

THE PIONEERS AND PATRIOTISM*

The march of the Oregon Pioneers across the wide desolate plains and mountains is one of the most remarkable movements in the history of that Republic. Preceded by the Lewis and Clark exploration of 1805-06, the fur-traders and trappers from 1812, and afterwards the missionaries of 1834 and 1836 and a handful of settlers who in some measure explored the country and prepared the way, the immigration of the Pioneers began in 1842 with the coming of 105 persons; next year 700 arrived; in 1844, 475; in 1845, 3,000; in 1846, 1,500; in 1847, 5,000; and they came in ever increasing numbers in following years. Many mingled motives induced this exodus: the spirit of adventure, love of change, the desire to escape the fever and ague then widely prevalent in the Mississippi Valley, the lack of markets for their produce, the pressure of debt; but among them all, land-hunger and patriotism were the strongest. For years the Oregon Question—the conflicting claims of the United States and Great Britain to the vast undefined Oregon Country—had been debated in Congress and discussed in the newspapers. A number of books and pamphlets describing the country in glowing colors had been published. By these means great interest was aroused among the people, especially in those of the then western states which we now term the Middle West and the strong feeling and determination excited to hold that great and beautiful region for the United States and defeat the British designs upon it. The men of that generation were bitter against England, for the animosities engendered by the Revolution and War of 1812 had not yet subsided. Their patriotism was stronger, more outspoken, self-assertive, self-reliant than that of to-day. They were proud of their country, of her colonial and revolutionary history, of her free institutions handed down from Anglo-Saxon forefathers. They delighted in celebrating the Fourth of July by the firing of cannon, and noise of guns and firecrackers; and in hearing the eagle scream by the voices of fervid orators who declared the glories of the Republic and her manifest destiny to gather beneath the Star Spangled Banner the whole continent from the North Pole to the Isthmus of Darien and from Ocean to Ocean.

And the Donation Act, which offered 640 acres to every settler and his wife who located in Oregon, pending and debated in Congress

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from 1839 until 1850 when it passed and which everybody believed would pass, added the lure of land to the call of patriotism and the pioneer immigration was the result.

These Pioneers were not rude, ignorant, lawless, reckless, borderers usually associated in literature and common belief with the frontier and mining camps. In reality they compare favorably with the founders and settlers of any of the States. They were people of more than average courage, enterprise, and self-reliance, for no others would undertake such a journey. With few exceptions they were intelligent, manly, self-respecting, honest, hospitable, kindly; and many of them deeply religious. They were all true Americans, patriotic and brave, and filled with firm faith in the future growth and greatness of the new country which they had come to make "blossom like the rose." Among them could be found the best blood of New England; the sturdy and kindly yeomanry of Virginia, Kentucky and Missouri; and men from every state of the Middle West. Most of them had slowly wended their way across the great plains and mountains, overcoming every obstacle and suffering untold privations; others had come by sea around Cape Horn or across the Isthmus. Governor Stevens appreciated the character of these people and spoke of them as follows: "They have crossed the mountains and made the long journey from the valley of the Mississippi to their homes on the Pacific, having to cut roads as they went and knowing little of the difficulties before them. They are therefore men of observation, of experience, of enterprise, and men who at home had by industry and frugality secured a competency and the respect of their neighbors, for it must be known that our emigrant traveled in parties and those go together who were acquainted at home because they mutually confide in each other. I was struck with the high qualities of the frontier people and soon learned how to confide in them and gather information from them."

The Pioneers, especially in Oregon, were commonly called "Pikes" because so many of them came from Pike County, Missouri. When a newcomer arrived, he was asked, "did you come the Plains over, the Isthmus across, or the Horn around." It was frequently remarked of a man of known or suspected dishonesty that he had sent his conscience around the Horn and it had not yet reached him. In nothing was the high character of the Pioneers better shown than by their fair and kindly treatment of the Indians. They frequently hired Indians to work on the farms, and squaws to do the housework, and traded with them for fish, shell fish and berries. They

opposed the sale of liquor to Indians, and as jurymen were prompt to convict the miscreants guilty of such offense.

