[CHAPTER SIX]

WHITMAN'S FIRST JOURNEY TO THE ROCKIES 1835

When Marcus Whitman left Amity on that Monday morning, February 23, 1835, he was making his first entry as an actor on the Old Oregon stage. For more than twelve years, or until his tragic death on November 29, 1847, he was destined to play a leading role in the stirring events which were to take place in the Pacific Northwest. Whitman made three journeys across the plains to the Rockies. This, the first, came in 1835. He retraced the route with his wife and the Spaldings in 1836, and again with the first great wagon train to go to Oregon in 1843.

Upon the advice of Parker, Whitman drew on the American Board for $100.00 for expenses. After his arrival at Liberty, Missouri, Whitman wrote to the Board on May 13 saying in part: "...I have expended in the following manner: about $30 expenses of traveling to St. Louis, seven dollars lost from my pocket with my wallet; sixty-one of the remainder I have expended for some additional clothing & articles of goods & medicines to carry with us, & in part to pay expenses." This indicates that the actual travel costs of the thirty-seven days horseback ride from Amity to St. Louis was less than one dollar a day.

Since Whitman had informed Greene of his desire to visit relatives and friends in Ohio and Illinois [Letter 6], we can trace in some detail the approximate route he followed. After leaving Amity, he rode

west until he came to the Buffalo–Cleveland highway. In all probability Whitman reached Erie, Pennsylvania, before Sunday, March 1. Since he was loath to travel on Sunday, he probably spent the day resting and in attending church. From Erie, Whitman rode to Kirkland, Ohio. There he must have seen the new Mormon temple then being erected; it is still standing. In 1835 the growing cult of Mormonism was a main topic of conversation throughout the area.

At Kirkland, Whitman turned to the left and rode seven miles south to the small crossroads community of Chester, about ten miles south of Cleveland, where he visited a number of relatives and friends. Within a few years after Whitman's return to Rushville from Plainfield, Massachusetts, a migration had begun to the Western Reserve in northeastern Ohio. It had caught up many of the people he had known in Cummington and Plainfield. Among those who had migrated were Freedom Whitman and his wife; two of Beza Whitman's sisters and their families; and Colonel and Mrs. John Packard.[1] No wonder that Whitman, on his westward journey in 1835, took time to call on his relatives and friends at Chester whom he had not seen for about fifteen years. After leaving Chester, Whitman rode westward to Danville, Illinois, which is about 125 miles south of Chicago, where he was a guest in the home of his brother Samuel.[2] In that home was a five-year-old boy named Perrin Beza, the son of Samuel, who had been named after his two grandfathers; we shall hear of him later.

Whitman's Official Commission

Whitman received at St. Louis a communication from Secretary Greene which contained his official commission, dated February 17, 1835, and the Board's final instructions. The commission was a certificate, which measures about eight by ten inches, with an engraved picture in top center.[3] The illustration epitomized the Board's philosophy of foreign missions. In the center of the picture is a sailing ship presumably arriving in some foreign port with the morning sun appearing above the distant horizon. In the foreground are some palm trees which suggest a tropical climate. On either side of the harbor are buildings, including some which represent Hindu temples. In the immediate foreground is a group of forty or more natives who, with outstretched arms, appear to be welcoming the arrival of the Christian missionaries supposedly aboard

the ship. Beneath the picture is the verse from Isaiah 9:2 (King James version): "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."

After the printed inscription: "This is to certify that" comes the penned statement: "Doct. Marcus Whitman is an assistant missionary to the Indian tribes West of the State of Missouri." Whitman was not commissioned as a "missionary," for that classification was then reserved for ordained men. Instead he was called an "assistant missionary." The January 1838 issue of the *Missionary Herald* listed him as "Physician" and in following years as "Physician and Catechist." The wives of the missionaries of the American Board were not then officially commissioned.

Differences Arise Between Whitman And Parker

Whitman arrived in St. Louis on April 1, whereas Parker, who had left Ithaca on March 14 traveling by stage to Pittsburgh and from there by river boat, did not arrive until the 4th. The two men called upon the officials of the American Fur Company and secured permission to travel with the Company's caravan across the plains and the Rockies to the Rendezvous, which was to be held that year on the Green River in what is now western Wyoming. The caravan was to be under the command of Lucien Fontenelle,[4] 1800–1840. Whitman and Parker left St. Louis on April 8 on the steamboat Siam for Liberty on the western Missouri frontier, near present-day Kansas City. The boat trip between these two points was usually made in seven or eight days, but this time because of an accident, the Siam took two weeks.

Since the Fur Company's caravan was not to leave Liberty until May 14, Whitman and Parker had about three weeks in which to purchase their animals, assemble equipment, and complete other necessary arrangements. At first Whitman deferred to Parker's judgment regarding what should be purchased. This was to be expected, as Parker was fifty-six years old and Whitman, thirty-three. Moreover, Parker was the one who had initiated and promoted the exploring mission. He had already made one journey to St. Louis and was presumably better informed on what was needed for overland travel.

Differences of opinion, however, soon arose between the two men over what should be purchased. Parker, who knew from personal experience

the difficulty of raising money for missions, was far too parsimonious. Whitman turned to Fontenelle for advice. None of Whitman's contemporary letters reveal the extent of the differences of opinion between him and Parker over this question. Several years later, when Whitman learned of some criticisms that Parker had passed on to the Board regarding the costs of the Oregon Mission, he was moved to write a long and revealing letter in which he gave some sharp criticisms of Parker [Letter 62].

Writing to Greene on May 10, 1839, Whitman frankly stated: "...as you introduce Rev. Samuel Parker as authority for supposing we might have saved expense, I will venture to make a few statements respecting his policy in this Country, & in his general tour of exploring. When he joined me at St. Louis, I thought he must know all that was required for our journey as he had been out before & made inquiry, so that I committed all arrangements to him. He said that our personal baggage must not exceed fifty pounds & in this he wished to include everything necessary to be carried, viz clothing, stationary, books, Medicines, Instruments, Ammunition, Goods for trading supplies, &c, &c. We made our arrangements accordingly, as near as possible. In the purchase of animals, he limited us to one apiece for riding, & one for packing which we bought. Mr. P. took one to ride to Fort Leavenworth about thirty miles, & injured his [i.e., the horse's] back so that he was unfit for the journey. He then sold him & bought another. Fearing the consequences of such an accident when we might be remote from the means of other supplies, I tried to persuade him to purchase another animal, but to no effect, & so we started with but three to cross the Rocky Mountains. One mule was to pack all the provisions necessary to take on that long route, including the above items of clothing, &c., besides cooking furniture, bedding, tent, axe, &c One of the items taken was Samuel Parker's saddle case which is now at Whitman College. This is a cylindrical leather bag, approximately 22½" long by 10½" in diameter and is marked on one end: "Rev. S. Parker, Ithaca." [5]

While still at Liberty, Whitman and Parker met the Rev. Moses Merrill, a Baptist missionary who had established a mission among the Oto Indians on the north bank of the Platte River about eight miles west of Bellevue in 1834. Merrill had gone to Liberty with an ox drawn wagon for supplies and was planning to return with Fontenelle. Bellevue lay on the west bank of the Missouri about twenty miles south of present-day

Omaha, Nebraska. Fontenelle, with between fifty and sixty men, about two hundred horses and mules, six wagons, and three ox teams, left Liberty for Bellevue on Thursday morning, May 14. Previously Fontenelle had shipped some of his supplies by boat up the Missouri River.

Whitman, in his letter of May 10, 1839, told Greene of unhappy experiences with Parker which took place at the very beginning of their overland travels: "Mr. P. obtained leave to put a small supply of provisions into Mr. Fontenelle's wagon. And now for the task of packing; a thing I had never seen done, & had no example before me, as the company was to go up to Bellevue before arranging their packs... This task I performed alone in the streets of Liberty, & after putting all but our provisions on the poor old mule, I started alone, but did not go far before all was in disorder & needed a repacking, a scene often occurring & for which I was as often blamed by Mr. P. for my unskillful management."

Experience is needed to tie a miscellaneous assortment of items on the back of an animal and have them remain securely in place when it is trotting or even walking. This Whitman lacked at first but in time he became an expert packer. Whitman's account continues: "It was not long before we found Mr. F. did not wish to take the trouble of our provisions, & we were forced to put them into Mr. Merrill's wagon, although he was obliged with a loaded ox team to keep up with Mr. F. with [his] mules & empty wagons. In order to do this, I assisted him in taking out his boxes at every bad place & carrying them on our backs or else lifting at the wheels in the mud &c."

Hostility of the Men of the Caravan

The unwillingness of Fontenelle to permit the missionaries to place some of their supplies in his empty wagons boded ill for their future relationships. The caravan had hardly started before Whitman became aware that the rough and ungodly men of Fontenelle's company did not appreciate the presence of missionaries and emphatically expressed their displeasure. Whitman wrote: "Very evident tokens gave us to understand that our company was not agreeable, such as the throwing of rotten eggs at me." He added: "In order to remedy this, I used to labour with extreme exertion with Mr. F's men in crossing rivers, making rafts & bridges, &c. In this way we reached Bellevue. I found I was very much exhausted in health, having been an invalid for some years previous."

