

MRS. VICTOR'S LATEST WORK

Her Book on "The Early Indian Wars of Oregon."

ASTORIA, March 11, 1897.—(To the Editor.)—At the request of a friend, a brief notice of Mrs. Frances F. Victor's latest work, entitled as above, is here undertaken. The request closes with saying: "I hope you will give the public of Oregon a review of the book"; and the particular reason was that the work, having been prepared at the expense of the state, and at a rather high figure, is held by the secretary of state not to be disposed of, except at cost, which will probably preclude circulation.

This is unfortunate, since Mrs. Victor, probably the most prolific historical writer on this coast, always has a strong following, and her works are clear-cut and positive, and are invariably succeeded by a wave of interest. As is generally known, Mrs. Victor prepared a considerable portion of the multi-voluminous Bancroft histories, as well as "The River of the West," "All Over Oregon and Washington," in two editions, and a great number of short sketches and poetry bearing the impress of Oregon scenery and life. A new edition of her first book would no doubt meet with the favor shown upon its first appearance.

The volume under consideration, "The Indian Wars," is written in the customary vigorous style, and exhibits the positive personality of the author. It is not intended as a story, but rather as a condensed account of the Indian troubles, and confines itself to a succinct statement of their causes, course, and termination. It is, therefore, almost devoid of personal narrative, and necessarily omits what is most attractive in our history—the growth of settlements and institutions.

The volume is, nevertheless, full of value, and gives the Indian part of our history in a more connected form, and more concisely than it can be found elsewhere. No library of Oregon history can afford to be without this compendium, and if the expense forbids general circulation, every public library should make special exertions to obtain a copy. In this way, the public might have access to the work, and the object of the state in publication be realized.

The most valuable feature of this book is in making a conclusive exhibit of the courage and the essential right of the early pioneers in dealing with the native population.

Their bravery in settling in the Willamette valley, at an hitherto unheard-of distance from the protection of their own government, surrounded by a savage population, that was already attached to a rival people, will never cease to command admiration, if not incurring condemnation for rashness. But their consideration for the natives, and endeavor to do them substantial justice, even under great provocation, is fully as remarkable. This Mrs. Victor's new book shows in the strongest light. A summary given of those killed by Indians makes a total of more than 1900, between the years 1828 and 1876. More than half of these were by murder, during times of peace, with circumstances of nameless cruelty; the worst of which was inflicted upon helpless women and children. Scalping was the least of the horrors practiced by Indians, when on the warpath. Yet torture of Indians captured by whites was unknown; but very few instances of scalping occurred, and mutilation of the Indian dead took place only to be severely condemned. The killing of Indian non-combatants was invariably disapproved. And finally the universal terms of peace were simply the surrender for punishment of the murderers who caused the outbreak. The prisoners thus obtained usually were given the benefit of trial by civil process, and punishment of those found guilty only was all that was sought. Indeed, the earlier Indian wars by the pioneers were carried on with more scrupulous regard to justice than later, when race feeling had become embittered by long injuries.

Another fact well illustrated by this account was the essential service of the

Oregon volunteers in protecting the territory. It has long since been forgotten by the general public that the volunteers of the Oregon army were reported by the commander of the United States troops—General Wool—as little better than bandits, and he repeatedly said that regulars were more needed to protect the Indians than the whites. The truth is well shown here that the regulars had not yet learned how to fight the wild men. Haller, Ruess, Steptoe, and even Wright, were all worsted at first, and, without the volunteers, were wholly unable to handle the Indians. Indeed, by attempting to fight without enough troops, or knowledge of the country or the warfare of their foes, and consequently being beaten, they encouraged the Indians into making a long war of an outbreak that should have been quelled in a single campaign. The volunteers had to meet a foe made strong in numbers and defiant in temper by victory over regulars; and they scored all the decisive victories, except those of Wright.

To many this will seem unimportant; but to the old volunteers, who, on account of Wool's reports, have never been recognized for their services, it is not unimportant; and it is only justice to set forth the facts, and to treat the volunteers accordingly. It is even more for Oregon to show clearly that the men who made our state were not border ruffians, bent on mauling wars with the natives; but honest men, protecting their homes from real peril.

A valuable feature is the insertion of the muster rolls by companies, to mention by name all in the service.