It was the coming of the Pioneers that saved Oregon to the United States, especially that part north of the Columbia River, the present state of Washington. For forty years the whole Oregon region was under the absolute sway of a British fur company, at first the Northwest company of Montreal which, in 1820, was merged in the Hudson's Bay Company of England. The able, far-sighted chiefs of that Company early determined to keep all north of the great River of the West as British Territory. To that end, in 1825, they moved their principal establishment from Fort George (now Astoria), on the south bank of the Columbia River, to Fort Vancouver, on the north bank. In 1833 they built Fort Nisqually on the Sound. In 1840 they opened farms on the Cowlitz and Nisqually Plains and stocked them with cattle and sheep; and in 1841 they brought out and colonized at those points with Canadian and Scotch settlers.

The British Government strenuously upheld their contention. To them and to anyone knowing and contrasting the action of the two countries in supporting their people, there appeared no doubt that the Columbia River would be made the boundary, and all north of it became British soil.

But this well-laid plan of the Hudson's Bay Company's chiefs was defeated by the advent of the American pioneer settlers with their ox-teams, their cattle, their plows and their rifles, and their reputation as fighting men earned at Bunker Hill, Saratoga and New Orleans.

To them the people of this State owe a debt of perpetual gratitude. But for them there would be no state of Washington. This beautiful land would be British soil and its inhabitants subjects of a European king.

The patriotism of the Pioneers was put to an even severer test by the Indian war of 1855-56. The war was not caused by aggression of whites upon Indians as has been erroneously claimed. Said Governor Stevens in his message to the Legislature of January, 1856: "The war has been plotting for two or three years, a war entered into by these Indians without a cause, a war having not its origin in these treaties nor in the bad conduct of the whites. It originated in the native intelligence of restless Indians, who foreseeing destiny against them, that the white man was moving upon them determined that it must be met and resisted by arms. We may sympathize with such a manly feeling, but in view of it we have high duties."

The Indians most closely in contact with the whites—all the

tribes on the Sound—remained friendly and at peace except the Nisqualli who were largely intermarried with the Yakima, the chief instigators of the war, and the majority of the Nisquallies refused to take the war-path. The great unbroken tribes of the upper country east of the Cascades, the Yakima and Cayuse, instigated by Kamaiakam, the leader, and Owhi, the diplomatist, brought on the war.

Year after year they saw the long trains of immigrants pass through their country and settle like swarming bees upon the fertile plains of the Willamette. They saw the Indians there dispossessed of their hunting grounds and rapidly dying off the face of the earth. The tale of every Indian wronged, or who thought himself wronged, was borne with startling rapidity to their ears. Thus far their intercourse with the whites had been of immense benefit to them. The fur-traders supplied them with superior weapons, blankets, and many articles of comfort and had greatly improved their condition. Devoted missionaries had labored among them for years, and with some success. By trade with the immigrants they were growing rich in cattle. But the actual occupation of the soil by the settlers filled them with alarm. Amid all these benefits the fear was fast growing into conviction that the fate of the Chinook and Wallamettes was the presage of their fate, and that the whites would pour with increasing numbers into their country and appropriate it to themselves. In these two tribes, the Yakima and Cayuse, the desperate resolution was extending and deepening itself to rise and wipe out the dreaded invaders ere it was too late. For several years the bold and turbulent spirit among them had been enlisting the disaffected Indians far and wide in a great combination designed to crush the unsuspecting whites simultaneously at all points by one sudden and mighty blow. Their emissaries visited the tribes on the Sound, Grays Harbor and Shoal Water Bay but met with no success except with their kindred among the Nisquallies.

In the spring of 1853, General Benjamin Alvord, then a major and commanding the military post at the Dalles, heralded among the Indians of the upper country the approach of General Stevens with his exploring parties, and in reply was visited by a delegation of chiefs of the Yakima, Cayuse and Wallawalla who declared that "they always liked to have chiefs, Hudson's Bay Company men, or officers of the army, or engineers, pass through their country, to whom they would extend every token of hospitality. They did not object to men hunting, or wearing swords, but they dreaded the approach of the whites with plows, axes and shovels in their hands." Major Alford had largely dealt with and studied these Indians, and, more-

over, had confidential information from Father Pandosy, a Catholic priest of the Yakima Mission. He became so impressed with the danger of an outbreak that he reported the facts and rumors to his superior, General Hitchcock, commanding the Pacific Department, by whom they were discredited, and Major Alford was soon afterwards relieved from the Dalles. Events were soon to prove that the magnitude and imminence of the danger were even greater than he apprehended, yet outwardly all was serene. The people were lulled into a complete sense of security.

