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### The Missionary Endeavors of Marcus Whitman

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THE MISSIONARY ENDEAVORS  
OF MARCUS WHITMAN

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Historical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

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by

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June 1955

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Source is his book, Letters in Historical Criticism.  
The adherents to this myth refused to believe that it was anything but true, and the argument raged for some years. Opposition eventually died down, and today all modern historians discount Whitman's patriotic efforts as, at best, insignificant.  
The result is this, that a historical coverage of Whitman's life and work emphasizes the study of his supposed patriotic efforts and their explanation, and relegates to a decidedly inferior position the evaluation of his ac-

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

From the time of Marcus Whitman's death in 1847 until the end of the nineteenth century there developed an extraordinary significance to Whitman's life and work which could only be termed legendary. This was the Whitman-saved-Oregon story, which claimed for Whitman what he himself never did, that the whole Oregon territory, comprising the present-day states of Washington, Idaho, and Oregon, was kept from the British and safeguarded for American hands solely through Whitman's efforts in his trip east in 1842-1843 and in his participation in the great western emigration of 1843. This legend grew and developed until the turn of the century when the story, already under suspicion, was thoroughly debunked and proclaimed a myth by Edward G. Bourne in his book, Essays in Historical Criticism.

The adherents to this myth refused to believe that it was anything but true, and the argument raged for some years. Opposition eventually died down, and today all modern historians discount Whitman's patriotic efforts as, at best, insignificant.

The result is this, that a historical coverage of Whitman's life and work emphasizes the study of his supposed patriotic efforts and their explanation, and relegates to a decidedly inferior position the evaluation of his ac-

tual mission work. Writers either pass by the analysis of his mission work, the massacre, and reasons for it; mention them in passing; or give varied accounts, especially as to the factors leading to the massacre of the mission in 1847.

It shall be the writer's objectives to first of all gather together, correlate, and evaluate all the possible important factors which could be termed causes for the massacre; and, secondly, to try to determine how much of the responsibility for the failure of the mission can be laid directly to its leader, Dr. Marcus Whitman, who is usually exonerated completely from blame.

The primary sources in this examination of the missionary endeavors of Marcus Whitman have been limited to published volumes of his and Mrs. Whitman's correspondence. Other sources were private collections and the archives of Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, and of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, located in Philadelphia. The latter, however, were not available for this paper.

The chapters of this paper deal with the initial mission work in the Oregon Territory, a biographical sketch of Dr. and Mrs. Whitman, the years of their activity in Oregon, and the massacre and its consequences. This is followed by an evaluation of the mission years as influencing or causing the massacre.

## CHAPTER II

### THE INITIAL RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES

The thoughts of possible missionary activity among the Indians of the Pacific Northwest were first manifested in the year 1798. In that year a German nobleman, interested in mission work, Baron August von Schirnding, proposed the establishment of a Christian mission on the coast of the Pacific Northwest. As missionary activity was being carried on at this time among the Indians of the eastern and central United States, he wished the spirit of Christianity to spread even further. This plan of his never materialized, but in a short while projects similar in nature came from other sources.<sup>1</sup>

The first official contact of the Indians of the Pacific Northwest with the white man came via the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1805-1806. The men of this expedition and particularly their leaders had made a favorable impression--religiously speaking--upon the Indians of this area, and this impression was strengthened by the subsequent association of the Indians with other white men who later started to infiltrate the area. These were the trappers, mountain men, hunters, and fur traders who were capitali-

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<sup>1</sup>Oscar Osburn Winther, The Great Northwest (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), p. 113.

zing on the abundance of fur-bearing animals in this area, since no trapping had ever been done before this. These furs could be turned in for profit at the trading posts which were then coming into prominence in the area, such as the Hudson's Bay Company and John Jacob Astor's post at Astoria, which was later abandoned in 1814.<sup>2</sup>

The teachings of Christianity were first introduced among these Indians, the Flatheads and the Nez Percés, between the years 1812-1820. The bearers of this "white man's religion" were a wandering band of Iroquois Indians from a mission near Montreal, Canada. Their chief, Big Ignace, a zealous adherent to the Roman Catholic faith, was instrumental in acquainting these two tribes with what he knew of his religion.<sup>3</sup>

The first official religious influences and established systems of training in the teachings of the church did not come from missionaries. Services for the Indians were held by Presbyterians and Episcopalians employed by the Hudson's Bay Company. From 1832 on Pierre Pambrun, the chief trader at Fort Walla Walla, gave Roman Catholic instructions to the Indians. Young Indian men, trained at the Red River Settlement School, under the sponsorship

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<sup>2</sup>William A. Mowry, Marcus Whitman and the Early Days of Oregon (New York: Silver, Burdett and Co., 1901), p. 45.

