

**THE WHITMAN
CONTROVERSY:
ARTICLES PP. 3-68**

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The Whitman Controversy: Articles pp. 3-68 by M. Eels & Ed. C. Ross & W. H. Gray

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THE
WHITMAN CONTROVERSY.

ARTICLES BY

ED. C. ROSS, REV. M. EELS AND W. H. GRAY.

IN REPLY TO

MRS. F. F. VICTOR AND ELWOOD EVANS,

Whose Contributions appeared in the *Oregonian* of November 7th
and December 26th, 1884, respectively.

W. H. Gray
Astoria
Oregon

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NOTE.

The attention of those who read this pamphlet is called to the fact that neither Mr. Ross nor Mr. Ellis knew that the other had made an answer to Mrs. Victor's effusion against Dr. Whitman and the mission.

The Hon. Elwood Evans has placed himself in an unfortunate position. The facts stated, and the quotations made, will aid the reader to a correct conclusion concerning the subject at issue.

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[From the *Oregonian* of December 9, 1884.]

DR. MARCUS WHITMAN.

BY ED. C. ROSS.

PRESCOTT, W. T., November 29, 1884.

To the Editor of the *Oregonian*:

This being the thirty-seventh anniversary of the Whitman massacre, it seems not an inappropriate time in which to answer some of the aspersions cast upon the dead missionary by Mrs. F. F. Victor, through the columns of the *Oregonian*, in its issue of November 7th.

She therein accuses Dr. Whitman with falsehood, deception, office-seeking, trying to deprive the Indians of their lands, trying to enrich himself at their expense, and at the expense of the emigrants, yet has not one word of commendation for any act of his life. As thirty-seven years have passed since our valley was red-dened by the blood of this man, to whom Mrs. Victor denies the crown of martyr, it would seem that she might have found a more graceful work than that of dragging the murdered missionary from his grave, to heap such opprobrium on his memory as hitherto has never been done, even by his most bitter enemy. In her ghoulish work Mrs. Victor outdoes all other calumniators of the dead. For more than forty years it has been claimed by his most intimate acquaintances and co-workers in the missionary cause, that in the winter of 1842-3 Dr. Whitman did make the horseback journey from here to the Atlantic States, and that he did visit Washington city, for the purpose of showing to the government the importance of Oregon as related to the United States. Also, that he was, in some degree at least, successful in the object of his mission. If this be true, his countrymen owe him a debt of gratitude that they do not seem in a hurry to pay, as his bones lie in a neglected grave, unmarked by stone or tablet. The idea is scouted that this "uncouth missionary" could have enlightened Daniel Webster about Oregon, because Mr. Webster had aspired to the presidency in 1825.

Was it not this same Mr. Webster who once said that California would never raise a bushel of wheat or a pound of wool? In matters of constitutional law, or international politics, he had no superior; but after a residence of six years in this country, Dr. Whitman's knowledge, gained by actual experience, was vastly better than any that Mr. Webster could possibly have had, touching the actual value of this country. At that time Mr. Webster probably held the popular belief that our "inland empire" was a barren desert. For many years before, and up to 1842, all the grain, and most of the vegetables, used at Fort Walla Walla, had been carried twenty-five miles; as it was not thought possible to raise anything on the sage brush and bunchgrass lands in that vicinity. Now, however, you may stand at the old fort, and behold thousands of acres of land that produce such crops as would make even Daniel Webster, were he still alive, admit that he had, a long time ago, underrated this country, and its importance as related to the United States.

I will not undertake to say just how much weight Dr. Whitman's representations had with either Mr. Webster or President Tyler, but there can be no doubt in which direction it fell. In the spring of 1842 negotiations were pending between our government and that of Great Britain, looking to an adjustment of boundary between this country and the British Possessions. Parties who started across the plains at that time arrived at Whitman's mission in the autumn, and told the Doctor of these negotiations. It is but fair and natural to suppose that the Doctor, as well as his informant, thought that these negotiations would, or at least might, settle the line clear through—from ocean to ocean. He knew the Hudson's Bay Company could be relied on to give information to the English concerning the value of this country, but who could be expected to give much information to our government? He determined to impose the task on himself. The hardships, dangers and suffering that he underwent on that journey are certainly greater than are usually borne by the ordinary man of to-day, who makes the pilgrimage to see the president and ask for some of the "loaves and fishes."

But before Dr. Whitman arrived in Washington the pending negotiations had been cut short, by cutting the boundary line in two. The eastern portion had been settled by the Ashburton treaty—the western portion, and the portion that related to Oregon, remained to be settled. It was settled by the treaty of 1846, and it was upon

this latter treaty that Dr. Whitman's actions brought forth fruit. I say actions, for it was actions and not words, that finally settled the Oregon boundary, as I will try to prove further on. In 1841 the Hudson's Bay Company had started an immigration from Red River to Oregon, that reached their destination in the latter part of the year 1842. Mrs. Victor has it in 1841, but the better authority is against her. These were to settle north of the Columbia river, and Sir George Simpson was to turn up in Washington about this time, to show that the English had the most numerous settlement in the country, and on this basis draw the line at least as far south as the Columbia. It appears to me that this was a plausible scheme, and one that might have had weight had the negotiations concerning the Oregon boundary still been pending. At the time Doctor Whitman started from here neither he nor the Hudson's Bay people, in this country, doubted that such negotiations were still pending, and while he was fighting his way over plain and mountain, through storm and flood, to reach Washington in time to do his country a service, Sir George Simpson was approaching from the other direction. On his arrival at London in November, 1842, he doubtless learned that the negotiations had been suspended, while Dr. Whitman was still pressing on his journey through the wilderness in ignorance of this fact. This turn of affairs made it unnecessary for Mr. Simpson to go on to Washington at that time, probably, yet as to whether or not he was there later in the winter does not appear to me to be either certain or important. But had things gone on as was expected, there is no doubt that either he, or some other agent of the Hudson's Bay Company, would have appeared on the scene to fully represent British interests on this coast.