The blow fell in October, 1855, like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. Settlers on White River and other places were massacred, miners and travelers in the upper country were cut off; Agent Bolon was murdered by Qualchin, the son of Owhi; Major Haller with a hundred regulars was forced to retreat by the Yakima. Another force of regular troops under Captain Maloney, after crossing the Cascades and entering the Yakima country, fell back to Fort Steilacoom. This, the only military post on Puget Sound, could muster barely one hundred soldiers and was so far from protecting the settlements that it called for and received the reinforcement of a company of volunteers. Fort Vancouver, the only other post, was but a handful in strength, and was reinforced by two companies of volunteers. But even this pitiful force was not to be used against the savage enemy, for Major-General John E. Wool, commanding the Pacific Department, disbanded the volunteer companies after they were mustered into the United States service, refused to take any active measures to protect the people, and loudly proclaimed both in his official reports and through the press that the war had been forced upon the Indians by the greed and brutality of the whites and that the former would be peaceful if only let alone and not treated with injustice.

The settlers in dismay abandoned their farms and fled for refuge to the few small villages. They were all poor, having no reserves of money, food or supplies, and starvation stared them in the face if prevented from raising a crop. Moreover, there was a deficiency of arms and ammunition, for the Legislature had neglected the Governor's recommendation to organize the militia, and the war department in consequence refused to issue arms and ammunition to the territory.

In this emergency, when the country seemed overwhelmed and the future hopeless, the Pioneers rose at the call of their Governor as one man. Out of a population of scant 4,000 men, women and children, over a thousand volunteers took up arms, and inside of three weeks were in the field attacking the foe.

The old men, boys and families returned to their farms and held them with blockhouses and stockades. The merchants furnished food and supplies to the extent of their abilities, the settlers oxen and wagons, Portland, Victoria and San Francisco aided with supplies and munitions. The volunteers were organized in three battalions. While the northern battalion blocked the Snoqualmie Pass and guarded Seattle and the lower Sound, the central battalion under Major Gilmore Hays advanced across the Puyallup, and on March 10, 1856, broke the power of the hostiles at the battle of Connell's prairie. The Indians, emboldened by their previous success, fought for five hours with a stubbornness that enabled the volunteers to inflict severe losses upon them. They were finally routed by a charge on their left flank by Captains Swindal and Rabbeson and a simultaneous attack in front by Captains Henness and White with a loss of 25 or 30 killed and many wounded. An hundred Yakima warriors aided the Nisquallies in this fight. The Indians now scattered and war parties doubled back behind the troops and killed men near Olympia. The southern battalion was brought over to the Sound from the Columbia River. The Indians were allowed no respite from attack and could find no refuge even in the densest swamps and thickets. The central battalion sent out strong parties to beat up the country of the White, Green, Cedar and Puyallup Rivers to the base of the mountains. Major Van Bokkelen, with Captain Smalley's Company and 76 of Chief Patkamim's Snoqualmie braves, swept the forests from the Snoqualmie to Connell's Prairie, thence up the mountains to Naches Pass, thence northward along the foot of the range to and over the Snoqualmie passes. Captain Sidney Ford, with his Chehalis Indians, and Agent Wesley Gosnell with a party of friendly, or pretended friendly, Indians from the Squaxon reservation—own brothers to the hostiles these—scoured the swamps of the Nisqually and Puyallup. Lieutenant Pierre Charles with a force of Chehalis and Cowlitz Indians scouted up the Newaukum and Cowlitz Rivers and captured a number of the enemy.