<sup>3</sup>George W. Fuller, A History of the Pacific Northwest (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), p. 125.

of the Hudson's Bay Company, also held services among the Indians and instructed them in the fundamentals of the Christian faith. One such Indian teacher was Spokane Garry, active from 1830 on, who was perhaps the most effective of all the Indian teachers.<sup>4</sup>

However, by this time American eyes had been opened to the possibilities of prospective missions among the Pacific Northwest Indian tribes. In 1810-1811 plans for a mission project on the Northwest Coast were being formulated at Andover Theological Seminary. In the same years, 1810-1811, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was formed which represented the Presbyterian, Congregational, and Dutch Reformed denominations, its home office located in Boston. Separate missionary societies were also being formed in this general period. In 1813 a Baptist society was formed, and a Methodist society in 1819.<sup>5</sup>

In 1819 the American Board for Foreign Missions sent its first missionaries--to the Hawaiian Islands. This mission was formally established in 1820. The men at this mission, living on a maritime trade route, kept hearing favorable reports about the Pacific Northwest as a mission

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>5</sup>Winther, op. cit., p. 113. Winther has the most comprehensive coverage of this phase of early Oregon mission work and shall therefore be quoted extensively for the next four footnotes, no problem existing in this area.

site and suggested to the American Board that this area might bear inspection with a view to finding a suitable location for mission work. In 1829 the Prudential Committee of the American Board sent one of its missionaries from Hawaii, the Rev. J. S. Green, to the Northwest coast on a tour of reconnaissance. Green never set foot outside of his ship and investigated only the ports. However, he did suggest that a mission be established near the mouth or lower part of the Columbia River. Definite action on Green's proposal was delayed by the American Board until 1834.<sup>6</sup>

The first direct move to establish missions in Oregon was made by the Methodist Missionary Society. That which finally prodded them into action was an account of the visit of an Indian delegation to St. Louis in 1833, published in the Christian Advocate in the same year. The known facts are these: a delegation of Flathead and Nez Perce Indians had come to St. Louis to see General Clark, who had visited their country some years previously. Since then they had come to know more of the teachings that Clark and his men had first brought them, and so they had come to him to seek further information and help. The story became highly embroidered and sentimentalized in its telling and retelling, but the result was that the story

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

was circulated and people were moved by it. The Methodist Mission Board issued a call for volunteers, selected one from among the many applications, and announced the appointment of a youthful minister from New England, the Rev. Jason Lee, as its missionary to the Indian tribes in Oregon.<sup>7</sup>

Not only Jason Lee but also his nephew, Daniel, had responded to the call and had been appointed. Jason was titled Chief Missionary and Daniel Mission Associate and Junior Assistant.

Jason and Daniel Lee and two lay assistants arrived at Vancouver on September 15, 1834. There the Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, Dr. John McLoughlin, advised them to settle in the Willamette Valley where the Indians were known to be more friendly. He thus not only kept them from getting in his way in his own area, but he also kept them out of the way of the very Indians who had originally sent the delegation to St. Louis for help.<sup>8</sup>

Lee established a mission in French Prairie late in 1834 and later on two branch missions at The Dalles and near Fort Nisqually. Missionary work was begun, but the Indian children proved to be the most receptive to the Gospel, the adults being considered hopeless as prospects.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

Jason Lee was required to perform the duties of a farmer, carpenter, mechanic, teacher, preacher, et al., and pleaded with the Board for help and reinforcements, which were sent in 1837. The following year Lee went east on a personal recruitment tour for still more workers, and in 1840 a total of fifty-one men, women, and children arrived.<sup>9</sup>

These reinforcements mark a turning point in the emphasis of the mission. As interest in the missionary work dwindled, that in the advancement of settlements and other secular pursuits increased. The Board realized this situation from their reports and replaced the Lees with the Rev. George Gary who managed to disassociate the mission from much of its secular activities. However, from then on this mission was still regarded as the nucleus of the American colonization, and it became the mecca for all those later pilgrims to whom the name Willamette Valley became synonymous with Oregon.<sup>10</sup>