Parker, in his *Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains*, likewise referred to the hostility of the men of the caravan, who "so disliked the restraints which our presence imposed upon them that, as they afterwards confessed, they had plotted our death & intended on the first convenient occasion to put this purpose into execution." [6] Since the caravan was traveling rather slowly over the two hundred mile stretch which separated Liberty from Bellevue, the three missionaries decided to remain in camp over Sunday, May 24. When the men of the caravan learned of this, they took great offense.

Parker described what happened: "After our arrangements were made for the night, one of the desperadoes came to our tent with a basin of alcohol, and stated that they had taken offense of our refusing to travel with them on the Sabbath... and concluded to pass it over, if we would take a friendly drink with them. This of course we declined. He said the men were highly displeased, and he could not say what would be the result—giving us to understand that if we refused their terms of reconciliation, our lives would be in danger. We still refused. He then said if we would put the basin to our lips and wet them, they would accept that as satisfaction. But his arguments and threats not availing to shake our temperance principles, he went away, but as we afterwards learned without giving up the purpose of revenge on some other occasion." [7]

Parker recorded a second incident in which some of the men of the caravan expressed their dislike of the missionaries and especially their disapproval "because we did not travel with them on the sabbath." After the caravan had crossed a stream where a raft had been needed, some of the men tried to dismantle the raft and set it adrift before the three missionaries could use it. "Providentially," wrote Parker, "it did not drift far before it lodged against a tree, and, without much loss of time, we repaired it and passed over." [8]

Whitman's Journal

Whitman began a journal on May 14, the day the caravan left Liberty. He kept it with more or less regularity until October 26 when he was back at Cantonment Leavenworth after his journey to the Rockies.

Whitman took the original manuscript of this journal with him to Rushville where, it appears, he copied and enlarged it and then sent the revised version with a letter dated December 17 to the American Board.[9] A comparison of the original with the revised copy shows that Whitman made many changes, mostly of a minor nature, as the following extracts illustrate. The streams mentioned empty into the east side of the Missouri River.

Original Journal

[May] 24. The Sabbath. Rested in company with Rev. Roses Merrill. How refreshing is the rest of the Sabbath and how delightful is social worship in this uncultivated prairie. Mr. Fontanell's men went on.

25th. Started and crossed the big Tarkoo with raft. Came up with Mr. Fontanell at evening.

27. Spent the day in crossing the River on the raft.

28th. Made a raft and crossed the west branch of the Nishnabotna. Mr. Fronsa [Fontenelle] has waggons which he crosses on the raft. We swim our animals over. The water was rising so fast we had great difficulty to get off the bottom before crossing.

29th. Made a bridge over the five barrel creek. [Now Keg Creek.]

30th. Bridged the Maraguim [Mosquito] creek and crossed the Missouri and came to Bellevue. We stopped at the government

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24. The Sabbath. We rested in company with Mr. Merrill. Mr. Fontanelle's men went on. How refreshing is the Sabbath and how delightful social worship in this uncultivated prairie. I bled myself for the pain in my side which is quite severe.[10]

30. We arrived at Bellevue after a very fatigueing journey. The rains were excessive and the streams high. Most of them had to be bridged or crossed by rafts. We put up with Mr. Merrill at the agency. Messrs. Dunbar and Allis are waiting for Maj. Dockerty [John Dougherty], agent for the Pawnees. They speak encouragingly of their reception among the Pawnees.

31st. Sabbath. Mr. Parker preached in Mr. Merrill's house in the morning & in the evening prayer meeting.

1st June. Attended concert[11] with Mr. Merrill's family and the Brethren of the Pawnee mission.

agency under the hospitality of Mr. Merrill. The Brethren Dunbar and Allis of the Pawnee mission are here awaiting the arrival of Maj. Dockerty, agent for the Pawnees. They speak encourageingly of their reception among the Pawnees.

10 June. I was called to visit one of Mr. Fontanell's men sick with Cholera. Spent much of the night with him.

11th. Patient much relieved.

How blessed is the consideration of union and concert in such a cause.

10. I was called to visit one of Mr. Fontanelle's men sick with cholera. Spent much of the night with him.

11th. Patient much relieved.

Parker, in his *Journal*, commented on their drinking water: "The water of all this portion of country, especially of the Missouri river, and its large tributaries, are very turbid, owing to the nature of the soil over which they pass. A pail full of water, standing half an hour at the seasons of freshets, will deposit three-eighths of an inch of sediment; and yet the water, when settled, appears to be of good quality." One of the difficulties which the missionaries encountered while traveling at that season of the year across the rolling prairies lush with the new growth of grass was the lack of wood for fuel. Parker wrote: "Our mode of living, from day to day, had already necessarily become uniform. Dry bread and bacon constituted our breakfast, dinner and supper. The bacon we cooked, when we could obtain wood for fire; but when out of sight of land,' that is, when nothing but green grass could be seen, we eat our bacon without cooking." [12]

Whitman found the sixteen-day trip from Liberty to Bellevue a gruelling experience. Although the caravan once traveled twenty miles in one day, yet because of heavy rains and swollen streams, it averaged about thirteen miles. Wherever a rushing torrent could not be forded by a wagon, either a bridge had to be built or a raft constructed, so that the wagons could be taken across. All this took time. Whitman and Parker had a small conical tent which provided some protection at night but, like the men of the caravan, they had to sleep on the wet ground.

Whitman quickly discovered that Parker was more of a liability than a help on the trail. It is difficult to imagine any two men with more opposite qualifications for a journey across the plains and the mountains in

those days than Marcus Whitman and Samuel Parker. Whitman was the practical type, eager to do his share of work and more. He was an out-of-doors man, rugged, likeable, and adjustable to the circumstances of his environment. Parker was an older man. At fifty-six he never should have ventured on such an expedition. His disposition was more suited for the study than for the rough life of western travel. He was tactless, fussy, and dogmatic. Parker let Whitman do most of the work in packing, setting up camp, and preparing the meals. Perhaps Parker was standing on protocol. After all, he had the status of being a "missionary" of the American Board; Whitman was only an "assistant missionary."

William H. Gray, who went out to Oregon in 1836 with the Whitman-Spalding party, characterized Parker as follows: "Mr. Parker was inclined to self-applause, requiring his full share of ministerial approbation or respect... was rather fastidious." [13]

Another characterization of Parker is found in a letter that W. G. Rae, an official of the Hudson's Bay Company, wrote from Fort Nez Perce (the early name for Fort Walla Walla), on March 20, 1836: "There is a Missionary there [referring to Fort Vancouver] from the United States of the presbyterian persuasion who sends us all to Hell—honest man—with as little ceremony as I would (at this moment for I am very hungry) drive a rump steak into my bread basket. Parker is the Worthy's name—and I must do him the justice to say he deals as plainly with the high as the low—in this respect I find no fault but altogether I think however good his motives—that he goes much too bluntly..." [14]

Becoming aware of the unfriendly attitude of the men of the caravan towards him and Parker, Whitman became concerned. How would it be possible for the two to cross the plains and the mountains unless they had the goodwill and the cooperation of Fontenelle and his men? Since he had become engaged to Narcissa Prentiss, Whitman was naturally taking note of travel conditions to see if it would be possible to take a white woman across the country to Oregon. If he were to get married and if at least one other married couple would join them, they would have to travel under the protection of the Fur Company's caravan after leaving the Missouri frontier. Whitman knew that if he and Parker could not win the respect of the men of the caravan, it would be impossible for any mission party with women to contemplate an overland journey to Oregon the following year.

Alert to the problem, Whitman overexerted himself in helping the men of the caravan get their wagons over the swollen streams. He felt that this was one way of overcoming the growing hostility which was being shown, but he paid a heavy price. Writing in his journal on May 20, Whitman confessed: "Much afflicted with pain in my side which is much aggravated by fatigue." On June 15, two weeks after the caravan had arrived at Bellevue, he again mentioned his ill health: "I have been quite sick yesterday and today." All such discouragements and afflictions, combined with the continued hostility of the men and the liability of Parker's attitude, made the outlook bleak. Whitman began to wonder if it would be possible for him and Parker to complete their projected exploring tour.

The Dread Cholera Strikes

A couplet from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is here applicable:

> *There is a tide in the affairs of men,*
> *Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.*

At Bellevue, in a sudden and unexpected way, the tide turned for Whitman when the dread cholera struck down some of the men of the caravan. As has been stated, Asiatic cholera was brought from Ireland to the Atlantic states in June 1832, and within a few months had spread across the country to St. Louis. The disease had reappeared with lessened virulence in 1833, but was worse in 1834. In some mysterious way, the deadly germs contaminated the drinking water used by Fontenelle and his men when they were encamped at Bellevue in June 1835.

