting the rapid, foaming current, reached the ice on the opposite shore, a long way down the stream.

He leaped from his horse upon the ice and soon had the noble animal by his side. The other men forced in the pack animals, followed his example, and were soon drying their frozen clothing by a comfortable fire.

At another time, near the headwaters of the Arkansas River, after traveling all day in a terrible storm, they reached a small river for camp, but without a stick of wood anywhere to be had except on the other side of the stream,



"THE RIDE FOR OREGON."

which was covered with ice too thin to support a man erect.

The storm cleared away, and the night bid fair to be intensely cold; besides they must have fires to prepare their food. The doctor took his axe in one hand and a willow stick in the other, laid himself upon the thin ice, and, spreading his legs and arms, worked himself over on his breast, boy fashion, cut his wood, slid it over, and returned in the same way.

Frozen, almost starved, thoroughly worn out, he rested several days at Fort Taos and then at Santa Fé in New Mexico. He had now really got around the mountains, and, changing his course to the northeast, pushed forward to Fort Bent, on the Arkansas River. It was late in January, but here he overtook a company of mountaineers and traveled with them to St. Louis.

From there he pushed on to Washington, which place he reached the 3d of March, 1843. John Tyler was President and Daniel Webster was Secretary of State. He told them what a valuable country the Oregon region was. The doctor had interviews with senators and members of the House of Representatives, and then hastened to Boston.

From Boston he hurried westward and met the emigrants, who had gathered in large numbers near Westport, Missouri. As soon as the grass was sufficiently grown one party started. A week later the second section moved, the third a week later still, and the fourth division ten days after that.

These four bands, during the summer, successfully crossed the great western plains, pushed up the valley of the Platte River, the North Platte, and the Sweetwater, through the South Pass and so on past Fort Hall, Boisé City, and over the Blue Mountains to the Columbia. This great company

numbered more than eight hundred men, women, and children, with two hundred emigrant wagons, and fifteen hundred head of cattle.

On reaching Oregon they spread themselves out principally in the valley of the Willamette River. Just as the war with Mexico was begun (1846), we made a treaty with Great Britain by which she relinquished to us her claims south of latitude 49°, and we yielded to her the whole region north of that line.

It is painful to be obliged to add that Dr. Whitman, his wife, and eleven others, were massacred by the Indians (in 1847), at his station on the Walla Walla River. Whitman was a man of great endurance, courageous beyond measure, with a noble soul, filled with the loftiest patriotism. The American people should cherish and honor the memory of Marcus Whitman as one of our greatest and most heroic patriots.

For fifty years that great section has been rapidly filling up with industrious and enterprising citizens from the older States, until now it contains more than a million inhabitants and has become noted for its rich soil and healthful climate, which make it one of the finest regions in the whole country. It raises great quantities of wheat, rye, potatoes, and hay,



THE WESTERN SETTLER'S FIRST HOME.

has valuable minerals, and is capable of supplying the world with the best of lumber, of which it has an exhaustless quantity.

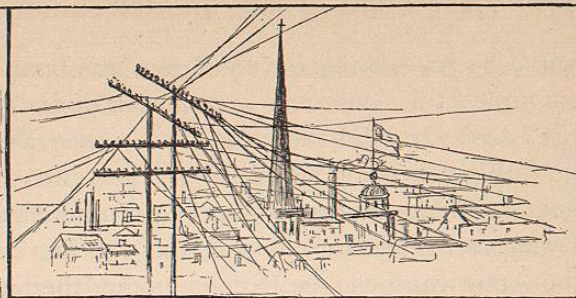
Thus we see how, through the sterling patriotism, intrepidity, and energy of one man, it has happened that three States, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, were added to our Union, three stars to our flag, and six members to the American Senate.

Explain each of the claims that the United States had to Oregon.  
 State the reasons for Whitman's eastward journey.  
 Give some account of that journey.  
 Give an account of the return trip.  
 State what the journey did for the United States.

Who discovered Oregon? Who explored Oregon? Who first settled Oregon? Who yielded to the United States her claims to Oregon? Who finally signed a treaty by which the United States fully received Oregon? Whitman went to Washington to tell the President how valuable Oregon was; why did not the President know this?



MORSE.



CHAPTER XXX

Samuel F. B. Morse

1791-1872

FEW inventions have proved of greater use or made greater changes in the life of man than the invention of the magnetic telegraph. It was almost wholly due to the genius and skill of Prof. Samuel F. B. Morse. He not only invented the instrument, but also planned all the details and put it into practical operation.

Professor Morse was the son of the distinguished geographer, Rev. Jedediah Morse, D.D., of Charlestown, Massachusetts. Like the inventor of the steamboat, he became a portrait painter. Like Fulton also, he went to England to study his profession. He worked with the famous Washington Allston.

While there, one day Allston took Morse to the studio of Fulton's friend, the great painter, Benjamin West. Morse was examining a portrait of King George III., when West said, "That is a portrait of the king." "So I observe," replied Morse, "did he sit here for it?" "Yes," said the painter, "and let me tell you a little incident. One day,