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## THE PROCESS OF SELECTION IN OREGON PIONEER SETTLEMENT.

In the days of the early Oregon pioneers the narrative of Lewis and Clark's explorations to the Pacific Coast had become little more than a tradition to the frontier people of the West. The wild stories of mountain trappers, told by camp fires, and colored by vivid recollections of real privations among mountain defiles—these formed the picture in the popular mind along the frontier of the difficulties to be overcome in a journey across the Rockies. As long as these reiterated stories took their measure of endurance from the wanderings of missionaries and mountain trappers, the problem of their influence might be a simple one; but when the question of taking women and children over the dreary wastes of wide deserts and pathless steeps of mountain cliffs was raised, other considerations were at once added; for how could these trusts be transported over bridgeless and fordless streams? How insured against hunger and thirst, and how kept out of reach of the danger of attack by hostile tribes of Indians?

The object of this brief paper is to outline a conviction of the writer that the difficulties in the way of a migration to Oregon—as these difficulties were seen by the people of the frontier states—formed a selecting test of the kind of people who alone could go to Oregon across the mountains in those days—a real and practical natural selection of a new people for a new community.

Without entering into the hackneyed question of the agency of Doctor Whitman in securing Oregon for the United States, we may say Doctor Whitman was no

mythical character. He was a real man ; a missionary of the American Board. In 1842 he found the Indians around him so dissatisfied, that he called a synodical meeting of the neighboring missions, and submitted to them the question "Shall we give up the mission of Waiilatpu?" The synod decided in the negative. The doctor then said to his co-laborers, "Then you must vote me leave of absence, for I must go home to confer with the board on the situation." In fact Doctor Whitman seems to have had a mild kind of monomania on the subject of ox teams drawing plain Missouri wagons from Fort Independence to the Columbia at Wallula. Anyway, his brethren of that synod all knew that he carried that conviction with him to the states. They knew, too, that he wanted an opportunity to publish it along the frontiers to the restless multitude who were asking the question, "Was it safe to attempt to take a family to Oregon in an ox wagon?" Doctor Whitman said he knew this could be done ; said he himself would guide a train of wagons to Wallula, on the Columbia, and reach there before the fall storms should hinder their progress.

Let us now turn to the restless people of the frontier who wanted to go to Oregon, and inquire what their mental picture of the great barriers of the journey was. At this time, 1842, these restless people might be found from Eastern Tennessee to Western Missouri. In their view the Rocky Mountain barrier was not a single line of mountains, but a complex system of ranges, like the one that separated Eastern Virginia and the Carolinas from the valley of the Ohio, with whose character they were familiar. They clearly apprehended the difficulties of such mountain travel, without roads or bridges, without shops for repairs, or towns for repurchase of supplies run short. They saw plainly the necessity of starting with wagons loaded for the whole journey, and of getting

through before winter. They knew, too, that having passed the Rocky Mountain barrier, a vast desert plain hundreds of miles across extended from the western slope of the Rockies, only to bring them to another mountain barrier—the Cascade Range, which, if not higher, was at least steeper in its approaches. And, inasmuch as this second barrier would be reached late in the season, oxen and horses would be so weak and worn by their long journey as to add fearfully to dangers which they of all people knew how to appreciate. Let it be remembered, too, that all this fearful risk was to be borne by women and children. We have called the routes of travel bridgeless (and often fordless), look as to how much this implies: Suppose our train to have reached what was at their route a fordless stream. The ferry was soon prepared by selecting one of the best of their wagon boxes, caulking its chinks and joints as best they could, and using this as a boat. A rope fastened to it was passed over the river, and this extemporized ferry was ready for its work.

In naming over the principal forms of danger that went to make up the outlook of the road to Oregon in the early forties, one must be named—one more dreaded than all the rest—the continued exposure to Indian attack. For, if after a long toilsome climbing over rocky declivities a pleasanter part of the way is reached, and the weary toilers are led to hope for easier travel, just here, at any turn in the road, the dreadful savage might suddenly make his appearance. Such was the dark picture the journey overland to Oregon presented to the men and women of the frontier, who yet restlessly waited for their own chance to try it. Now, in spite of all these dangers of the way, the wagon trains were organized; were loaded with their precious burden of life and hope; did cross these mountain ranges and the long stretches

of desert between them ; did reach and people Oregon. There remains the inquiry : What manner of people were they who dared to do this? For surely it was the coming of the women and children of these pioneer wagon trains that won Oregon for the Stars and Stripes.