Whitman's journal tells the story. On June 16, he wrote: "My health is improved. Went to see a man for whom I was called last night but was unable to go. Found him in a hopeless collapse of cholera. Another case, the man laying on the bank of the river and in the evening exposed to a severe shower, soon after which he died." On the 19th Whitman wrote: "There have been several new cases of cholera each day and one death last night. Mr. Fontanelle is sick with cholera."

On June 21, in a letter to Narcissa, Whitman wrote: "For the last twelve days have been attending upon Mr. Fontanelle's men; the cholera has raged severely among them; three only have died. Mr. Fontanelle

is sick with it himself, but now convalescent. He has a house and farm half a mile below here, where his men have been, some encamped, and some in his buildings. It is not strange that they should have the cholera because of their intemperance, their sunken and filthy situation."

Although we have no evidence that Whitman had actually treated a case of cholera while practicing medicine at Wheeler, it is evident that he had been close enough to the Erie Canal and other focal points of infection to become informed about the symptoms of the disease and the best ways to treat it. He had learned that contagion was connected with intemperance and lack of cleanliness. He knew the importance of good clean drinking water, and he knew the most appropriate medication to be used. When Fontenelle called upon Whitman for help, Whitman at once recommended that the men be moved from the low bottom lands bordering the river, where the water supply had evidently become polluted, to "a clean, healthy situation" on higher ground. This stopped the spread of the disease.

Looking back on those days, Parker commented in his *Journal*: "Three of the company died; and several others barely survived, through the blessing of God upon the assiduous attentions of Doct. Whitman, my associate, and the free use of powerful medicines. And, had it not been for his successful practice, the men would have dispersed, and the caravan would have failed of going to the place of rendezvous. This was plainly seen and frankly acknowledged." [15]

After the death of the three men, all others who had been stricken, including Fontenelle, recovered. A magical change of attitude towards the missionaries took place. There were no more throwing of rotten eggs at them, no more taunts because of their temperance principles, and no more harassments. Dr. Whitman became the most respected man in the caravan. Parker was tolerated for Whitman's sake. Both Whitman and Parker viewed the cholera epidemic, as far as they were concerned, as being providential. "The medical skill of the Doctor," wrote Parker, "converted those [who had been hostile] into permanent friends."

Four years later, Whitman in a letter to Greene likewise stressed the providential aspects of the epidemic by writing: "At this place the Lord had a great change for us, for the Cholera appearing in camp, my aid was greatly sought. Mr. F. himself being one of the subjects of the disease and recovering (as also most of his men), he showed his gratitude, as

well as all other persons concerned in the company, by bestowing upon us every favor in his power" [Letter 62].

What if there had been no cholera outbreak at Bellevue: Would the two missionaries have been able to continue their exploring tour to the Rockies that summer? What if Whitman had been a minister and not a doctor? Would he have been able to overcome the hostility of the company and so win the friendship of Fontenelle that it was possible for the mission party of the following year, which included two women, to travel with the caravan to the Rendezvous? This is doubtful. From all available evidence, it is safe to conclude that Whitman's skill as a doctor in dealing with the cholera epidemic at Bellevue made possible the establishment of the Oregon Mission of the American Board in 1836.

From Bellevue to the Rendezvous

The friction which had arisen between Whitman and Parker during the trek from Liberty to Bellevue threatened to end their missionary tour at the latter place. Whitman insisted on buying another mule and hiring a man to help in packing and unpacking. Parker was opposed to such extra costs. His determination to keep the expenses of the exploring tour to a minimum may have reflected some promise that he had made to Secretary Greene, whom he had seen in Boston in the fall of 1834.

Whitman, knowing that they would have to carry enough food for at least three weeks, until they arrived at the buffalo range, in addition to other equipment and supplies, continued to insist on the absolute necessity of having a second pack animal. In his letter of May 1839, Whitman gave Greene the following details: "After much entreaty I received for a reply, *You* may purchase one if *you* will take the *responsibility*.' I replied, *No*, Mr. P. not under such circumstances. In such a situation I cannot go any farther.' After that he reluctantly consented to buy one, but would not hire a man to assist in packing, although we were repeatedly urged to do it." It is evident that Fontenelle was one who recommended that the two missionaries hire a packer.

Whitman faced the eight-week journey to the Rendezvous with a heavy heart as he realized that most if not all of the labor connected with packing and unpacking, setting up camp and preparing meals, would devolve upon him. On June 22, the day he and Parker left Bellevue, Whitman wrote in his journal: "My health is feeble," and then bravely

added, "but I am not discouraged."

After being delayed by the cholera outbreak for a full three weeks, Fontenelle was eager to be on his way even though some of his men were not fully recovered. On Sunday, June 21, he moved the caravan a short distance out of Bellevue into the prairie. The trail that he planned to follow paralleled somewhat the north bank of the Platte River to its forks, about three hundred miles west of Bellevue, and then up the North Fork to Fort Laramie. This trading post, located at the mouth of Laramie Creek, was founded only the year before, 1834, and is not to be confused with present-day Laramie, Wyoming, which lies about eighty miles to the southwest.[16]

The buffalo range began in the vicinity of what is now North Platte, Nebraska, at the forks of the Platte, which was a good three weeks march from Bellevue. The long delay at Bellevue had meant a serious depletion of Fontenelle's food supplies, hence the urgency to be on their way and get to the buffalo range as soon as possible. After reaching buffalo, the men would live almost exclusively on meat.

Having conscientious scruples about traveling on Sunday unless it was absolutely necessary, Whitman and Parker remained in camp at Bellevue on the day that Fontenelle left. Both men knew, however, that as soon as the caravan entered the Indian country, they would have to stay with it on Sundays as well as other days of the week for safety's sake. On Monday, June 22, the two men started their westward march and easily caught up with the caravan before evening.

Parker, like Whitman, made rough notes along the way which became the basis for the report he submitted to the Board on June 25, 1837.[17] He used both these rough notes and his report in the writing of his *Journal of an Exploring Tour* which was first published in 1838. A comparison of Whitman's journal and his letters, written shortly after his return to *Rushville* in the fall of 1835, with Parker's writings reveals some striking differences in their respective attitudes toward the objectives of their tour.

Whitman was the practical person, mindful of his engagement to Narcissa Prentiss and concerned with the problems involved in taking her together with one or more other married couples across the prairies and over the Rockies to Oregon. He saw the importance of establishing a good rapport with the leaders of the American Fur Company's

caravan. He also wanted to make sure that the hardships of horseback travel, when the women would be riding on side-saddles, would not be too much for them to endure. Of course Indian women had crossed the mountains but they, like the Indian men, rode astride. The Spanish, in what is now southwestern United States, had taken their wives over the Continental Divide but they too may have ridden astride. Certainly the mountains in the south were not as rugged as those north of what was then the Mexican border. Whitman knew that no white woman had ever crossed those rugged and little known mountains which lay north of the border. Was such an endeavor feasible? This he wanted to investigate.

Parker, on the other hand, had no such concern in mind. He was not planning to establish any particular mission. He was on an exploring tour and was viewing the whole scene on a grand scale. He had an observant eye and an inquiring mind. He gathered a myriad of facts regarding the physical features of the country, its geology, fauna, flora, climate, the customs of the Indians, and the activities of the fur companies. Although of great value to Americans interested in Oregon, Parker's explorations and published journal proved to be of little use to the American Board or to its Oregon missionaries.

The combined testimony of Whitman and Parker through their respective accounts give us some vivid descriptions of the experiences and hardships endured on the trail. At the end of their first day's ride after leaving Bellevue, Parker noted: "In the afternoon we had to ride in a heavy, cold rain, in consequence of which I became much chilled. We overtook the caravan, and encamped on a high prairie, where we could find but little wood, and it was difficult to make a fire. We had for supper coarse bread made of corn, and some bacon. The change from the comforts to the bare necessities of life was trying... On the 23d, the storm still continued, and we did not remove our encampment." [18]

Fontenelle got the caravan on the march again about noon on the 24th but before the men could make camp in the late afternoon, they were drenched with another heavy rain. Whitman wrote that evening in his journal after they had made camp during the storm: "The water ran across our tent like a brook, so that we could not lay down until late, and then cover ourselves with wet blankets." [19]

The caravan made slow progress partly because of the inclement weather and also due to the difficulties involved in taking six heavily

loaded wagons over the soggy prairie. The Elkhorn River was crossed on the 26th in a boat made by covering one of the wagon boxes with buffalo skins. The Loup Fork of the Platte was forded on July 1, and on the 4th, the caravan arrived at a large Pawnee Indian village and camped near it. "We were invited to three feasts," wrote Whitman, "two of boiled corn, and one of dryed buffalo meat." [20] Here Whitman and Parker met Allis and Dunbar, who had gone out to the frontier with Parker the preceding year, and who were then traveling with the Pawnee Indians. There on the prairie of what is now eastern Nebraska, Whitman became aware of some of the problems and difficulties which missionaries faced in trying to evangelize roving bands of Indians. These were problems which he would have to face later in Old Oregon.