The ladies of Olympia made blue caps with red facings with which these red allies were equipped to distinguish them from their hostile kindred. Another company under Captain E. D. Warbass built a blockhouse on Klickitat Prairie and kept scouting parties constantly on the move. Major Mason and his command searched the whole length of the Nisqually far into the Cascade Range, leaving their horses and plunging into the tangled forests on foot, and on one scout killed eight and brought in fourteen captives. Miller's and Achilles's companies joined in the work. Captains Howe and Pea-

body led detachments of the northern battalion from the Snoqualmie down through the unknown and trackless forest to Lake Washington and beat up the shores of the Lake. Lieutenant Neely led a party in canoes up Black River into the Lake and fell upon the camp of the hostiles just after it had been abandoned, which was filled with remains of cattle and goods plundered from Seattle and the settlers.

Every blockhouse with its little garrison, every armed train and express as well as the numerous scouting parties, was constantly watching and searching for hostile Indians, and more than all, their own kindred, of whom Colonel B. F. Shaw declared "Blankets will turn any Indian on the sides of the whites" now joined in the hunt, and, stimulated by rewards, showed the way to all their secret hamlets and trails.

Then the whole tangled region with its dense forests and almost impenetrable swamps from the Snohomish to the Cowlitz, 200 miles, was beaten up, the Indian resorts and hiding places, and trails searched out. It was in the midst of the rainy season that this aggressive campaign was waged. Amid constant rains and swollen streams the volunteers threaded the dripping forests where every shaken bough drenched the toiling soldier with another shower bath, following some dim trail, or often cutting or forcing their way through the trackless woods—heavy packs of blankets and rations on their backs, the axe in one hand, the rifle in the other. Scarcely would they return from one scout when they would be ordered out again. To every demand the volunteers responded with the greatest alacrity, spirit and fortitude. The mounted men without a murmur left their horses and took to the woods as foot scouts. The southern battalion, who enlisted with the expectation of campaigning on the plains of the upper country, promptly and cheerfully obeyed the order summoning them to the Sound, to the discomforts and hardships of the rains, forests and swamps.

For two months after the fight of Connell's Prairie the whole force thus incessantly hunted down the hostile with unrelenting vigor. The Indians thrown completely on the defensive, did not commit another depredation on all that long line of scattered settlements. They were driven and chased from covert to covert, their hidden camps and caches of provisions were discovered and destroyed, many were killed or captured, and by the middle of May over five hundred came in and gave themselves up and were placed on the reservations with the friendly Indians while the guilty chiefs and warriors fled across the Cascades and sought refuge among the Yakima.

Thus the war west of the Cascades was ended by the complete surrender or flight of the hostiles.

In June the forts and blockhouses built by the volunteers on Puyallup and White Rivers, Connell's Prairie and Camp Montgomery were turned over to the regular troops, and the volunteers on the Sound were disbanded in July.

Starting from Camp Montgomery on June 12, Lieutenant-Colonel B. F. Shaw led a force of 175 mounted men of the central and southern battalions across the Naches Pass, traversed the Yakima and Walla Walla Valley without finding an enemy, and struck the hostiles in the Grand Ronde Valley, instantly charged and broke them and chased them fifteen miles across the valley, killed forty and captured all their provisions, ammunition and over 200 horses and mules, many of which bore the "U. S." brand, and had been taken by the Indians from the regular troops. These captured animals sold at auction in Vancouver brought more than the cost of Shaw's expedition.

Shaw's command marched via the Dalles to Vancouver except one company which Governor Stevens retained to protect his camp at a council with friendly and hostile Indians in the Walla Walla Valley in September and which rendered good service in repelling an attack of the hostiles. This company, too, marched to Vancouver, and all were mustered out in October.

Thirty-five stockades, forts and blockhouses were built by the volunteers, 23 by the settlers and 7 by the regular troops. The discipline and good conduct of the volunteers were remarkable and more creditable to them. All captured property was turned over to the quartermaster and properly accounted for. There was no case of murder or unauthorized killing of Indians by the volunteers, nor plundering, nor serious offenses of any kind. They were the best type of American settlers, brave, intelligent, self-respecting, and patriotic. They went into the war in self-defense and were determined to put it through as soon as possible. Their achievements form an example of patriotism of which their descendants and the whole State may well be proud, and one worthy of imitation at this time.

HAZARD STEVENS.