

DOCUMENTS

Early Letter from the Methodist Mission

Prof. J. Orin Oliphant, Ph.D., is doing some research work at Harvard. In the relatively rare copy of *Zion's Herald*, Boston, October 28, 1835, page 170, he found this interesting letter by Cyrus Shepard of the Methodist Mission of Oregon, and copied it for reproduction here.—EDITOR.

Fort Vancouver, Columbia River, 45° 37'
North Latitude, 122° 39' West Longitude,
10th January, 1835.

DEAR BROTHER—It is with heartfelt gratitude to our *Kind Preserver* and *Bountiful Benefactor*, that I, for the first time, address you from this distant land; and you will, undoubtedly, join me in aspiration of praise to Almighty God, when I tell you that “goodness and mercy” have followed us all through out long and dangerous journey, and even up to the present period. “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

We arrived here on the 15th of September, in one hundred and forty days after leaving the upper settlements of Missouri. On our arrival, we were received in the most friendly manner by the governor, and gentlemen of the fort, who, till the present time, have remained sincere friends to us, and the cause in which we are engaged.

I have been engaged in a school, here, ever since our arrival, excepting about six weeks which I passed with the brethren at the mission establishment, assisting them in their labor, etc.

This school was commenced by Esq. Ball, (whose letters were published in the *Herald* last year,)¹ about two years since, and is composed, principally, of half-breed children, collected about the fort, who, but for the advantage of instruction derived from their connection with the school, would be in little, if any, better situation than the natives themselves.² Some of them have made very laudable improvement in reading, spelling, writing, English gram-

¹ Shepard here refers to extracts from three letters from John Ball, a member of Nathaniel J. Wyeth's first expedition to the Pacific Northwest, to Dr. Brinsmade, of Troy, New York. These were reproduced in *Zion's Herald* from the *New York Commercial Advertiser*. The first extract, dated at Lexington, Mo., April 29, 1832, is in *Zion's Herald*, December 18, 1833, p. 256; the second, dated at “Head Waters of Lewis River,” July 15, 1832, is in *Zion's Herald*, January 1, 1834, p. 4; the third, dated at “Fort Van Couver,” February 22, 1833, is in *Zion's Herald*, January 15, 1834, p. 12. There may have been another extract in the issue of *Zion's Herald* of January 8, 1834, which is missing from the file of the Congregational Library, Boston.

² In an earlier letter, dated at Fort Vancouver, November 8, 1834, Shepard thus writes of his school: “I have tarried here since our arrival, to take charge of the school at the Fort, (the former instructor having left,) which is composed of half-breed children, having French Canadian fathers, and Chenook mothers. The Chenooks are a tribe who inhabit from this place to the shores of the Pacific. These children have now some of them been at school nearly two years, and what is rather singular, have always been taught by Americans.” *Zion's Herald*, September 23, 1835, p. 150.

mar; and a few of the most advanced are now studying, in addition to these, geography and mathematics. In addition to the day school, I have one in the evening, composed of ten of my scholars, and two young men, one of whom has just commenced learning, and is making good progress. I have also had three Japanese under instruction, who were wrecked on the coast more than a year ago, and remained captives among the natives till released, about ten months since, by the captain of a vessel in the service of the Hudson Bay Company, and brought to this place.³ They have now sailed for England, from whence they are to be returned to their native land. While in the school, they were remarkably studious, and made very rapid improvement.

I shall remain here, "if the Lord will," seven or eight weeks longer, and then join my brethren at the mission establishment, which is sixty miles from this, on the Willammitt. This selection has been made, after much reflection and fervent prayer. It has been found by observation, that, in order effectually to benefit the rising generation among the natives, a location must be made, where a large school can be supported by the produce of the soil; and the place which has been selected appears to be the most favorable, for that purpose, of any we have yet discovered. From this place, we trust the mission will hereafter be extended to other places, and much good be done among the poor natives in the name of Jesus. Their situation is truly wretched in the extreme, and loudly calls for sympathy from the Christian world.

The brethren have succeeded in erecting a log-house, thirty-two feet long, by eighteen wide, and a story and a half high. The brother Lees⁴ have put both side and shoulder to the wheel, and have labored unremittingly, in rain and sunshine, to advance the work of building the house, ploughing the ground, getting out fencing stuff, etc., etc. For five or six of the first weeks after commencing the house, there was almost constant rain; during this, they labored each day, and, at night, had no other shelter than a small tent of cotton cloth. All these, and many more inconveniences, they have submitted to with cheerfulness, and endured without a murmur, or even repining at their lot, although it were a severe one—fully proving to me, that the love of Christ constraineth them. This course of labor must, necessarily, continue through the present and succeeding year; and I earnestly long to have the

³ The same rescued Japanese that were mentioned by Nathaniel J. Wyeth in his letter to Washington Irving and published in an appendix to the latter's *Adventures of Captain Bonneville*, 1843. Their experiences inspired the trip to Japan by Ranald McDonald.