"How solitary is the situation of Messrs. Dunbar and Allis," he wrote in his journal, "each with different bands."

Whitman's ill health continued. He referred to it in his journal for July 7 and on the 13th wrote: "I have had dysentery for several days so that it was with great difficulty I could travel with the company." Parker, however, made no reference to this in his journal. Four years later when Whitman was stung by Parker's criticism, he wrote to Greene saying: "Soon after passing the Pawnees, I was taken sick with a painful bowel complaint. Being often obliged to stop, I fell in the rear of camp, & was unable to overtake them again until they had long been encamped for I was too weak to ride faster than a walk. I must have failed by the way had it not been for one of the Companies Clerks who kindly kept me company & assisted me in mounting & dismounting.

"Before I was able to stand, I was obliged to do our cooking or else do without eating, for I do not recollect that Mr. P. ever got a meal during my sickness either for himself or me, but went to eat with Mr. F. & it was only by the favour of his cook that I obtained a little food occasionally. During this time, Mr. P. was obliged to pack the animals, which task he found himself very unskilllfull & poorly able to perform. I write thus to show how unfit it was for us to be without an experienced servant" [Letter 62].

Parker in his June 1837 report to the Board gave the following account of their "Mode of travelling:" "At break of day the call is made, out, out, gear up your mules.' We get on our way about sunrise, travel on until about the middle of the day and stop for breakfast[21]—our horses

and mules are turned out for about two hours to feed upon the prairies, under guard. In the afternoon we travel until about two hours sun, when we encamp for the night—the animals are again turned out until near dark, when they are taken up and staked out with twelve or fifteen feet of rope, in a hollow square, formed by the river on one side—three wagons on one side, extending back to the river, and three on the opposite side, and the packs in the rear. Guards are placed around the square, relieved every two hours during the night. This is done to keep hostile Indians from falling upon us by surprise, or from stealing our horses." [22] He also wrote: "We were permitted, by favor, to pitch our tent next to the river, half way between the two wings, which made our situation a little more retired." [23] Here we see clear evidence of Fontenelle's appreciation of Whitman in assigning a man to help during his illness and in giving the missionaries a favored camping site.

The first buffalo was killed on July 13, a little over three weeks after the caravan had left Bellevue. By this time the men were almost out of food. After reaching the buffalo range, the men lived almost exclusively on buffalo meat. On July 20, Parker noted in his journal that he had participated in a buffalo hunt and that he had shot and wounded one.[24] Although Parker did not so indicate, we can assume that another person killed the animal. There is no evidence that Whitman ever took part in a buffalo hunt. He was by conviction opposed to the use of force and would not engage in hunting wild animals unless the demand for food required it. He took no pleasure in seeing the buffalo killed and let others shoot what were necessary to provide food for the caravan.

The caravan arrived at Fort Laramie on July 20, which was about two-thirds of the way from Liberty to the Rendezvous. Here the wagons were left and the baggage transferred to pack animals. At this point, Thomas Fitzpatrick[25] relieved Fontenelle as captain of the caravan.

Before parting company with Fontenelle, Whitman asked for his bill for giving the two missionaries protection while crossing the plains from Bellevue. According to Parker, Fontenelle refused to even think of making such a charge and told Whitman: "If any one is indebted, it is myself, for you have saved my life, and the lives of my men." [26] In a letter to Andrew Drips, one of the partners in the American Fur Company who was awaiting the arrival of the caravan at the Rendezvous, Fontenelle recommended that special care and attention be given to Whitman and

Parker and to "…the Doctor particularly. He has been of great service to us." [27] Fontenelle praised Whitman to Fitzpatrick. During the journey from Fort Laramie to the Rendezvous, a friendship grew up between Whitman and Fitzpatrick which proved to be of great value the next year when the mission party of five, including two women, crossed the plains and the Rockies with the caravan then under Fitzpatrick's command.

The caravan started out on the last segment of its journey on August 1. The trail followed the south bank of the North Fork of the Platte until it crossed the river at a point a few miles southwest of present-day Casper, Wyoming, whence it followed the north bank of the Sweetwater River to the summit of the Rockies. The caravan passed that great landmark on the Oregon Trail, Independence Rock, on August 7, and rode through South Pass on the 10th.

The Pass, which became the great mountain gateway to Old Oregon, lies at an elevation of about 7,550 feet. The ascent is so gradual that the exact summit can be located only with difficulty. Parker that day wrote in his journal: "It [i.e., the Pass] varies in width from two to fifteen miles… Though there are some elevations and depressions in this valley, yet comparatively speaking, it is level." Then with prophetic insight, Parker added: "There would be no difficulty in the way of constructing a rail-road from the Atlantic to the Pacific ocean." [28]

At the 1835 Rendezvous

Books could be written about the way changing fashions in men's and women's clothing have affected the economy and even the history of our country. For several centuries the beautiful fur of the beaver has been an important item of dress and adornment both in America and abroad. Since the European species of beaver became almost extinct in the 17th century, the fur of the American species, *Castor canadensis*, was in great demand. When it became known that vast numbers of these animals were to be found in the Rocky Mountains of both Canada and the United States, several fur companies were organized which vied with each other in the scramble for the rich rewards found in the sale of beaver pelts. Sometimes the rivalry of these contending companies led to violence and even to bloodshed.

In Canada the Hudson's Bay Company, which had been chartered in 1670, secured exclusive rights to the fur trade of Old Oregon when it

absorbed the North West Company in 1821. The Hudson's Bay Company had its Canadian headquarters at Lachine, nine miles from Montreal. The Company partitioned British America into four great departments. The Columbia Department covered the Columbia River Valley and, after 1825, the Pacific slope of what is now Canada, then called New Caledonia. Fort Vancouver, located on the north bank of the Columbia River near the mouth of the Willamette River, became the headquarters of the Columbia Department. The furs collected at that place were sent by sea to the Orient or to England.

The American Fur Company, chartered in 1808 by John Jacob Astor, was organized to compete with the great fur companies of Canada. Branch headquarters were established in St. Louis in 1822. The history of the American fur companies is complex during the third and fourth decades of the 19th century. For our purpose it is sufficient to say that Astor retired from the fur trade in 1834 and by 1835 the American Fur Company was supreme in the mountain fur trade.[29] Since the Americans did not have the advantage enjoyed by the British of being able to ship their furs to various markets by sea, they had to carry their furs out of the Rockies on pack animals. In order to collect the pelts from the hundreds of trappers which the several American fur companies employed, annual gatherings were held during the midsummer at some previously appointed place in the Rockies called the Rendezvous. Sixteen of these gatherings took place beginning in 1825 and ending with a small, unsponsored gathering of trappers in 1840. During the peak years in the history of the American Fur Company, 1835–38, annual caravans consisting of several hundred pack animals loaded with supplies from civilization and under the care of fifty or sixty men would leave the Missouri frontier as early in May as conditions permitted for the mountains. At the Rendezvous the supplies would be traded for furs which would then be taken back to St. Louis.

Most of the Rendezvous were held west of the Continental Divide, the favorite place being on Green River, a tributary of the Colorado, near what is now Daniel, Wyoming.[30] Here was a well watered meadow, some twelve miles long and about ten miles wide. This provided an ideal pasture to accommodate large herds of horses. Sometimes as many as five thousand Indians would be present; if each Indian had two horses, this would mean ten thousand animals. In addition were the horses and

mules belonging to the trappers and to the Fur Company's caravan. Thus a large meadow was a necessity. The location on Green River was one of surpassing beauty. To the east was the imposing Wind River range with Fremont Peak rising to a height of 13,700 feet. Although the Rendezvous was an event unique to the American fur trade, the Hudson's Bay Company would often send small parties to these gatherings from their trading posts in the Columbia River Valley.

The Indians who attended the Rendezvous came from such still friendly tribes as the Shoshones or Snakes, the Bannocks, the Nez Perces, the Cayuses, the Flatheads, and sometimes the Utes. Most of the trappers, also called mountain men,[31] had a native wife—sometimes more than one. The Rendezvous was the great social event of the year for these men. Most of the year, they had lived in lonely isolation, but now with their wives and half-breed children, they assembled not only to trade their pelts for supplies but also to celebrate. The Hudson's Bay Company tried to prevent the bartering of liquor to the Indians or to the mountain men for furs, but the American companies had no such scruples. Large quantities of whisky were carried by the caravans to the Rendezvous in barrels especially made to fit over the curvature of a horse's back. For some ten days or two weeks, there would be intermingled with business dealings—drinking, carousing, horse racing, gambling, philandering, and fighting.

