

## THE OREGON PIONEER.

Had you been in Portland on a recent day in June you might have seen a strange procession passing through the streets. One man, bent with years, walked feebly in the front. He bore a banner telling the year of his arrival in Oregon. Other aged men and aged women in little companies followed closely behind, each company in succession bearing a banner of a later date. Few were the banners of the '30s and early '40s, and few were the groups in those irregular front lines in which some husband or wife did not walk companionless. Larger companies of the '50s and the '60s followed, and men still stalwart and women still comely walked on in conscious pride of the honor that on that day was theirs. For they were the guests of the city, and many a cheer and shout of pleasantry marked their progress toward the great Armory, where they were to sit down to a banquet fit for an assemblage of kings, and be eulogized as the bravest and best in all the land.

These were the pioneers of Oregon, and Washington, and Idaho, come to the mother City of Portland to hear once more the roll-call of the living and the dead, to renew the friendship that began when Oregon comprised all the Northwest; when Oregon was a part of neither the United States nor of Canada; when Oregon, unpossessed, as it were, and undivided, was all their own.

How changed are the scenes they look on now! How thinned are their own victorious ranks! A few more Junes shall come and go and there will be none left to walk in that yearly procession. And those banners borne aloft so long must also perish. But the fame of the pioneers will live forever in legend, song and story, and three great States will never cease to erect monuments to their memory.

'Tis enough! No strain of sadness can do justice to the Oregon pioneer. His was no mournful existence. He lived in the halcyon days of youth and hope. He came hither with great expectations, and he realized yet more. I have heard him laugh at the hardships and dangers he passed through. He sang aloud as he cracked his whip about his oxens' ears in the early morning start across the plains. He had his wife and

children with him, and with them he chatted and joked around the campfire at night, and lay down to dream of love and happiness in the new home he would build beyond the shining mountains.

To whom shall I compare the Oregon pioneer? Whether by land or by sea, the journey to Oregon from the settled East took longer than the voyage the Dutch ventured on a little earlier in their flight for freedom to Cape Colony. Our ancestors migrated from the German shores to England, and thence after a thousand years to Massachusetts and Virginia. History tells us how much the race was bettered by each migration—by each transplating. Shall we doubt the race gained a new hardihood, a new courage, a new love of independence in the third and last journey to the West? Nay, the strong survived and bred a hardier stock than ever the world had known. And so, if even in America, as I believe, the Star of Empire takes its westward way, and if the balance of power is even now held in the West, know that for these things we must chiefly thank the Oregon pioneer. For by as much as the love of gold is less noble than the love of home and country by so much less, it seems to me, will the abiding influence of the early settlers of California be less than that of the pioneer of Oregon.

And who was the Oregon pioneer? Not Captain Gray, who found our mighty river, or Lewis, or Clark, or any of Astor's men, or Bonneville, or that magnificent dreamer, Hall J. Kelly. These were but the harbingers of settlement on our shores. Not yet were the hearthstone and the altars of the American home established here.

Who, then, was the Oregon pioneer? He was such a one as Jason Lee, who came in 1834 in answer to the call of the Nez Percés Indians for the white man's Book of Heaven. He with his companions opened a school for the Indians, as did Whitman and Spalding two or three years later. He set up the missions of Chinook and Nesqually, in this State. He founded the City of Salem and Willamette University. He drew up and carried the first memorial from Oregon to Washington asking Congress to extend the protection of the United States over the Oregon country. And a remarkable document it was—wise, statesmanlike and prophetic. His was the first marriage of a white man with a white woman in Oregon. He beheld the greatness of the Oregon to be, and gave his life for the realization of his vision. In his death far away he longed to be buried in his beloved Oregon, and grandly was his wish

fulfilled when, after sixty years of sepulcher in Canada his body was brought back to Salem, and there reinterred by many distinguished citizens and the State officials and the Pioneers' Associations of Oregon, Washington and Idaho. With solemn joy they laid him to rest in the old mission cemetery where his wife and child had slept so long. Here I am on familiar ground. It is hard for me to pass so swiftly on. Often have I lingered long and lovingly amid the scenes where the feet of Jason Lee have trod.

The Oregon pioneer was such an one as Narcissa Whitman, that beautiful woman with golden hair and snowy brow, who came riding across the continent on her bridal tour. And that other dark-eyed one, Eliza Spalding, the sweet singer who finished the farewell song alone in the little church of her native town when the congregation broke down in tears. Even so was the highest type of wife and mother to be the Oregon pioneer. But of these two women and of Marcus Whitman and H. H. Spalding another paper will speak more deservedly.

There was Father Blanchet settled among his flock, who did great good to the settlers in ministering to their temporal as well as to their spiritual wants. There were W. H. Gray and Dr. White, and George Abernethy and Dr. Babcock, who drew up the plans for the provisional government that made Oregon a little American republic at the very time when England was most desirous to make it a province of hers. It was the Oregon pioneer that saved Oregon for the American nation, not the statesmen in Washington. That call of Jo. Meek's "Who's for a divide? Follow me," in that epochal meeting at Champoeg, was infinitely wiser and more eloquent than all of Webster's great speeches against the occupation of Oregon. All honor to the fifty-two who crossed the line with Meek—the fifty-two whose sole survivor, Francis Xavier Matthieu, is the father of our townswomen, Mrs. Burton and Mrs. Geer. But what shall I say more? For time fails me to tell of the Waldos, the Dennys, the Applegates, the Scotts of literary fame, of the brave soldiers Lane and Nesmith; of Ezra Meeker, who last year retraced his steps over the old wagon road to the East, building a monument in the presence of many people to mark every stage of the way; of the Royals, and the Wilsons, and Glovers; of the Meanys, and Youngs, and Holmans, who are doing so much to preserve our early history; of the immortal Stevens, and a multitude of others whose names must ever come to mind when we think of the past.

Such was the Oregon pioneer, who, with heroic patience, subdued the wilderness, battled mightily with tribes of savages, triumphed over British enterprise and diplomacy, selected with unerring wisdom the strategic sites of our chief cities, and gave to the American Union these three great Northwestern States.

The rivalry with England could do the pioneer no harm. It quickened his patriotism and summoned all his powers to larger action. The settlement of the Oregon question has served as an example of peaceful arbitration to all nations and to all succeeding generations.

Dr. John McLaughlin's services to the Oregon pioneers must be forever a bond between the two peoples, who are still neighbors and who have so many ideals, so many aims, so many hopes in common. And if in the passage of the years the good, old Doctor, as it now seems probable, should be called the Father of Oregon, none would be more willing than the children of the pioneers to yield this highest honor to him who, being here before them, succored all Americans who came, and at last for love of them cast in his lot with them and became himself an American citizen and of Oregon pioneers the first.

And so I circle back to the thoughts with which I began—to entreat once more your regard, your admiration, your veneration for these old toilers among us who, as I have said, laid the foundations for all we do or may hope hereafter to accomplish. Some day we shall read of their joy in reaching this Western shore in words as eloquent as those of Xenophon in telling how the Ten Thousand, in beholding the waters of the Euxine after their long march across Armenia, cried out as one man, "The sea, the sea!" Some day the story of their travels will be told all over the world as now we tell of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece. Some day the historians of America will relate with equal ardor the landing of the Pilgrims and the coming of the Oregon pioneer.

WILLIAM P. MATTHEWS.

Wilbur, Washington, February 3, 1908.