⁴ Meaning Rev. Jason Lee, the leader, and his nephew, Daniel Lee.

time arrive when I shall be permitted, in the order of Divine Providence, to unite with them in performing my share of labor; but as it was thought by the brethren, that it would better advance the interests of the mission for me to tarry here this winter, I cheerfully submit. The special providence of God has, already, seemed to throw upon our care three poor Flat-head orphans; one, a lad of fourteen or fifteen years of age, who is quite serviceable in several ways. The other two are apparently about seven years of age; one is sister to the above-mentioned lad, and they are the only survivors of the family to which they belonged; to this girl we have given the name of LUCY HEDDING. The other is a very flat-headed boy, who has neither parent, brother, nor sister. He came one day to the mission-house, and, in the most imploring manner, asked, in Indian, and by signs, to stay and live with us; and though food will naturally be rather scarce with us for the present, yet such importunities cannot be turned away. Providence, we trust, will provide means of support till we can raise something to subsist on. These children came to us almost naked, in a very filthy state, and covered with vermin. The girl had no other covering than a small piece of deerskin over her shoulders, and a deep fringe of the same material tied round her waist. I made her a gown, (*though not a very fashionable one,*) from some pieces of tow-cloth, which had been used for baling our goods; and J. LEE cleansed them from their vermin, so that they do not now appear like the same children they were when they first came.

The ague and fever have carried off numbers of the Indian population in this vicinity, and there are many poor destitute orphans, that have none to take care of them, whom we shall endeavor to gather in as soon as circumstances will permit.

We wish you, through the medium of your excellent paper, to recommend to the female members of the church in New England, to form Dorcas societies, for the purpose of making clothing for these destitute orphan children, and such other Indian children as may, from time to time, be placed under our care; and you will please to recommend and urge this upon them, as one of the first objects of Christian charity and philanthropic benevolence. We also request you, through the same medium, to inform our friends, that donations of books, of every description, that are useful, will be very valuable to the mission; such as Murray's Grammar, Alger's Pronouncing Testament, and Murray's Pronouncing Introduction and Reader by the same author, Dictionaries, Arithmetics, Spell-

ing-Books, all sorts of Juvenile books, slates, etc. will be received with gratitude, and be invaluable here.

I think most, if not all, the books mentioned, may be collected without much trouble, were some person appointed to make a collection in each society, as such books have either passed out of use in different families, or have been superseded by others, and, in this way, those who are wishing to do all the good they can, will have an opportunity of turning their useless books to a very good account. Books of philosophy, astronomy, chemistry, rhetoric, etc. will also be highly acceptable. To the above-mentioned objects we would, most earnestly and affectionately, invite the attention of our Christian brethren and sisters, and trust our entreaty will not be in vain. We do not beg for ourselves; far be this from us. We have learned contentment in our present situation, and hope to remain faithful until death. But we do *beg for the suffering and the destitute*. And shall the voice of humanity plead in vain?

But we *have* one or two requests to make in our own behalf. First, we earnestly request a special interest in the prayers of Christians, and, secondly, we request letters from them every opportunity that may occur of sending, also the back numbers of Zion's Herald, say the numbers since March last, and the Minutes of the Annual Conferences.

In respect to letters, we only request our friends to do by us as they would wish to be done by, were they in our isolated situation. In order to facilitate these objects, a person should be appointed, in Boston, to take charge of letters, or other articles, and forward them, to the mission, in some vessel sailing to OAHU, one of the Sandwich Islands, to be left there in the care of GEORGE PELBY [Pelly], ESQ. These packages should be addressed to "JASON LEE," and directed to the "Care of John M'Laughlin, Esq., Chief Factor of the Hudson Bay Company, Fort Vancouver, Columbia River." This gentleman has kindly offered to have any thing, that may be sent, carefully forwarded to the Fort by the Company's vessels, which touch at OAHU almost every month. You will please to give notice, in your paper, to our friends where they may leave letters, books, and other articles. Brother Lee preached, at this Fort, on Sabbath, 28th September, which were the two first sermons ever preached in this region, west of the Rocky Mountains. He also preached here again, on the 14th of December, at which time he baptized four women, and fifteen children. This was a solemn, interesting, and profitable season. The people of the fort are, mostly, attached to the Church of Eng-

land, and it was the wives and children of such, that were baptized; also some orphan children, belonging to the school. Among the women, baptized; was Governor M'Laughlin's wife. One of the brothers Lee preaches, every Sabbath, at the house of a Frenchman, by the name of Jerveys,⁵ who lives a few miles from the mission-house. He is, by profession, a Roman Catholic. There are generally present from thirty to forty hearers. During the forty-five Sabbaths which have passed since I left Massachusetts, I have not had the privilege of hearing more than ten sermons. I have, however, found it good to trust in God, and endeavor to do his will. I thank him, that I have been permitted to come to this land, and hope to be useful in my sphere of action. Brother L. joins me in love to you and Christian friends.

Yours, in the bonds of Christ,

CYRUS SHEPARD.

⁵ Joseph Gervais.