

JASON LEE'S PLACE IN HISTORY.*

That faith which foresees and believes and is the prophecy of all things, was the inspiration of the Oregon missions and the creative power of the growth of our great states of the Pacific Northwest.

The history of the origin of each of our states lies in the biography and character of the few who were first actors in the history. It is a record, therefore, of the individual lives of men and women rather than of great events. Such were the opening scenes of the history of Oregon.

I refer now, not to the first discoveries and explorations, but to the conditions that started the permanent settlement and began the continuous social and political life of Oregon. But when we are able to take up the history of a commonwealth from its very beginning, and in particular when that beginning was in smallest things, of recent development, almost wholly under our own eyes, there is obvious advantage. We are able to see clearly, assign the founders to their proper places and to accord them severally their meed of fame.

There is something unsatisfactory in beginning a history with the mature state of a country. As in biography, so in history, we desire to go back to the cradle and see the growth of social and political life from the first small beginnings. There is, moreover, not a little difficulty in finding a later moment which will afford a real starting point. In a mature state each condition is the result of what went before, and the human mind feels compelled to seek causes for this as for every other effect.

The absence of written documents in the early ages obliges us to form all our ideas of primitive history from oral traditions, handed down from generation to generation. These become more or less changed by lapse of time and are accompanied with superstition and a belief in the miraculous intervention of the divinity—a doctrine which it enhances while it envelops the pride of a people with a halo of glory.

But we have for the origins of the history of Oregon abundance of written and printed contemporary material; and we

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know, therefore, we are on the sure and solid ground of historical truth. Here, however, are disadvantages, because there is little room for play of the imagination. The poetry is lost.

One who stands as an actor on the threshold of such a new movement has great advantage in this, that though his labors may be arduous, he has a chance, a certainty almost, of reaching a place in the memory of posterity. And after all, fame is something, and it is something to win even remembrance among men. Though a great poet declares the desire of fame "the last infirmity of the noble mind," yet the desire is one that justifies itself in the lives of men, and even at the bar of human history. For none would live without notice or praise, if he could gain it, nor pass to the infinite unknown leaving no mention or memorials of his name.

I am not now intending to give a sketch of the early history of Oregon, but shall attempt some account of estimate of one of the leading actors in it, incidentally only referring to others. I avoid claims made for one and another, and all controversy as to who "saved Oregon;" for in my conception Oregon was secured to the United States by a train of events in which numerous persons were important actors. Nevertheless, I must give chief credit for our beginning as an American state to the missionary effort, of which Jason Lee was the protagonist.

Attempts were made prior to the coming of Jason Lee, but they were failures. I need not speak of Astor's unsuccessful undertaking; nor of the failure of succeeding adventurers, Wyeth and Bonneville, whose enterprises were those of traders; nor of the attempted colonization by Hall J. Kelley, which ended even more disastrously. It was not until the American missionaries entered and possessed the country neither as traders nor as secular colonizers, though in reality willing to become both, that a foothold was gained for the occupation of Oregon by American settlers. With exception of Felix Hathaway, who had come by ship in 1829, of Solomon Smith, of Clatsop, and perhaps one or two more who had come with Wyeth's first expedition in 1832, there were, so far as I am able to ascertain, no Americans in Oregon when Jason Lee and his four companions came in 1834. Hall J. Kelley and Ewing Young, coming from California, arrived the same year a little later.

A word here about the members of this first missionary party of five persons, beginning with Jason and Daniel Lee. Jason Lee was a man of earnest and energetic character. He was

devoted to ideals, yet one could not say that he was a man of great original genius. Such, indeed, are not numerous in our world. But he was sincere, strong in his convictions and in himself. He was a man of sincere piety, of settled beliefs and was fit for the work in which he was to engage. It was a hopeless scheme, indeed—that of educating and civilizing the Indians of that time, but he didn't know it, and therefore didn't trouble himself with doubts. He believed fully in the future of this great country, yet was scarcely aware that the Indian could not be a factor in it. On the contrary, he thought the Indian might be. This was a mistake. But what he did was to lead the way to American colonization.