The Doctor's idea from the start appears to have been this: First, to arrive in Washington before the Oregon boundary line should be settled, and then impress upon the minds of those having the matter in hand the real merit and value of this country. If by so doing he could delay the negotiations, he proposed to show that it was possible, and even practicable, to settle Oregon with an American population overland. To do this he proposed to aid in bringing a wagon train of emigrants across the Rocky Mountains, and on to the Columbia river—a thing that had never before been accomplished by man, but a thing, also, that he had more nearly accomplished than any other person, in the year 1836. In that year Messrs. Whitman and Spalding brought the first wagons across the Rocky Mountains, and brought a cart as far as Fort Boisé. &c.

Mrs. Victor intimates that the Doctor told an untruth when he, on his visit to the States, told those desirous of crossing the plains, that they could bring their wagons through the Rocky Mountains, as he had done that thing six years before; but if she will state the geographical fact that Forts Hall and Boise are both west of the Rockies, then she will find that it is only she that has made a mistake, and not Whitman. Between the years 1826 and 1843, Col. Joe Meek, Mrs. Victor's "hero," had solved the remainder of the problem of crossing the continent in wagons, by taking a wagon from Fort Hall to Whitman's mission. She reluctantly gives Whitman credit for assisting in marking out the route from Fort Hall to Grand Ronde—she gives John Gaunt credit for piloting the main body of immigration as far as to Fort Hall, but fails to say that seven years before, Dr. Whitman had, with his own wagon tires, marked this portion of the route for John Gaunt. So chary is she of giving credit to the Doctor that she quotes Applegate as saying that the Doctor's principal service was in showing one wing of the emigrants where to ford Snake river, and in the next note she quotes the same man as saying that he alone paid the Doctor \$45. For what? For showing him where to ford the river? If the lady is really digging for a truth mine she certainly has not struck it in paying quantities in this place.

No one will claim that Dr. Whitman, alone, saved Oregon to the United States, yet we have no record of any one who underwent such hardships and perils as he did for the purpose. On the other hand, it can not be successfully maintained that he was an unimportant factor in accomplishing the end he aimed at. Certain it is that he worked zealously at Washington, and it is not probable that his words and deeds were forgotten, even when the administration changed, and when the Oregon question was finally settled three years later.

While it can not be truly said, as some of his admirers have claimed, that he raised an emigration and brought them out to occupy the country, it is, nevertheless, true that he gave all the advice, counsel and encouragement to those who were desirous of making the trip that he could, before starting, and that he rendered them great assistance throughout the journey, as guide and otherwise. As an offset, Mrs. Victor tells us that the emigrants hauled the Doctor's provisions. She tells us that he had been six years with the Indians without having benefited or conciliated them; yet he and his associates had printed books in the Indian tongue;

had taught them to read and write; had taught them to farm on a small scale; had built a mill to grind their grain; had introduced cattle, sheep, hogs and fowls among them. The Doctor showed his wisdom in trying to anchor them to fixed habitations as a preliminary step to civilizing them. But the Doctor's Cayuse Indians bathed their hands in his blood, and as a retribution the place that knew them as a powerful nation knows them no more. Only a handful remains, and although beads and crosses have been bestowed on them freely by the same religious organization that the Doctor dreaded, Mrs. Victor would probably hesitate to say that they have been benefited by the change from the influence of the Doctor to that of those who now have their spiritual welfare in charge.

The Lapwai Mission, under charge of Mr. Spalding, in the Nez Perce country, as well as that of Messrs. Eells and Walker, among the Spokanes, were further off the line of travel and further removed from opposing influences, either religious or otherwise. These Indians did not murder their missionaries, but protected them, and to this day may be seen springing up some of the good seed sown by the missionaries among them forty years ago. It is not a month since I talked with a lady who is one of the children who survived the Whitman massacre. She had just returned from the old Lapwai Mission—her birthplace. She there found many of the old mission Indians who still held to the teachings of the missionaries. Among them was one old Indian who still lives in what is left of the old mission building, which he has occupied for thirty-seven years—ever since the missionaries were compelled to abandon the field of their labor. He told her that he intended to die in that house. The benefits of the missionary work are not all obliterated there, although so many years have passed.

As to conciliation, there would have been nothing to conciliate, neither would the massacre have followed, but for the interference of outside parties who poisoned the minds of the Indians against their best friends, the missionaries. About the time of the Doctor's departure for Washington, a report was circulated among the Indians that the whites from the Willamette valley intended to come up next spring and kill off all the Indians. A French and Indian half-breed—Dorion—interpreter to the Hudson's Bay Company, was busy with this story, and to those who know how much more readily an Indian will believe a lie than the truth, it will not be a matter of surprise that this story was credited by them. At whose instance this story was put in circulation we will leave Mrs. Victor