As the Methodist Mission Board was stirred into activity by this published report of the Indian delegation to St. Louis in 1833, so was also the American Board for Foreign Missions. In 1833 it issued a call for volunteers for a reconnaissance mission to the Northwest and chose an el-

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>10</sup>Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of the Pacific States of North America (San Francisco: The History Co., Publishers, 1886), XXIV, 117.

derly minister from Middlefield, Massachusetts, the Rev. Samuel Parker.<sup>11</sup>

Parker wanted to start west right away, but the traveling conditions he would have encountered due to the weather prevented him from leaving until 1834. In that year Parker and his associates set out for St. Louis. They had planned to cross the plains westward with the fur caravan, but they reached St. Louis six weeks too late. Parker left his associates there to do mission work among the Pawnee Indians, and he returned east to look for more workers for Oregon.<sup>12</sup> His plan of action, carried out with the knowledge and consent of the American Board, was to gather not only more men and workers, but also more money for the project.<sup>13</sup>

On this recruitment trip east Parker arrived in Wheeler, New York, in November and aroused the interest of Dr. Marcus Whitman in the cause of missions. A few days later he stopped at Angelica, New York, and also aroused the interest of Narcissa Prentiss, the future wife of Dr. Whitman. Drury says of Parker's activity in interesting the

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<sup>11</sup>Winther, op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>12</sup>Clifford M. Drury, Marcus Whitman, M.D., Pioneer and Martyr (Caldwell, Idaho: The Gaxton Printers, Ltd., 1937), p. 67.

<sup>13</sup>Joseph Schafer, A History of the Pacific Northwest (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905), p. 126.

two of them in foreign missions:

Although Parker did not realize the full significance of the drama then in its preliminary stages, we now both know that one of his greatest services to the cause of both church and state was to find these two characters and to interest them in Old Oregon.<sup>14</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church also became aware of its missionary responsibilities in this area and officially recognized this region of the Pacific Northwest in 1836. In 1838 the Church sent Father Francis N. Blanchet of the Montreal diocese and Father Modeste Demers from the Red River in Canada to be missionaries in this area. They were to minister not only to the Indians, but particularly to the French Canadian fur traders in the region and to the various servants and employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, a predominantly Catholic group of workers. Their first mission was on the Cowlitz River, near the present border between Oregon and Washington.<sup>15</sup> The Jesuits also heeded this mission call and in 1840 sent the Belgian, Father Pierre-Jean de Smet, to the Oregon country from St. Louis. De Smet was a physical and spiritual tower of strength and established many missions among the Indians who everywhere liked and respected him. He often served as a mediator between the Indian and the white man in times of trouble.<sup>16</sup>

This was the situation which confronted Dr. Whitman

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<sup>14</sup>Drury, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>15</sup>Winther, op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

when he arrived in the Oregon country in 1836. Some of these factors were helpful and beneficial to his work, but some of them also caused him and his work to suffer.

In any event the coming of Dr. Whitman to the Oregon Territory in 1836 was not to a cold and hostile region, but to one which had already tasted the Gospel of Christ and was seemingly desirous of still more.

The following chapter shall be an examination of the early life and background of Dr. Whitman prior to his work in Oregon.

Dr. Whitman continued his trade of shoemaker, and fathered five children. Marcus, their third son, was born in the old house in Nashville on September 9, 1802.

When Marcus was only eight years old his father, John, died, leaving a widow alone with five children, the eldest, Ann, being only twelve years old. Because of the heavy financial burden resting on Mrs. Whitman after her husband's death, she sent Marcus to live with his father's half brother, Francis Whitman, in Cummington, Massachusetts.