The second man was Daniel Lee, nephew of the former, thoroughly devoted to the idea of the mission, young and ardent, not idealistic, but practical, with a world of good common sense and with a willingness to work. He labored in the missionary cause in Oregon until August, 1843, when he left the country, never to return. The ill health of his wife required his departure with her. They left by sea. Daniel Lee continued in the ministry in the Eastern states during many years, and died in Oklahoma in 1895.

With the Lees from New York came Cyrus Shepard, from Lynn, Mass. He was thoroughly devoted to the work for which he was engaged, but had not the physical constitution necessary for his hardships. After his arrival in Oregon he married a Miss Downing, who came out by sea in the *Hamilton*, with the White party, arriving in 1837. Shepard died in January, 1840. His wife and two children survived him.

Jason Lee, Daniel Lee and Cyrus Shepard were the original party. In Missouri they engaged two young men for their adventure—Philip L. Edwards and Courtney M. Walker.

Edwards was a native of Kentucky. In his early boyhood his father removed to Missouri. Here at the age of 22 he joined the Lee expedition to Oregon. He taught a school at Champoeg in 1835, and in 1836 went to California to obtain cattle for the settlers in Oregon. With Ewing Young he returned with a band of nearly 1,200, which laid the foundation for rapid accumulation of the comforts of life and future wealth. In March, 1837, Edwards took the trail for the East, over the plains, with Jason Lee and two Indian boys. Returning to his old home in Missouri, he entered the field of politics and was elected to the Legislature. He was chairman of the delegation from Missouri in

1844, which nominated Henry Clay for the Presidency. At Richmond, Mo., he practiced law successfully till 1850, when he went overland to California and in 1855 was in the Legislature of that state as a representative from Sacramento. Wherever he lived he was always a man of note. He died at Sacramento in 1869.

The fifth member of this pioneer missionary party was Courtney M. Walker. He was engaged in Missouri, upon a contract for one year, to assist in establishing the mission. He never left Oregon, but took an Indian wife, lived in Yamhill and left a posterity now, I think, extinct. As I remember him he was a courtly gentleman who, toward the end of his life, managed to dress well, and had the appearance of a man of culture and leisure. A daughter, Helen, married a lawyer in Yamhill, named John Cummins, who in 1862 was a representative of that county in the Legislature. Cummins and wife went to Washington City, where he practiced law. She died there, after a few years, leaving no children. The offspring of white marriages with Indians, though often worthy persons, seldom were long lived.

I give these details, picked up out of many sources of information not readily accessible. But they possess an interest, since they lie at the basis of the creation of the states of the Pacific Northwest; and the smallest details of the beginning of great things have human interest and historic value.

All accounts of the missionary movement to Oregon begin with the story of the four Flathead Indians who, in 1832, made their way over mountains and plains to St. Louis, on a journey whose object the missionary spirit tells us was to obtain religious instruction for themselves and their people. I confess this story has always seemed to me to have a mythical element in it; and Daniel Lee in his book intimates that the later development of the story was subject to doubt. Nevertheless, he tells us that General William Clark, of the Lewis and Clark expedition, told him in 1834 that two years before—that is, in 1832—four Indians, probably Nez Perces, had accompanied a party of white trappers from the mountains to St. Louis and had given him an interesting account of their journey and its objects. From the trappers they had learned of the white man's God and the Book he had given, and they wanted to know. General Clark was not a doctor of theology, and appears to have answered them in merely conventional terms. The story carried by the newspapers to the East touched the religious imagination, and served the mission-

ary purpose just as well as if the sole object for which the Indians had accompanied the trappers was to make these inquiries. Certain it is that the cause which started the first of our missionaries to Oregon was publication in New York of this simple Indian story. Let not incredulity smile at the simplicity of the recital. This is the true beginning of the history of the making of Oregon.