Some imperfections of execution will be noticed; such as relying too exclusively upon the letter—probably some time after the events—of Jesse Applegate for the particulars of the express journey begun to California for help in the Cayuse war; the characterization of Topsy, or Tpsu, the chief who lived at the foot of the Siskiyou, as very hostile to white men, whereas by Captain Thomas Smith, the first settler there, he is credited as friendly and honorable; and a comparatively slight notice of the arduous march of Colonel P. R. Cornelius from the Palouse through the Yakima country, and his hard fight and victory over Kaminikin, and death of Hombree. The volume closes somewhat abruptly.

Mrs. Victor's estimate of Dr. Whitman will not be generally accepted. The impression of him given in her writings is of an inflexible, but designing and narrow-minded man, whose aims were largely personal. She says of him and his associates that, instead of spiritualizing the Indians, they became themselves unspiritualized. She makes the astonishing assertion that, upon his setting out upon his winter trip to Washington city, in 1842, he threatened his Indians that he was going to bring many white men to chastise them. What proof she has for a declaration so little accordant with Whitman's character, and so unnecessary and foolish, she does not give, relying apparently upon the rumors around the Hudson's Bay trading post. She remarks, however, that the tone of his letter to the secretary of war is accordant with the idea. But this letter and bill show the highest confidence in the Indians, proposing to make them auxiliary United States soldiers, and the pollen of the territory, under the superintendents of the agricultural posts. In Whitman's plan, the Indians were a necessary part, but were to be transformed into trained men to restrain a banditti, such as actually developed subsequently, and to become herdsmen, instead of hunters.

It is to be remembered, however, that Mrs. Victor has never been a friend of Dr. Whitman, and not until positive documents were found, ever admitted that he went to Washington. Yet it is too much to imply, or almost boldly assert, that the massacre and the Cayuse war were to be laid to a threat of Whitman's that he would bring many people to chastise his Indians. The idea is preposterous, and should not be found in a book published by the state.

Much more controversial matter might be found in the manifest sympathy shown in this volume for the British Fur Company, rather than with the American settlers; and a curious and over-persistent observation as to the danger of converting savages to a spiritual religion; the massacre and Cayuse war were the result of an injudicious attempt to convert Indians to Protestantism. But the fact was that the only Indians who did not go to war were the Nez Percés and Spo-

kane, and Sticcen's band of Cayuses, who were under Protestant instruction. If it were Protestant influence, trying to spiritualize the wild man too fast, that caused the trouble, to what should be laid the outbreak of Kaminikin, who was under Catholic influence only; or of the Shastas and Modocs, who were under the primitive nature worship? Yet, we find, from Mrs. Victor's book, that it was due to the influence of the Shandlids that the Nez Percés remained friendly. But that almost determined the result, as the Nez Percés controlled nearly half the fighting Indians of the Upper Columbia. So it seems that Protestant influence was not a danger, but a great protection.

Yet, while these peculiarities of the book, due to the personal idiosyncrasies of the author, detract from its value, and compel us to take it with a grain of salt, they were to be expected from her, and will not be long remembered. Much of her work will endure. There is coming soon a great revival of interest in our local history. It will not be romantic, or scientific, but educational. Our heroes will come back again, and we shall all be learning their names, and repeating their deeds, and experiencing what they felt and suffered.

Their stories will be told not from the standpoint of the author, either romancer or philosopher; but from that of the actors, the people did it all. Objective fact, though useful, is not all-important. Fidelity to subjective experiences is the essential. It was out of what those who made our history believed and felt that their actions came. It is out of that same material that all our real interest in history centers. Having that much, we can live again with them, and thereby inherit what they attained.

All history will ultimately be written as the Bible was written; from within, and true to experience—to faith and life; and not even from imagination, but from human sympathies, which is a greater solvent.

Mrs. Victor has written the history of Oregon with the Roman steel, trying to reach objective verity. This has been a great service, even where her conclusions have been prejudiced and unjust; for, since her method of destructive criticism has been applied, a certain sentimentalism that rejoices in the indefinite and improbable has received a great correction, and the materials of constructive history are defined as never before, thanks as much to those who have combated her as to herself.

Yet not to any writer of objective historical verity will the honors of a people's interest be given. It is the one who can render its human spirit and life that will capture the heart of the coming generation.

J. S. LYMAN.