A vivid description of the Rendezvous of 1884 held on Ham's Fork of Green River has been given us by the naturalist, John K. Townsend, who wrote from personal observation. With particular reference to the mountain men, he wrote: "These people with their obstreperous mirth; their whooping, and howling, and quarreling, added to the mounted Indians who are constantly dashing into and through our camp, yelling like fiends; the barking and baying of savage wolf-dogs, and the incessant crackling of rifles and carbines render our camp a perfect bedlam." He also commented on the "jargon of drunken traders… the swearing and screaming of our own men, who are scarcely less savage than the rest, being heated by the detestable liquor which circulates freely among them."[32]

All trading was done on a barter basis. Beaver pelts were valued from five to eight dollars each, depending upon size and quality. Prices for the goods brought from the States were high. Townsend wrote that

tobacco which sold for ten cents a pound in Philadelphia brought $2.00 at the Rendezvous. Whiskey sold for $2.00 a pint even when diluted; three awls brought fifty cents; and a blanket $25.00.[33]

For nearly two decades after 1815, the fashionable headpiece for men was the high beaver hat with a crown of varying shape and a narrow rolling brim. But when Prince Albert of England in the early 1830s preferred the silk hat to the beaver hat, this doomed the beaver trade. Perhaps the change came just in time to save the Rocky Mountain beaver from the fate of its European cousin. Only about two hundred trappers attended the 1835 Rendezvous and their supply of pelts was smaller than that of the previous year. The beaver trade had already started to decline.

By another of those coincidences of history, which the devout Christian might call the providence of God, the Fur Company's caravans were still crossing the plains during the summers of 1835, 1836, and 1838, thus providing protection for the missionaries of the American Board who traveled to Old Oregon during those years. Without such protection in hostile Indian country east of the Rockies, there might have been no Oregon Mission of the American Board.

The 1835 caravan with Whitman and Parker finally arrived at the Green River Rendezvous on Wednesday, August 12, about a month behind schedule. It was greeted with uproarious enthusiasm by the impatient trappers and by about 2,000 Indians [Letter 11]. The weather at that altitude was already beginning to turn cold. Parker noted that the thermometer stood at 24° on the morning of the 11th. Even before the trading for furs and supplies could begin, the casks of whiskey had to be opened and the carousing began. Both Whitman and Parker were dismayed to see the demoralizing effects of the liquor traffic, not only upon the mountain men, but upon the Indians as well. The hard life of the trappers took a terrific toll. Parker reported that the attrition rate among them amounted to about one-third each year.[34]

Upon Whitman's return to the States, he wrote to Greene on December 28 and gave considerable information as to the extent of the liquor traffic. "All the present regulations upon this point are disregarded or evaded," he said, "and I fear all further regulations will be equally ineffectual." Whitman sensed the fact that the hesitancy of some of the officials of the American Fur Company, including Fontenelle, to

extend a cordial welcome to the missionaries was the feeling that "our object would always be regarded as opposed to their interests." In this letter to Greene, Whitman suggested that perhaps the American Board could lay pressure on the Government to take some steps to curb the evil, but warned: "You are aware of the delicacy of this subject to one who is liable to be exposed to opposition of Traders."

At the Rendezvous Whitman and Parker were introduced to the buckskin dress worn by the Indians and whites alike. The day came when Whitman likewise wore buckskin. The fringes below the neck across the back, at the bottom of the jacket, at the end of the sleeves and trouser legs were not just for ornament but rather to facilitate the draining of water. Water drains better from points than from a straight edge; this may he the reason why our Creator gave us eyelashes.

Dr. Whitman's Operation

Among the colorful characters at the 1835 Rendezvous was Jim Bridger, one of the most famous of the mountain men. He had been a member of a trappers' party which had a skirmish with the Blackfeet Indians at Pierre's Hole[35] on July 18, 1832 in what is now known as Teton Basin in Idaho near the Wyoming border. A few days later Bridger was in another skirmish with the Blackfeet at which time he was wounded, receiving an arrowhead in his back. Incidentally, it is evident which way Bridger was going when the arrow struck.

The three-inch arrowhead remained in Bridger's back for three years until Whitman removed it on August 13, 1835. Parker described the operation: "It was a difficult operation, because the arrow was hooked at the point by striking a large bone and a cartilaginous substance had grown around it. The Doctor pursued the operation with great selfpossession and perseverance; and his patient manifested equal firmness." [36] This operation, perhaps the first ever to be performed by an American-trained physician west of the Rockies, came eleven years before the blessed effects of anesthesia were first demonstrated in the United States.[37]

Parker's account continues: "The Doctor also extracted another arrow from the shoulder of one of the hunters, which had been there two years and a half. His reputation becoming favorably established, calls for medical and surgical aid were almost incessant." [38] Even some of the

Indians sought his help. Here was a medicine man greater than they had ever seen, whose skill was magic in their eyes. Whitman carried back with him to the States a stone arrowhead taken from some Indian's body which the author saw in the summer of 1955 when he visited its owner who lived near Rushville.

Due attention has never been given to the important connection between Whitman's medical and surgical ability and the founding of the Oregon Mission of the American Board. We find several instances in the history of Protestant foreign missions where some land hostile to the introduction of Christianity has been opened because of the skill of a missionary doctor. This was true of Korea where a missionary doctor performed a successful operation on a member of the royal family and, as a result, the land was opened to Christian missionaries. So may it be said of Old Oregon.

The fact that Whitman saved the caravan of 1835 at Bellevue prepared the way for the mission party of 1836, which included women, to cross the plains in safety. Now at the Rendezvous, Whitman in his open-air clinic won the respect and admiration of mountain men and Indians alike. Friendships were begun which continued through the remaining years of Whitman's life. Two mountain men whom Whitman first met at the Rendezvous of 1835 were Jim Bridger and Joe Meek; each of them in later years sent a half-breed daughter to the Whitman mission to be cared for and educated. Moreover, the reputation that Whitman gained among the natives was an important factor in the warm welcome given the members of the 1836 mission party by both the Cayuse and Nez Perce Indians.

Whitman and Parker Separate

On Sunday, August 16, Whitman and Parker met with the principal men of the Nez Perce and Flathead tribes and explained the object of their visit. A French Canadian mountain man, Charles Compo, who had a Nez Perce wife, may have been their interpreter. Without a doubt, references were made to the Nez Perce delegation which had gone with Fontenelle to St. Louis four years earlier. When Whitman sent the journal of his overland travels to Greene, he gave Fontenelle's account of the delegation, and quoted him as saying that the Indians went "to gain religious knowledge" [Letter 11].

Whitman and Parker asked the Indians if they had met the Jason Lee party which passed through the Rockies the previous year. They replied that "they never heard of the Methodist missionaries." It may be that the two men misunderstood what the Indians said; we do have evidence that Lee met with some of the Cayuses and some Nez Perces at the Rendezvous of 1834 and also later at Fort Walla Walla. A Scottish adventurer, Sir William Drummond Stewart, who had traveled with the Wyeth party and the Lees to the Willamette Valley the previous year, was present at the 1835 Rendezvous. He told Whitman that on the advice of Dr. John McLoughlin, Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Vancouver, the Methodist missionaries had decided to settle in the Willamette Valley. Hence, the Nez Perce field was still open for Protestant missionaries, free of any denominational competition.

Whitman wrote in his journal on August 16: "We had a talk with the chiefs of the Flathead and Napiersas [i.e., Nez Perce] tribes, in which they expressed great pleasure in seeing us and strong desires to be taught. Little Chief of the Flatheads said he was greatly rejoiced when he heard there was a teacher from the Almighty and a physician coming among them;... He had been told some things he said about the worship of God but he did not practice them. But now, if a teacher would come among them, he and his children (meaning all over whom he had authority) would obey all he should say."

Parker reported: "The first chief of the Nez Perces, Tai-quin-su-watish, arose and said, He had heard from white men a little about God, which had only gone into his ears; he wished to know enough to have it go down into his heart, to influence his life, and to teach his people.' Others spoke to the same import, and they all made as many promises as we could desire." [39]

Tai-quin-su-watish, known to Whitman and Spalding as Tack-en-sua-tis, was nicknamed Rotten Belly by the trappers. This unsavory title was due to a severe stomach wound he had received in the Battle of Pierre's Hole. The nickname continued long after the festering wound had healed. Chief Tackensuatis was to be one of the most enthusiastic friends of the missionaries during the first years of the Oregon Mission of the American Board, but later his attitude changed.

Whitman and Parker were deeply stirred by the earnestness and sincerity of the Indians and by their evident eagerness for Christian

teaching. All that they learned in this conference confirmed the Walker-Disosway report which had appeared in the March 1, 1833, issue of the New York *Christian Advocate*. Following their conference with the chiefs of the Flathead and Nez Perce tribes on Sunday, August 16, Whitman wrote in his journal: "After mutual conversation and prayer with reference to these tribes, and being satisfied there were no missionaries of any denomination among them, I said to Mr. Parker if we had another associate with us, I should like to return home and, if the Board should approve, come out next year with others to establish a mission among them."

Much to Whitman's surprise, Parker gave immediate approval to the suggestion that Whitman return for associates while he continued on the exploring tour. Knowing Parker's ineptitude in packing and the fact that he was then in his fifty-seventh year, Whitman at first was skeptical of the wisdom of having him continue the tour alone. Parker insisted that it would be perfectly safe for him to travel with the Nez Perce Indians to their homeland. Whitman asked what the people in the States would say if some accident befell him. Parker replied: "I told him to give himself no uneasiness upon this subject, for we could not go safely together without divine protection, and with it, I could go alone."[40] This was a courageous attitude to take. All honor to him!