The missionary expedition did not find its resting place in the country of the Nez Perces or the Flatheads, according to the original intention. It fell in with the Wyeth party and came on down to the Willamette, then the settlement of a few of the men of the Hudson's Bay Company—British subjects, most of whom had taken Indian wives. The Wyeth party was to meet at the mouth of the Willamette the little vessel which Wyeth had dispatched from Boston, with goods for the Indian trade. The destination of the Wyeth party determined also that of the Lee party. Both were received with kindness by Dr. McLoughlin, the chief factor of the Hudson Bay Company. Shepard remained at Vancouver, detained by sickness. Jason Lee and Courtney Walker came on up the Willamette by boat, and Daniel Lee and Edwards took horses, for which they were indebted to the kindness of Dr. McLoughlin, and joined the others at the site chosen for the mission, on the Willamette, a few miles below the present city of Salem. It was not till after much deliberation that the mission was established at that place, for we are told that the merits of different portions of the country were considered—the Flatheads, the Nez Perces, the Cayuse and other tribes were carefully reviewed, but to the exclusion of all others the Willamette Valley was selected, chiefly because it was “strongly recommended by Dr. McLoughlin and the rest of the gentlemen at Vancouver.” How, in the face of testimony like this, delivered by the American missionaries themselves, it could have been supposed or told later, that the British people in the country were enemies of our people, passes comprehension.

Yet there was sharp competition between the subjects of Great Britain and the American newcomers in Oregon, for ascendancy in the country. The claims of both countries extended to the entire area, from the 42d parallel to 54-40. In truth, however, neither party could hope to maintain its claim entire. Such was the situation that compromise was inevitable. Our claim to the country north of the 49th parallel was weak. As weak was the British claim to the Columbia and especially

weak to the territory south of the Columbia river. Neither party, therefore, was able wholly to exclude the other, though for a time each bravely made an exclusive claim. The talk on our side of "fifty-four forty or fight" was merely the cry of a party among our own people. Say, rather, it was the insolence of partisanship, for Great Britain's claim, through discovery, exploration and occupation, to a standing below fifty-four forty rested on a basis too solid to be disposed of in this way; and besides our claim to "fifty-four forty" rested merely on a convention between the United States and Russia, through which the latter had named "fifty-four forty" as the southern boundary of her American possessions. But to this convention Great Britain had not been a party, and she justly declared that her rights could not be concluded by any negotiation in which she had not participated, or in whose results she had not promised acquiescence. The question, therefore, was still open between Great Britain and the United States. Both countries had undoubted claims. Great Britain, by retrocession of Astoria to the United States, after the War of 1812, had acknowledged our right in the country, and still was acknowledging it; though she was occupying the country, and we were not—down to the arrival of the American traders and missionaries, in 1832-34. Yet Great Britain, through her channels of diplomatic intercourse—whatever her people here may have said or claimed—never made any serious pretension to the territory south of the Columbia river, but had insisted on that stream as the boundary line. But we had, through Gray's discovery, the exploration of Lewis and Clark and the settlement of Astoria—even though Astoria had capitulated—a chain of title that made it impossible for us to consider this claim. Still, there could be no termination of the dispute till the slow migration of our people to the Oregon country gradually established American influence here; and finally the large migration of 1843 gave the Americans decided preponderance, especially in the country south of the Columbia. Into this competition our missionary people were plunged. Indeed, they led the way in it, and to their efforts, mainly, was due the agitation that led to increase of American immigration from our states and gave our people the ascendancy. That there were no collisions here, of serious character, between the representatives of the different countries, was due to good, common language and kinship. The reception accorded to our common sense on both sides, to mutual forbearance, and to

people by the English was uniformly considerate. We have seen how they interested themselves in the settlement of our first missionaries, and remembrance of the benevolence of Dr. McLoughlin to our people, shown many long years, is a possession that will be cherished in our history forever.

In every sketch of the early history of Oregon it is necessary to make some statement of the controversy between Great Britain and the United States over rights of sovereignty here. I shall not pursue the subject, but must mention it, for it is the key to our pioneer history, and the fact must ever be borne in mind when dealing with any part of the theme.

As missionaries to the Indians, the little band and those who came after them cannot be said to have been successful. After few years not many Indians remained to be educated and civilized. This was not the fault of the missionaries, but the inevitable and universal consequence, repeated here, of contact of the white and Indian races. But, as settlers and colonizers, our missionaries "came out strong."

