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EVOLUTION OF AN INDIAN HERO IN FRANCE *

Not until the war of the Revolution had been completed and our independence won was the birth of our beloved country fully accomplished. A short while thereafter, in the land of Hwulch, on the shores of that great inland sea called Puget Sound, a baby boy was born — an Indian baby boy. As a mere lad he gazed with wide-eyed wonder at the great white-winged ships of Vancouver and saw them sail the hitherto untroubled tides of Puget Sound. Among his people of the Suquamish and Dwamish at Old-Man-House (Port Madison Reservation) he grew apace to man's estate and then became the chieftain of a great confederation of neighboring Indian tribes. It is significant that in the treaty with these people his name leads all the rest. He was a great chief and an eloquent orator. There was little indeed of evil in his heart, for he ever held it friendly to his white friends and neighbors — the great metropolis of the Northwest stands as a monumental token of the faith and friendship of Chief Se-at-tlh, for that was his name.

About the time that Se-at-tlh attained young manhood the expedition of Lewis and Clark was making its way through the trackless western wilderness to the south — of which fact we shall have more to say later.

Chief Se-at-tlh saw the first ships to reach Puget Sound and also the first steamers, thus witnessing an epoch in transportation. Born after our first great war, he died just after the successful consummation of another great war. He died (1866) and was buried at his old home at Old-Man-House, now called Suquamish. He thus lived somewhat more than the allotted four-score years ere he was gathered to his fathers. Fortunately he left surviving him both lineal and collateral descendants, of whom one, as we shall see, served his country with his very life.

The relation between cause and effect is sometimes remote and frequently far from obvious. Somewhat more than a century ago the

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Lewis and Clark Expedition explored the Pacific Northwest. Somewhat later, more than a quarter of a century, Indians of the Northwest made a pilgrimage to this selfsame Clark at St. Louis in quest of religious truth and instruction. This pilgrimage thrilled the entire Christian world. Bishop Rosati of St. Louis, who met the Indian pilgrims, wrote an account of this pilgrimage, and the account was published in a missionary publication in Lyons, France. The account thrilled and enthused a young French boy of that neighborhood, and he made a vow to become an Oblate and a missionary, and shortly thereafter he was ordained in France especially for missionary work in the diocese of Walla Walla (which included much of the Old Oregon country of that day). The young French lad became our well-known and successful apostle to the Indians of the Northwest, Father Chirouse.

In the fall of 1831 a small party of Indians from the Flathead and Nez Perce tribes made the long journey overland to St. Louis in search of religious instruction. They traveled in company with a party of trappers and traders about as far as Council Bluffs or some nearby point on the Missouri River. Here some of them turned back, having escorted their emissaries over the most dangerous portion of the route. This left two Flatheads and two Nez Percés to continue the long journey to St. Louis. At St. Louis they sought General William Clark (who had been appointed governor of the Northwest Territory and United States superintendent of Indians), and besought him to send those who would teach them the white man's better way of living, nor for the hereafter. About twenty-seven years before this General Clark had passed through their country — then as Captain Clark of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

December 31, 1831, the Rt. Rev. Joseph Rosati, Bishop of St. Louis, wrote an account of the arrival of these Indian seekers after the eternal truth, and the same was printed in a Catholic journal in Lyons, France (an important fact whose bearing will appear later). Bishop Rosati's account is as follows:

"Some three months ago four Indians, who live at the other side of the Rocky Mountains, near the Columbia River, arrived in St. Louis. After visiting General Clark, who in his celebrated travels had seen the nation to which they belong and had been well received by them, they came to see our church, and appeared to be exceedingly pleased with it. Unfortunately there was no one who understood their language. Sometime afterward two of them fell dangerously ill, I was then absent from St. Louis. Two of our priests visited them, and the poor Indians seemed delighted with their visit. They made

signs of the cross, and other signs which appeared to have some relation to baptism. This sacrament was administered to them; they gave expression to their satisfaction. A little cross was presented to them, they took it with eagerness, kissed it repeatedly, and it could be taken from them only after their death. It was truly distressing that they could not be spoken to. Their remains were carried to the church for the funeral, which was conducted with all the Catholic ceremonies. The other two attended and acted with great propriety. They have returned to their country.