William H. Gray, who went out to Oregon with the Whitman-Spalding party in 1836, in his *History of Oregon*, suggested that a subdued friction had developed between the two men which made Parker desirous of going his own way alone. Gray wrote: "The peculiarities of Messrs. Parker and Whitman were such, that, when they had reached the rendezvous on Green River... they agreed to separate; not because Dr. Whitman was not willing and anxious to continue the exploring expedition in company with Mr. Parker, but because Mr. P. could not put up' with the off-hand, careless, and, as he thought, slovenly manner in which Dr. Whitman was inclined to travel."[41]

Perhaps the most important factor which induced Whitman to consent to Parker's daring proposal to separate was his desire to return home, be married, find associates, and lead a mission party to Oregon in the spring and summer of 1836. Whitman was convinced that travel conditions across the plains and even over the Rockies presented no serious obstacle for women.

In his report to Greene, he wrote: "There were 20 wagons at one time from St. Louis at the place where the company rendezvoused last summer" [Letter 11]. Realizing that nearly 2,000 miles separated the Missouri frontier from Fort Walla Walla and being fully aware that custom then demanded white women should ride on side-saddles rather than astride, Whitman reasoned that wherever a wagon could go, a woman could go. If she grew weary riding side-saddle, let her ride in the wagon. Being thus convinced that it was indeed feasible for women to cross the Rockies if a light wagon could be taken along, Whitman was eager to return home and get married. Whitman's immediate concern was for the safety and comfort of Parker should he continue with the exploring project with the Indians.

Whitman and Parker met with the Nez Perces on Monday, the 17th of August. Since the Flatheads were not included in the consultations of that day, this indicates that the two men had decided that it was best, in view of the slender resources of the American Board, to limit their attention to one tribe. Regarding this meeting, Whitman informed the Board: "They expressed great satisfaction that I should return and see if others would come and live among them and teach them and readily promised the necessary escort to Mr. Parker, together with assistance to pack and drive his animals" [Letter 11].

Parker gives confirming testimony in his journal: "They were much pleased and promised to assist me, and to send a convoy with me from their country to Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia River. They selected one of their principal young men for my particular assistant, as long as I should have need of him, who was called Kentuc; and I engaged a *voyageur*, who understood English, and also the Nez Perce language sufficiently well to interpret common business, and some of the plain truths of our holy religion, to go with me while I should continue with these tribes."[42]

Kentuc (or Kentucky) was a fun-loving young Nez Perce who was so named by the trappers because of his efforts to sing a popular ballad "The Hunters of Kentucky." [43] The voyageur was Charles Compo. Satisfied with the arrangements that had been made with the Indians for Parker's welfare, Whitman gave his final consent to the plan. Since the Nez Perces were eager to be on their way, the missionaries found that they had but four days in which to prepare for their separation.

Letters had to be written by Parker for Whitman to carry back to the States. Whitman turned over to Parker both of their pack animals with most of the camping equipment, keeping only his riding horse and the barest essentials. Needing a pack animal, he made inquiry and found that a good horse at the Rendezvous sold for $100.00, which was more than he felt justified in asking the Board to pay. He finally bought a decrepit animal for $5.00 but, as he later explained to Greene, the horse "was a disgrace to any man to pack on account of his extreme sore back" [Letter 62]. A mitigating factor was the lightness of Whitman's pack.

Criticism has sometimes been made that the missionaries forced themselves upon the Cayuse and Nez Perce Indians. Contemporary evidence is all to the contrary. The Protestant thrust into the Old Oregon country came as the result of the appeal made by the Nez Perce delegation to St. Louis in 1831. Both Whitman and Parker in their respective journals and letters, when commenting on their experiences at the 1835 Rendezvous, testified as to the eagerness of the Indians for missionaries.

Nothing was said by the natives regarding land for mission sites. This was apparently something that all took for granted. Since at that time the Indians knew nothing about the white man's custom of securing legal titles to certain parcels of land, this simply was not an issue. In general the Indians promised to do all that they could to induce the missionaries to settle among them. Whitman received assurances that if he found associates and brought them to the 1836 Rendezvous, the Nez Perces would escort them to Fort Walla Walla.

Whitman Selects Two Nez Perce Boys to Return with him

At the August 17 meeting with the Nez Perces, Whitman suggested that he take back to the States with him a Nez Perce lad by the name of Tack-i-too-tis or Tack-it-ton-i-tis whom he renamed Richard. After some discussion regarding the advantages of giving the youth some education and a chance to learn the English language, the boy's father consented. Whitman later explained to Greene: "My reason for taking him is that he can speak the English language a little and by being with white people he will soon speak so as to interpret or assist in learning his language" [Letter 11].

Three days later another Nez Perce chief begged Whitman to take

his son, Ais, also. "The father said," wrote Whitman, "he had but one more son, but he was willing to part with this one that he might be taught the religion of the whites or the Christian religion." Whitman was doubtful of the wisdom of taking two Indian boys back to the States with him, but Parker urged him to do so and suggested that the second lad could stay with his family in Ithaca. Finally being convinced that it would prove helpful in the future to have two boys who could speak English and who would have some knowledge of Christianity, Whitman consented. Ais was renamed John.

An interesting parallel can be drawn between the sending of Spokane Garry and Kootenai Pelly to the Red River Mission school in 1825 and Whitman's taking the two Nez Perce boys, Richard and John, with him to the States in 1835. In both instances the boys were sent to a school where they would learn English with the expectation of being used later as interpreters, and also with the hope that they would be taught the Christian religion.

Before Whitman and Parker parted, they witnessed a duel fought by two mountain men, Kit Carson and a French bully called Shunar. Parker tells the story and thus introduces for the first time in the literature of the West the name of Kit Carson. The two men fought with pistols, each being on horseback. Both fired almost simultaneously. Shunar's bullet passed over Carson's head. According to Parker: "C's ball entered S's hand, came out at the wrist, and passed through the arm above the elbow." [44] As Carson was reloading preparing to fire again, Shunar begged for his life and the duel was over. The savage incident gave Whitman another patient.

On Friday, August 21, the Nez Perces moved their camp three miles, thus beginning their homeward march. Whitman went along and spent the night with Parker. The next morning the two men parted, never to meet again. With a heavy heart Whitman returned to the Rendezvous. That day he wrote in his journal: "Mr. Parker went on this morning, after we had unitedly sought the blessing and guidance of God. He went on with firmness. I regretted exceedingly to see him go alone, but so we have decided, hoping more fully to advance the cause of our divine master." Whitman's return meant that a mission could be established in Oregon at least a year earlier than would have been possible had he continued with Parker.

The Return Journey

The caravan loaded with a year's harvest of furs left the Rendezvous for Fort Laramie under Fitzpatrick's leadership on August 27. With the caravan were some eighty-five mountain men who were returning to civilization.[45] Among these was Robert Newell who later played an important role in Oregon's history.[46] He bore the nickname "Doc" because of some skill he had in minor surgery and in the use of a few simple remedies. A friendship developed between Newell and Whitman on this eastward journey. Five years later a son born to Newell and his Nez Perce wife, was named Marcus Whitman. Here is further evidence of the favorable impression that Whitman made on his contemporaries.

The returning caravan arrived at Fort Laramie on September 8 where Fontenelle took over the command from Fitzpatrick. By September 3, the caravan was in the buffalo country, and a halt of three days was called in order for the men to kill buffalo and dry the meat for the remainder of the journey. On or about October 10, Whitman left the caravan and rode on ahead to a trading post conducted by Jean Pierre Cabanné about ten miles above present-day Omaha.[47] There he had the pleasure of meeting Dunbar and Allis with whom he spent a Sunday before continuing to Bellevue. Both Dunbar and Allis were engaged to be married and they asked Whitman to escort their fiancées to Liberty the next spring. This he promised to do.

Having made previous arrangements with Fontenelle, Whitman left his horses and those belonging to the Indian boys to be wintered with the Fur Company's animals on the Missouri bottom lands near Bellevue. Through the courtesy of Cabanné, free passage was given to Whitman and the boys on a boat which left Bellevue on October 20 for St. Louis. The boat arrived at Fort Leavenworth on the 26th, where Whitman met Colonel Henry Dodge and received confirming information from him about the feasibility of taking wagons over the Rockies [Letter 11].

Whitman and the Indian boys landed in St. Louis on November 4. Here the letters Parker had written to the Board and to his family, which Whitman had carried, were forwarded. Whitman wrote to Greene on the 7th and told him of the decision that he and Parker had made at the Rendezvous to separate—Parker to continue on his exploring tour and he to return for associates. Whitman stressed the friendly attitude of the

Indians, reporting that the Nez Perces were "remarkably well disposed and exceedingly anxious to receive instruction."