They, with the reinforcements sent out during the next ten years, became the chief force that Americanized Oregon and held the country till the general immigration began to arrive.

The Presbyterians followed the Methodists in the missionary effort. Samuel Parker was sent out in 1835. Whitman came in 1836. Reinforcement to the Methodist mission arrived by sea in the spring of 1837. Its leader was Dr. Elijah White. Dr. White and wife sailed from Boston in the ship *Hamilton*, July 2, 1836. They came by way of the Sandwich Islands. With them came a dozen persons, for work in the mission, including three young women, who became wives of missionaries. Of these details I can give no more in so brief an address as this must be, than is necessary to the main purpose of a short and rapid narrative. Within a year after this reinforcement arrived, Jason Lee, realizing the need of a still stronger force for the work, started East over the plains. This was in 1838, more than five years before "Whitman's ride," undertaken for a similar purpose. Passing through Peoria, Ill., in the winter of 1838, he delivered a lecture on Oregon. This started a party of young men from Peoria for Oregon in the spring of 1839. The party disagreed and divided. A portion of it passed the winter at Brown's Hole, on Green river, some miles below where the main line of the Union Pacific railroad now crosses that stream. In the spring of 1840 it came on to Oregon, arriving at Vancouver

in May, 1840. In this Peoria party were Joseph Holman, Sidney Smith, Amos Cook and Francis Fletcher, all of whom lived to old age and left descendants, now living in various parts of Oregon.

Before he had arrived at the end of his journey eastward, Jason Lee heard of the death of his wife in Oregon, which occurred shortly after he had left her. Bowing as man must to so great a grief and loss, yet his purpose was not shaken. He bestirred himself with all energy to obtain further help for the mission in Oregon, and in October, 1839, with a large party that included many names which became widely known in our pioneer life, sailed from New York in the bark *Lausanne* for the Columbia river. The vessel arrived in the river just as the Peoria party, which had started a year earlier, came down the Columbia to Vancouver, that is, in May, 1840. The party that came by the *Lausanne* became known in missionary annals as "the great reinforcement."

White left Oregon in July, 1840, by sea, for New York. In 1842 he came out again to Oregon, over the plains. With him came a large party, among whom were persons afterwards well known in the history of Oregon as J. R. Robb, S. W. Moss, Medorem Crawford, the Pomeroy's, Andrew and Darling Smith, and many more. White himself went back over the plains in 1845; came again to Oregon via Panama in 1861, with a commission from President Lincoln for an industrial scheme among the Indians, but, finding it impracticable—most of the Indians having passed away—remained but a short time and departed for California. He spent the last years of his life in San Francisco, where he died in 1879.

Of course, it is known and acknowledged on all sides that the missionary enterprise led by Jason Lee was not the only one in the early history of Oregon that left its impress on the life of the country, directed its course and determined its destiny. There were other similar undertakings, but this one was the first, and, on the whole, more powerful than any other. After the Whitman massacre, all Protestant missions in the Upper Columbia region were abandoned, and the people came to the Willamette Valley.

But it was not merely to obtain a reinforcement for the mission that Lee prosecuted his work in the Eastern states. His work was the first work done by a resident of Oregon to induce the government of the United States to aid in colonization and

support of the country, to settle it with American people, and to establish here an American state. Knowing also that commerce must attend the settlement of the country, he made representations to the Cushings of Massachusetts, which interested them in commercial effort in this direction; and this brought John H. Couch to Oregon in 1840, in the bark *Maryland*, with goods for trade, and again in the *Chenamus*, in 1844.

The Catholic missions in Oregon were started in 1838, four years later than the Methodist, and two years later than the Presbyterian.