First of all, then, these pioneers were all frontier people. In 1842 the only people who cared about the question of a migration to Oregon were frontier people of these Western States ; people already familiar with the modes and the dangers of travel beyond the safeguards of civilization. And this fact gives us our first test in the classification of our pioneers—they were all frontier people. This limitation was not intended, was not the result of any choice or purpose of those concerned. As an applied test it developed itself from the very nature of the case ; for nobody but frontiersmen thought of going, or cared to go.

Another important limitation developed itself in well-defined outlines from the beginning of the movement and lasted throughout the real pioneer period. It was the practical exclusion of capital from the forces that originated its companies, purchased their supplies, or paid for the help they needed on the journey. No people knew better than the border Americans the power of money ; but here again its absence was not planned, was not desired. Its absence resulted from the nature of the case ; and the forces that moved those trains of farm wagons moved without the stimulus of sustaining capital. The simple fact was that capital saw in the migration of these pioneers no return of any appreciable per centum of the funds to be expended. And thus it came to pass that the wealthy were effectually excluded from the ranks of our Oregon pioneers.

Frontier life has in it ordinarily less of poverty than any other condition of society ; a fact, doubtless due to

the continual effort necessary there to keep at all abreast of the incessant struggle against the savagery of its surroundings. The long frontier line west of the Mississippi in the early forties was aglow with a restless people pressing westward, and but recently come there. The usual causes of extreme poverty had not settled there; and so it came that few indeed along this border line could be classed as dependent poor. And, perhaps, none too poor to own a team and a good serviceable farm wagon, with means sufficient to provision it with good wholesome food and clothing for a journey to Oregon. But, if such there happened to be, we can easily imagine the dismay it must have caused to have the name of such a man proposed as a member of one of these companies. The fact, doubtless, was that the unfitness of such a proposal prevented its occurrence.

The poor—the dependent poor—were not in the movement to Oregon. These organized wagon companies, however well meaning, however generous they might be as individuals, had no place in their organizations for the dependent poor man. Yet one more of these causes of unfitness for such a journey as the one we have been trying to picture, was that of chronic feeble health. To start on such a difficult and dangerous expedition as this unquestionably was during the proper pioneer family movement, from 1842 to 1852, would have seemed to all concerned too much like suicide of the sick or the chronically feeble.

The expedition to Oregon, as they looked upon it, called for a power of endurance that might be found only in the soundest. So by common consent poor health ruled its possessor from the ranks of the pioneers. One can readily see what must have been the result of this exclusion upon the health condition of

Oregon during the early period of its history, if not through more remote chapters of its development.

We have thus forced upon us the conviction that the pioneer migration across the plains to Oregon consisted almost wholly of frontier people. That from their organized trains the rich excluded themselves; the dependent poor were kept aloof, and those subject to chronic sickness or feeble health at once accepted their inevitable exclusion. Now, with these inelligible groups cancelled, we may well ask: Who were left to go to Oregon.

Well, the proposed migration thus shorn of elements that did not fit the heart of the movement, there remained scattered along the frontier several thousands of the very material for pioneering. Men in the prime of life with small families who were themselves accustomed to the management of teams; were familiar with the dangers of desert travel and mountain climbing; were accustomed to Indian alarms, many of them to Indian fighting; and all of them accustomed from childhood to the use of the rifle—these were restlessly waiting the time for movement. Doctor Whitman was informed of this. And it was to take the message of readiness to these that he decided on a winter journey. He may have done other important things. He may have failed to do some things over zealously ascribed to him. This herald work he did. He announced to his synod in Oregon that he regarded this service as the work needing to be done. He did this work, and the Missouri ox-wagons followed. For the restless waiters on destiny along the frontier saw that their time had come.

THOMAS CONDON.