"We have since learned from a Canadian, who has crossed the country which they inhabit, that they belong to the nation of Têtes-Plates (Flatheads), which, as with another called the Pieds-Noirs (Blackfeet), have received some notions of the Catholic religion from two Indians who had been to Canada, and who had related what they had seen, giving a striking description of the beautiful ceremonies of the Catholic worship, and telling them that it was also the religion of the whites. They have retained what they could of it, and have learned to make the sign of the cross and to pray. These nations have not yet been corrupted by intercourse with the others; their manners and customs are simple, and they are very numerous. We have conceived the liveliest desire not to let pass such a good occasion. Dr. Condamine has offered himself to go to them next spring with another. In the meantime we shall obtain information on what we have been told, and on the means of travel." * * * * *

The Bishop's account is further confirmed by the register of burials of his cathedral, which shows that one Indian (Narcisse, a baptismal name probably given to him by the priests *ante mortem*) was buried October 31, 1831, Rev. Edmond Saulnier officiating; and the second (Paul, undoubtedly another *ante mortem* baptismal name) was buried November 17, 1831, Rev. Benedict Roux officiating. George Catlin, the famous painter of Indian portraits and scenes, obtained from General Clark a corroboration of the essential facts of the Indian pilgrimage. He was also a passenger on the same steamboat by which the two surviving members of the Indian delegation left St. Louis on their way home, and he traveled with them two thousand miles up the Missouri River. This was in the spring of 1832. It was said that a third pilgrim of the Indian party died on the return journey and was buried near the mouth of the Yellowstone River. George Catlin gave publicity to the matter after he had it confirmed by General Clark. In addition to Bishop Rosati and Catlin, Walker and others also gave publicity to the matter, and many sensational accounts appeared. Some of them were inaccurate, some attributed impossible

speeches to the Indians themselves. In one way or another, however, the visit of these Indians to St. Louis and the various and varying accounts of that visitation led to the establishment of Christian missions, both Catholic and Protestant, west of the Rocky Mountains.

Father Eugene Casimir Chirouse was born in France on the 8th of May, 1821, in the ancient town of Bourg du Peage, in that proud and celebrated province of Dauphine. He was born about fifty miles or so south of Lyons, the great silk center.

It will be recalled that the journey of the four Indians to St. Louis in search of religious instructors to be sent to their people created an intense interest throughout the Christian world. It will be recalled also that these Indians called upon the Rt. Rev. Joseph Rosati, Bishop of St. Louis, for missionary help for their people. It will be recalled further that the Bishop of Red River had promised to send missionaries to the Northwest as soon as they could be obtained from Europe. On December 31, 1831, Bishop Rosati wrote an account of the arrival and purpose of the Indian delegation to St. Louis. This account has been referred to heretofore. It was later published in *Annals de l'Association de la Propagation de la Foy* in Lyons, France, and attracted attention as well as excited comment. It was shortly thereafter that the news reached young Chirouse, and he then gave material evidence of his purpose to become a missionary and labor among the people calling for such help. It should be remembered that Lyons is the metropolis of the neighborhood of the birthplace of Father Chirouse, the upper Rhone valley, and no doubt the imagination and determination of the young lad were greatly fired by the account. One afternoon in May, 1836, when fields were fair and nature invited to more material things, the young French lad of fifteen heard the spiritual call and saw the vision. Faithful to the celestial vision, he entered the church of St. Bernard at Romans, not far from his birthplace, and there, before the altar, he registered a solemn vow to become not only a member of the Oblates, but also to serve as an apostle. He spent five years thereafter at the College of Crozat in Valence, pursuing classical studies, and then took up his novitiate in L'Osier. In a letter written in the last years of his life, he goes back with deep emotion to the days of his novitiate. On August 15, 1844, the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he took his perpetual vows at Marseilles, in the presence of the venerated founder of his order, Bishop de Mazonod. Two years later he was ordained a priest of the Lord, and a few months afterward left for the distant missions of Old Oregon. It is said that he was

ordained for this very work in the Walla Walla diocese, and the first priest to be ordained for such specific purpose.