Jason Lee, leaving Oregon in 1838, and reaching the Atlantic states early in 1839, at once directed his efforts to the purposes he had in view, and for which he had made the tedious journey over the plains. Before he started for Oregon he and P. L. Edwards, who had come with him, drew up a memorial to Congress, which was signed by Lee and Edwards, by every member of the mission at Willamette station, by seventeen other American citizens, nearly all at that time in the country, and by nine French Canadians, who desired to become citizens of the United States. The object of the memorial was to induce the Congress to extend the protection of the United States over the Oregon country, and the first appeal made to the government of the United States by any body of the American settlers in Oregon, for assertion by Congress of the rights and sovereignty of the United States. "Our interests," said these petitioners in Oregon, "are identical with those of our own country. We flatter ourselves that we are the germ of a great state, and are anxious to give an early tone to the moral and intellectual character of its citizens. We are fully aware, too, that the destinies of our posterity will be deeply affected by the character of those who emigrate to this country. The territory must populate. The Congress of the United States must say by whom; by the reckless and unprincipled adventurer, the refugee from Botany Bay, the wanderer from South America, the deserting seamen, or by our own hardy and enterprising pioneers." Further, the position of Oregon, on the Pacific Coast, and its necessary relations to future commerce, were explained, and strong appeal was added, that the United States should at once "take formal possession."

It is not my intention to claim merit for one at the expense of another. All our pioneers did well. All performed their part. But it is due to the truth of history to show that Jason Lee was

the leader in colonial as in missionary work in Oregon, and that his journey to the East in the interests of Oregon, and his appeal to Washington, antedated the journey and the appeal of Whitman by five years.

We have said the contest between our own people and the subjects of Great Britain for possession of the Oregon country was the key to our pioneer history. It stimulated the early migration and hastened the settlement. The missionary stations were outposts on the line of colonization. It was through their appeals, chiefly, that the Oregon country was brought to the attention of the pioneer spirit, ever moving westward; and it is not too much to say that most of those who came to Oregon during the first twenty years of settlement and growth were moved to come by the agitation begun and carried on by those engaged in the missionary cause.

There is a vague instinct which leads restless spirits to leave their native country in early life, to try fortune elsewhere. Each thinks, no doubt, that beyond his visual horizon there lies new moral space, with large, though unknown, opportunities. Change of place is the natural demand of this restlessness of spirit. The world, through all ages, has received the benefit of it; it has been one of the great moving forces in the history of our race. Our Oregon of today is a product of it.

The Indian races of Oregon, and in particular of Western Oregon, rapidly melted away. But among the white settlers, fast increasing in numbers after 1840, there was a growing field for religious, moral and educational work. Jason Lee had remarried; and again his wife was called away by death. Sore as was his bereavement, he pursued his work. New demands were constantly arising, and to meet these he deemed it necessary to make another journey to the Eastern states, for additional assistance. Parting with his co-laborers in the missions, and leaving his infant daughter, he sailed from the Columbia river in November, 1843, just after the arrival of the great immigration of that year. Passing through Mexico, he reached New York in May, 1844. Thence he went again directly to Washington to urge once more upon the government the necessity of terminating the joint occupation of Oregon and of establishing quickly and definitely the sovereignty of the United States. But Jason Lee was never to see Oregon again. Conferences with his missionary board, and work of preparation for larger efforts in Oregon occupied him during the remainder of the year

1844. But his arduous labors, the privations and sacrifices of more than ten years, had broken his constitution, and in March, 1845, his mortal part passed from earth. But his spirit is here, and the work he set in motion is a possession here forever. It is fit that Oregon should recover the dust and that her soil should hold it, as the life of her people holds his spirit. Yet human glory was not his aim. His spirit was a higher one, and he achieved it. His name lives; yet of such mould was he that, assured as he was that the Almighty Judge could not forget, even the oblivion of man could have been no matter to him.

He was still young; not yet 42 years of age; but "virtue, not length of days, the mind matures;" and, "that life is long which answers life's great end."

A great nature is a seed. The spirit of life and of action which springs from it grows and will grow among men forever. Thus it is that man is the only being that cannot die. The poet tells us in mournful cadence that the path of glory leads but to the grave. But this is true only in a superficial sense. The path of true glory does not end in the grave. It passes through it, to larger opportunities of service—into a spirit that it stimulates and feeds, and into the spirit that survives it, in men's minds, forever.