He further stated: "They say they have always been unhappy since they have become informed of the religion of the whites; they do not understand it. It has only reached their ears; they wish it to affect their most vital parts. They are very much inclined to follow any advice given them by the whites and are ready to adopt anything that is taught them as religion." Whitman expressed the hope that he could "return with others… next spring, if the Board should approve of it" [Letter 13].

In the closing paragraph of the report sent to Greene from Rushville on December 17, Whitman mentioned receiving contributions for the Board from an individual in Cincinnati and the Presbyterian Church at Erie, Pennsylvania. From such references we are able to trace out the route of his return journey. He traveled by river boat from St. Louis to Cincinnati; thence by stage to Cleveland; and then by boat or stage to Erie. Since there was in that day no means of rapid communication, Marcus had no way of sending advance word to Narcissa of his coming. When he arrived at Amity, he learned that the Prentiss family had moved about six miles to the north to a small village called Angelica. Judging by the time it took Whitman to go to St. Louis in the early spring of that year, he could hardly have arrived in Angelica before December 10, 1835.

No record remains of the joy that both Marcus and Narcissa felt on their meeting again. He had much to tell, and she was eager to listen. We can assume that he told about the cholera epidemic and of the assurances given by the American Fur Company for the safe conduct across the plains and the Rockies of any mission party, including women, which he might bring out in 1836. No doubt Marcus told about the great herds of buffalo which at times moved like dark clouds hugging the landscape. He surely would have mentioned the gentle approach to the Continental Divide through South Pass. The Rockies were not nearly as formidable as some had said. And what a topic for conversation—the buckskin clad mountain men and the thousands of Indians at the Rendezvous! No doubt he mentioned such men as Jim Bridger, Joe Meek, Kit Carson, and Doe Newell and perhaps he showed Narcissa the stone arrowhead he had extracted from an Indian which he had carried back as a souvenir.

A high point of his report to Narcissa would have been a description of the enthusiastic reception given to him and Parker by the Nez Perces. The Indians were eager for missionaries. The very presence of the two Indian boys, Richard and John, doubly emphasized this point. And finally Marcus would certainly have told how wheeled vehicles could be taken over the Rockies. He would have assured Narcissa and her parents that it was perfectly feasible for women to cross the Rockies, for wherever a wagon could go, a woman could go. There was then no valid reason why the two should not be married and go out to Oregon the next year with at least one other couple. Little imagination is needed to conjure up the thrilling stories Marcus was able to tell of his great adventure.

We know practically nothing of what Narcissa was able to tell Marcus regarding her experiences during their nine-month separation. She no doubt told of sending in her letter of application to the American Board on February 23, the day that Marcus had left for St. Louis. She would have been able to report that she had received notice of her appointment and that Secretary Greene had discreetly stated in his letter to her of March 19: "The particular tribe for whom you may labour & your location cannot of coarse be stated definitely at present."[48] After Marcus had explained the possibilities and the difficulties of women crossing the Rockies, Narcissa unhesitatingly indicated her readiness to be married and go with him to Oregon.

Realizing that it would be unwise for Narcissa to be the only woman in whatever mission party might be assembled, the next problem to be faced was that of finding at least one other couple to go with them. Among the possible candidates, Narcissa suggested the names of Henry and Eliza Spalding. Although we do not know whether Marcus at that time knew the Rev. Henry H. Spalding, we know that Narcissa did. As has been stated, Henry and Narcissa had grown up in Prattsburg, and had attended the same church and the same academy at the same time. Henry had proposed marriage and had been rejected. Later, Henry had married Eliza Hart and the two had been appointed by the American Board to be missionaries among the Osage Indians at a station near what is now Emporia, Kansas. Their departure had been delayed in 1835 because of the expected birth of a child. A stillborn baby girl was born to the Spaldings at Prattsburg on October 24 shortly before Marcus' return from the Rockies.[49] No doubt Narcissa knew of this.

The urgency of finding associates prompted Whitman to write to Spalding to see if he would be willing to change his destination and go with him and Narcissa to Oregon, provided the Board would give its consent. Although Whitman was taking the initiative in looking for associates, yet at the same time he was expecting the Board to help in the search.

After a short visit with Narcissa at Angelica, Whitman hastened on to Rushville. Mrs. Mary Alice Wisewell Caulkins, a daughter of Whitman's only sister, has described how her uncle with the two Indian boys arrived at his mother's home late on a Saturday evening, perhaps December 12. The family had retired for the night. Mrs. Caulkins wrote: "His mother, then Mrs. Loomis, hearing a noise, recognized his step and ran in her nightclothes to meet him." [50]

The household was soon aroused. The fire in the fireplace was stirred up. All present listened with rapt attention to the marvelous tales of adventure which Marcus had to relate. Mrs. Caulkins also wrote of an incident which took place the next morning: "A brother, Augustus, lived only across the street, but the Sabbath was so strictly observed that there was no communication between the two families on that day, so Augustus and his family were already in church without knowing that Marcus was in town." When Marcus and the two Indian boys unexpectedly entered the church, sixteen-year-old Deborah Whitman broke the decorum of the meeting by suddenly jumping up and crying out: "Why, there's Uncle Marcus!" [51]

When Whitman agreed to take the two Nez Perce boys back to the States with him, Parker had suggested that one be left with his family in ithaca. After a short visit with relatives in Rushville, Whitman took Richard and John to Ithaca. In his reminiscences of his father, Samuel J. Parker, M.D., wrote: "My recollections are that one day late in the fall of 1835, he came to my father's house… and there was at the door the two Indian boys; that he said he had been a few days with his brother's family at Rushville; and that the Indian boys could not bear to be separated." [52] Even though Mrs. Parker had two sons living with her then—Samuel, seventeen, and Henry, thirteen—who could help take care of the Indian boys, she viewed the responsibility with considerable misgivings. Samuel J. remembered that several days were spent in consulting with members of the Ithaca Presbyterian Church, who no doubt promised to help, before Mrs. Parker consented to receive the boys into her home.

In his reminiscences, Samuel J. told of how the Nez Perces were always suspicious of all strangers, and especially those who might be carrying guns. Among the incidents related are the following: "...and what was amusing, these Indian boys were ever on the look-out for being murdered. As one day they came home on the most rapid run, having seen a codger' with a gun just above Spring St. and another [time] while four or five of us were sporting on skates... a man with a gun hunting partridges, sent them off like the wind; into the cliffs of the creek, while we skated undisturbed."

The Indian boys attended a school taught by Miss Emeline Palmer, who was engaged to Samuel Allis and who planned to go out to the Missouri frontier the next spring. She took a special interest in the lads. The strangeness of their environment and language difficulties brought problems. Sometime in January, Whitman returned to Ithaca and took Richard back to Rushville where, perhaps, he was placed in the home of his brother Augustus.

In Whitman's letter to Greene written from Rushville on December 17, he reported the presence of the boys. Replying on the 30th, Greene wrote: "I think you will have cause to regret that you brought the two Indian boys with you. Our whole experience is against such a measure. The boys will probably be ruined by the attention they will receive They can hardly fail to occasion considerable expense." [53] Here is a good example of Greene's straightforwardness in speaking his mind. As will be shown later, the two boys were of great help to the mission party on their westward journey the following summer. However, the high hopes of Whitman regarding the usefulness of the boys in the mission were not realized after their arrival in Old Oregon.

"We Could Cross the Mountains with a Wagon"

As has been stated, when Whitman wrote to Greene from St. Louis on November 7, 1835, he expressed his hope of finding associates and going out to Oregon the following spring if this met the approval of the Board. Although Whitman had said nothing in this letter of his desire to get married and take his wife with him over the Rockies, Greene was able to read between the lines. He replied on December 8 and asked: "Have you carefully ascertained & weighed the difficulties in the way of conducting females to those remote & desolate regions and comfortably

sustaining families there?... How are annual supplies to be obtained with such certainty that a family may safely depend upon them." [54]

David Greene was a hard-headed New Englander, a Yale graduate, and a Board career man, to whom the difficulties of escorting women over the Rockies to Oregon and sustaining a family in such "remote & desolate regions" seemed insurmountable. Yet he was willing to accept Whitman's judgment. "You are better able to judge than we," he wrote. "If there is no obstacle here, we will send as many suitable persons as can be found." The final decision as to the feasibility and advisability of taking women over the Rockies and establishing homes in the Oregon wilderness was Whitman's. In making the decision to venture forward, Whitman was assuming a degree of cooperation from the natives which at that time was untested and unpredictable.

Even before receiving Greene's letter of December 8, Whitman had anticipated the questions which might be asked regarding the feasibility of taking women over the Rockies. Before mailing the journal of his travels to Greene, Whitman added a 2,000 word appendix in which he passed on important information about various western Indian tribes and commented especially on travel conditions. He answered three questions which he felt members of the Board would surely ask: (1) What protection was available for a mission party while crossing through hostile Indian territory? (2) What food supplies would be available to the members of a mission party while en route and after their arrival in Oregon? And (3) was it feasible to take women on a 1,900 mile trip after leaving the Missouri frontier across the plains and over the Rockies when they would have to ride on side-saddles most of the way?