The stout-hearted Oblate was indeed at times a medicine-man amongst his flock. In 1863 the dreaded *sklay-kah-buts*, the scourge of smallpox, was brought from California and spread swiftly through the Indian camps. Father Chirouse then had to turn surgeon and physician, and with his helper, the future Bishop Durien, he vaccinated several thousand of his native missionaries. His devoted self-sacrificing service ultimately left such an impression on his Indian charges that time is now being counted by his coming. "B. C." in Tulalip literally means "before Chirouse." In placing the time of an occurrence, the Indian will often state that it was a long time ago, before Father Chirouse came; or it was not so long ago, it was since Father Chirouse came. This event, the coming of Father Chirouse, ranks with the treaty itself as a marker between the end of ancient time and the beginning of recent times among the Indian population.

Father Chirouse passed much of his life in Washington, evangelizing the Indians, who were devoted to him. He became missionary to the Yakima Indians in 1848 and remained four years with them. From 1852 to 1856 he looked after the Cayuse tribe, and was finally transferred to the missions of Puget Sound, with headquarters at Olympia. Difficult but successful was the work of the Oblates in Western Washington. It meant a pioneer undertaking among various roaming tribes; but their survivors cherish, even to this day, the memories of their first apostles, and name their baby boys after them.

From the beginning he was impressed with the importance and necessity for Indian schools. He founded the one at Tulalip, Washington, and for many years, up to 1873, he remained at the head of this institution. In March, 1892, on St. Casimir's Day, a few months before the end came, the good father, being then at St. Mary's Hospital, New Westminster, B. C., received many congratulatory letters, St. Casimir's Day being his patronal feast. He was especially delighted with the simple but sincere letters from the children of the Indian school at Tulalip. They remembered him so well; to the last, he was their "dear father," and they were his "affectionate children."

Early in the spring of 1892 our brave knight of the cross suffered a stroke of paralysis and became a patient of St. Mary's Hospital, New Westminster, under the kind care of the Sisters of Providence. After four months he had mended and seemed on a fair way to recovery. Suddenly, on Saturday afternoon, May 28, he became unable to leave his bed. A short while before this he had seen his

confessor and had assisted at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. His once active mind seemed about to sink at last to slumber. Father Ouellette administered the Extreme Unction before Father Chirouse fell asleep in Jesus. Thus passed to his glorious reward a faithful soldier and servant of his Master. By his deeds the name Chirouse has been made imperishable in the missionary annals of the Northwest. His burial at St. Mary's Mission occurred just as 1500 Indians happened to be gathered there — or did Almighty God call together these children of the forest to do homage to the Oblate who spent forty-two years of his life laboring for their spiritual welfare?

A small cross on the banks of the Fraser River marks the tomb of the Oblate father. Day and night it keeps a solitary vigil. Here he rests in God's eternal peace, and may light perpetual shine upon him.

As the good father passed away, God passed the torch along and sent into the world at Suquamish another Indian baby boy (Eli George) where Chief Se-at-tlh had lived, died and was buried. This last baby was a descendant of the first one mentioned. The new baby, like the other, grew apace to man's estate, and then saw this fair world embroiled in the carnage of war. Sixty years before a young French boy had heard the Macedonian cry of the Northwest Indian and had crossed the ocean and continent, half-way round the world, to serve those who cried aloud for help and consolation. He gave his life in such service, and his hallowed dust is mingled with that of our great Northwest. He came to succor the people of Eli and to lay down his life for them. Now the fair land of France, the land of Father Chirouse, war-worn and weary, torn and bloody, sends a call across the ocean for succor and support. The young Indian lad Eli heard that call and recognized it as blood calls to blood. He enrolled under the Stars and Stripes, sought service and sacrifice in France and served honorably and well — having done, not his bit but his best, he lay down to his eternal slumbers in bloody, war-torn France on Christmas day last — the very birthday of the very Prince of Peace Himself! Eli thus requited, by service and sacrifice even unto death, the supreme debt of his people. His dust is now a portion of France. In Chaumont he slumbers. In America Father Chirouse slumbers. Half a world intervenes between the two, but the thunders of war disturbs not their slumbers.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine!

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