Not long remembered would Jason Lee have been—we may suppose—but for the fortune of opportunity that sent him to Oregon. With all men of action it is so. But for his opportunity, given by the Civil War, General Grant would have no name. How slight the original incidents that have linked the name of Jason Lee inseparably with the history of Oregon! The Protestant missions failed, as missions, but they were the main instruments that peopled Oregon with Americans. That is, they were more successful than their authors ever dreamed they could be. They established the foundations of the sovereignty of the United States in the Pacific Northwest. The mission was the first low wash of the waves where now rolls this great human sea, to increase in power, we may believe, throughout all ages.

Jason Lee, though a preacher of power, relied not on the graces of pulpit eloquence. Deep was his earnestness, but he was not a showy man. His journey to the West and his work herein vastly extended his spiritual and intellectual vision. Bancroft, in his study of the character of Lee, says: "No discipline of lecture room, general ministration or other experience, could have been so valuable a preparation for his duties as the rude

routine of the days of his overland journey. It seemed to him as if his theological sea had suddenly become boundless, and he might sail unquestioned whithersoever the winds should carry him. It was delightful, this cutting loose from conventionalisms, for even Methodist preachers are men. Not that there was present any inclination toward a relaxation of principles, as is the case with so many on leaving home and all its healthful influences; on the contrary, he felt himself more than ever the chosen of God, as he was thus brought nearer Him in nature, where he was sustained and guarded by day, and at night enfolded in his starry covering. Fires, within him, both physical and mental, blazed brightly, and he was not a whit behind the most efficient of his company in willingness, ability and courage." This is the testimony of a writer who, throughout his monumental work on the origins of the Pacific states, has shown little disposition to laud the missionaries, or to accord them more than their due.

It is small business either to disparage or flatter the ministry. But we may, even at the grave, speak of the minister as a man. Theology, like conscience, belongs to the private property of each communion; we shall not invade its precincts nor call its devotees to question. But putting aside the doctrine of the priest and considering only the sacerdotal calling in its relations to the world, we must acknowledge the moral superiority and exalted privileges which this profession offers to the man of genius, spirit and virtue who devotes himself to its exercise. On this basis the missionaries to Oregon, of all denominations, Protestant and Catholic, are to be judged without loss to them of any element of worthy reputation.

Of the two women who shared with Jason Lee the labors of his life in Oregon the annals of the time are full of appreciative notice and description. Each was a type of devoted womanhood. Though they gave all for the opportunity to labor in this then unknown field, and sacrificed their lives in it, they are fortunate in name and fame. The first wife, Anna Maria Pittman, died in May, 1838; the second, Lucy Thompson, in March, 1842. Sorrowful fatality, due to the conditions of remote pioneer life, in which woman had to bear more than her part, and yet in her hour of need could not have the assistance that her sisters in more favored circumstances receive. Such were some of the sacrifices of the pioneer time, through which this country was prepared as a dwelling place for the succeeding generations.

It is difficult for any generation to estimate rightly its contemporary men and women of real worth. There are many mistaken estimates. After the Restoration in England, John Milton was overlooked and forgotten. Though the literary defender of the Commonwealth and regicides, he was regarded as too unimportant for notice. His obscurity secured him immunity from prosecution, and he died unnoticed. But so great is he now that kings and princes and nobles of his time walk about under his shadow; the very age that neglected him is now known as "The Age of Milton," and receives its luster from his name. Mind and spirit are the controlling forces of the world. Men of pre-eminence can be estimated only by their peers. Equality of judgment is too scantily bestowed in any living generation to insure a correct decision, to settle the scale of pretension, to arrange the gradations of favor, or the definite place or title which each is to occupy in the ranks of fame. Contemporary men often pronounce that to be greatest which approaches nearest to themselves, since they are able to look upon it with the distinctness of close proximity. But the judgment is with the future time. We get no proper sense of the majesty of our mountain peaks when near them. We must draw back a little, if we would take in their full grandeur.

On this view the work of our missionaries in Oregon rises to proportions more and more majestic, as we study it from the standpoint of history and of consequences, and though others bore lofty spirits and did great work, no name stands or will stand above that of Jason Lee.

HARVEY W. SCOTT.