Regarding protection for a mission party, he wrote: "I have every assurance [of traveling with the caravan] from Mr. Fontenelle if we should go out with him next year." Whitman did not seem to be concerned about the need for protection for the part of the journey which stretched from the Rendezvous to Fort Walla Walla.

Regarding food supplies, he explained: "Our subsistence would be such as we should take from the settlements to last us to Buffalo [i.e., the buffalo range]. We could take flour besides to last us in part to our destination. The Company would furnish us with meat from their hunters after we reach Buffalo... We could drive cows and other cattle without much if any expense and I would advise to take enough so that in case

of necessity we might kill some for beef after we arrived at our destination." He added that after their arrival in Oregon, they could purchase supplies from the Hudson's Bay Company with drafts on the American Board. Whitman knew that the Jason Lee party had driven a small band of cattle to Oregon in 1834.

As to the feasibility of taking women, Whitman wrote: "We could cross the mountains with a wagon." The implication was clear: Wagons could be taken for the convenience of women should they grow weary riding on side-saddles.

What a contrast between Parker's report of his exploring tour and Whitman's factual and illuminating analysis of travel conditions. Parker looked into the future and prophesied that the day would come when a railroad would cross the Rockies. Whitman, considering the problems of the present, saw the possibility of taking wagons thus making it feasible for women to ride horseback over the mountains. In Whitman, the Board had unknowingly chosen a man well qualified to observe travel conditions and to make sound judgments regarding certain practical problems which a party of missionaries going overland to Oregon would have to face.

Whitman sent his journal with an accompanying letter to the Board from Rushville on December 17. Again he referred to the possibility of taking a wagon: "If you see fit to send [a] mission to the other side of the mountains, we can go as far as the Black Hills [i.e., Fort Laramie] with a wagon for the convenience of females and from that to rendezvous." For a third time, in his letter to Greene of December 28, 1835, he repeated the reference to a wagon: "We should go as far as the Black Hills with a wagon."

Greene, in his letter to Whitman dated December 30, frankly stated that the Board had found it difficult to recruit men willing to work in mission fields in America. Somehow the glamor of going overseas was more appealing. He wrote: "The patient, enduring, contented, unostentatious [person] whose love for God and the souls of men vents itself out, making no noise and never having their names heard of—these are the persons wanted for such a service." [55]

Oregon was then so far away and so isolated, that the prospect of making a journey of six months or more was frightening, especially for women. Mail service was spasmodic and uncertain. After their arrival

on the field, the missionaries discovered that it usually took two years for a letter to be sent by sailing ship around Cape Horn to the States and for a reply to be received. Moreover, some candidates for the mission field questioned the wisdom of spending a lifetime working with a tribe having only a few hundred or possibly a few thousand members, and learning their language, when the same effort could be spent on some foreign field as China or India where the people were settled in cities and where millions spoke the same tongue. This issue was raised by the Rev. A. B. Smith, a member of the 1838 reenforcement to the Oregon Mission who settled among the Nez Perces in the upper Clearwater Valley. He came to the point where he deeply regretted his decision to go to the Nez Perces and wrote to Greene saying how much he wished he had gone to Siam.[56]

The year 1835 came to a close with Whitman engaged in doing what Parker had been doing just a year before—looking for missionaries, and especially for at least one married couple, who would be willing to go with him and Narcissa to Oregon. There was more urgency in Whitman's search than in Parker's—Whitman had promised to return the two Indian boys to their fathers in the summer of 1836. Since he wanted to be on his way to the Missouri frontier by the middle of February, Whitman had but six weeks to find some qualified couple who would accept his assurance that it was indeed possible for women to cross the Rockies.

Chapter 6 footnotes

1 The late Dr. F. C. Waite and I visited the Chester County cemetery in the summer of 1935 where we found the tombstones of many of Whitman's relatives and friends whom he had known in Massachusetts. John Packard's tombstone states that he died April 11, 1843.

2 *W.C.Q.*, II (1898):2:33, quotes Perrin Whitman as saying that his parents were then living at Deerfield, Ill. Samuel Whitman's record book (see fn. 3, Chapter Three) clearly states that he was living at Danville and not Deerfield.

3 Original certificate is in Coll. W. See picture in Drury, *Whitman*, p. 88.

4 For the sake of clarity and consistency, corrections have occasionally been made in quotations taken from Whitman's writings. Fontenelle's name, for instance, has a variety of spellings. Whitman and others of his day usually spelled wagon with a double "g"—"waggon."

5 Whitman College has no record as to the history of this item except that it was presented to the college in October 1949 by George A. Taber of Reading, Mass., who claimed that it was owned by Dr. Whitman. The inscription on the bag clearly indicates that it had once belonged to Parker.

6 *Op. cit.*, 5th ed., p. 46. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Parker's *Journal* will be from the 5th edition.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

9 See notation Letter 11, Appendix 1, regarding location of the two versions of Whitman's journal.

10 This is one of the few references to bleeding found in Whitman's writings.

11 The word "concert" was often used by Christians of Whitman's day to indicate a prayer meeting, or "a concert of prayer."

12 Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

13 Gray, *Oregon*, p. 107.

14 G. P. Glazebrook (ed.), *The Hargrave Correspondence*, Publications of the Champlain Society, Toronto, 1938, XXIV:235.

15 Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

16 Fort Laramie was sometimes called Fort William after the fur trader, William Sublette.

17 Samuel J. Parker, M.D., in his manuscript in Coll. B, stated that his father used two notebooks on the trail: "One that he carried in his pocket, quite small, made of sheets of paper cut, and sewed together with thread. 2nd. A red spotted paper-covered note-book... that he wrote fuller in and kept in his valise as he travelled." All efforts to locate either or both of these notebooks have failed.

18 Parker, Journal, p. 47.

19 Hulbert, *O.P.*, VI: 150 ff.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

21 The Fur Company's caravan usually made two camps or marches a day. The morning march was usually shorter than that of the afternoon. This meant two meals a day.

22 Hulbert, *O.P.*, VI:96.

23 Parker, *Journal*, p. 52.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

25 Fitzpatrick had been one of the exploring party that discovered South Pass in March 1824. He was known as "Broken Hand." See L. R. Hafen and W. J. Ghent, *Broken Hand, Life Story of Thomas Fitzpatrick*, Denver, 1931.

26 Parker, *Journal*, p. 72.

27 Hafen, *Mountain Men*, v:95, quoting from Fontenelle's letter of August 1, 1835, in Drips Papers, Missouri Historical Society.

28 Parker, *Journal*, p. 77. Parker died in 1866, three years before the first transcontinental railroad was completed but near enough to know that his prophecy would be fulfilled.

29 See W. J. Ghent, *The Early Far West*, New York, 1936, and Bernard DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri*, Boston, 1948, for detailed information about the American fur companies and the Rendezvous.

30 Only three of the Rendezvous were held for the full or partial period at some site east of the Continental Divide—1829, 1830, and 1838.

31 See L. R. Hafen (ed.), *Mountain Men and the Fur Trade*, 10 vols., Clark Co., Glendale, Calif., 1965–72. All of the mountain men mentioned in this work have biographical sketches in this set. The first reference that the author has been able to find which calls the trappers "mountain men" is in the diary of Mrs. Cushing Eells, April 30, 1838. See Drury, *F.W.W.*, II:75.

32 J. K. Townsend, *Sporting Excursions in the Rocky Mountains*, London, 1840, I:123.

33 *C. W.* Ebberts ms., Coll. B., pp. 8–9.

34 Parker, *Journal*, p. 189.

35 The term "hole" was used by the trappers to designate a part of a valley.

36 Parker, *Journal*, pp. 80–1.

37 The use of ether was first demonstrated in this country in Boston in 1846.

38 Parker, in the first edition of his *Journal*, p. 77, wrote that calls for Dr. Whitman's services "were constant every hour of the day."

39 Parker to Greene, Aug. 17, 1835. Coll. A.

40 Parker, *Journal*, p. 82.

41 Op cit., p. 108.

42 Parker, *Journal*, p. 83.

43 Josephy, *The Nez Perce Indians*, p. 125.

44 Parker, *Journal*, p. 84.

45 Hafen, *Mountain Men*, I:148.

46 Dorothy O. Johansen (ed.), *Robert Newell's Memoranda*, p. 33.

47 Hulbert, *O.P.*, VI:158.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

49 From Spalding's family Bible, Pacific University, Forest Grove, Ore.

50 Mrs. Caulkins ms., Coll. Wn.

51 Nixon, *How Marcus Whitman Saved Oregon* gives a different version of the incident, claiming that it was Whitman's mother who exclaimed: "Well, well, there is Marcus Whitman." Mowry in his *Marcus Whitman* and other writers have followed Nixon. The account given by the niece seems to be the true story.

52 Parker ms., Cornell University Library, Ithaca, N.Y.

53 Hulbert, *O.P.*, VI: 177.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 170.

55 Ibid., p. 176.

56 Drury, *Spalding and Smith*, p. 109.