This period of time spent in Cummington had far-reaching results in the life of Marcus. Some of his later life

Dr. William S. Urury, Marcus Whitman, M.D., Pioneer and  
 History of the Oregon Territory, 1807-1847,  
 1907. His profile is presented in Dr. Whitman's life  
 prior to 1836, therefore Urury will be referred to frequently  
 in this chapter and correlated all the extant evidence  
 in his biography of Dr. Whitman. Many other volumes were  
 consulted, but all concurred with Urury on major points.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE LIFE AND BACKGROUND OF MARCUS WHITMAN UNTIL 1836

Marcus Whitman was the son of Beza and Alice, nee Green, Whitman, who were married March 9, 1797, in Cunningham, New York. In the fall of that year they moved from Cunningham to Rushville, Ontario County, New York, 250 miles west, where they lived in the recently vacated house of Alice's brother, Henry Green. In Rushville Beza built a tannery, continued his trade of shoemaker, and fathered five children. Marcus, their third son, was born in the old house in Rushville on September 4, 1802.<sup>1</sup>

When Marcus was only eight years old his father, Beza, died, leaving a widow alone with five children, the oldest, Augustus, only twelve years old. Because of the heavy financial burden resting on Mrs. Whitman after her husband's death, she sent Marcus to live with his father's half brother, Freedom Whitman, in Cummington, Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup>

This period of time spent in Cummington had far-reaching results in the life of Marcus. Some of his later let-

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<sup>1</sup>Clifford M. Drury, Marcus Whitman, M.D., Pioneer and Martyr (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1937), pp. 22-25. No problem is presented in Dr. Whitman's life prior to 1836, therefore Drury will be referred to frequently as he has utilized and correlated all the extant evidence in his biography of Dr. Whitman. Many other volumes were consulted, but all concurred with Drury on major points.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

ters speak of his early education and religious instruction and describe the care and training of his very pious grandfather and uncle as that of the most diligent, loving, and constant. Drury says of them:

These two pious men, grandfather and uncle, left an indelible impression upon young Marcus. It was his good fortune to come under their influence during some of the most important years of character development.<sup>3</sup>

As a further indication of the influence of these two men upon the life of Marcus, Drury also feels that,

Marcus Whitman would never have gone to Old Oregon as a medical missionary, had it not been for the chain of events that started with the death of his father, Beza Whitman.<sup>4</sup>

At the age of thirteen Marcus was enrolled as a student in a classical school at Plainfield, seven miles from Cummington, conducted by the Rev. Moses Hallock, pastor of the church there. At this school Marcus took the standard courses offered there, the English classics and related subjects, Latin, and Greek, subjects ordinarily given to those students preparing for the Gospel ministry. It was while in this school that Marcus decided to study for the ministry.<sup>5</sup>

Marcus was influenced in his desire for the office of the ministry by a number of factors. First of all by his

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

grandfather and uncle, mentioned above, with whom he lived during his early formative years. A second factor was Marcus' teacher, Moses Hallock. He exerted a strong religious influence on his students, since the records indicate that fifty of his 304 students entered the ministry. Another factor was the Sunday School in the Plainfield church, organized in 1819. Marcus' teacher was Deacon James Richards, whose son, James Richards, Jr., was a missionary to Ceylon, and who, no doubt, spread the enthusiasm for foreign missions in his home town through his work. With all of this background Marcus could hardly help but think highly of the ministry as a profession.<sup>6</sup>

Marcus returned to Rushville in 1820, ready for college and Seminary, but he found that small, if any, financial assistance could be given him, for the expense of seven additional years of training required for the ministry was too costly for the finances of the Whitman family. Marcus was needed to help out with the business at home. His older brother had married and moved away, and Marcus was needed to give his parents assistance in the shoe and tannery trade which had been continued by Marcus' stepfather, Calvin Loomis, who married Mrs. Whitman while Marcus was in Plainfield.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 34-36.

Marcus then transferred his membership from the Cunningham church and became an active member of the Congregational church at Rushville.<sup>8</sup> Under the Plan of Union of 1801, which provided a scheme whereby Congregational and Presbyterian settlers in communities might combine and/or call a minister of either denomination to serve them,<sup>9</sup> the church was served by Presbyterian pastors who supplemented the training Marcus had received earlier in Plainfield.

After his twenty-first birthday, September 4, 1823, Marcus decided to enter the medical profession and began to take his training under Dr. Samuel Bryant, the friend and physician of the family. The system in that day was to have the aspiring student "ride with the doctor." This was a sort of apprenticeship, the student learning techniques and preces through actual experience. A medical education thus cost very little, for little formal education was required. Dr. Bryant taught Marcus thoroughly and imparted to him all the skills of the profession which he knew.<sup>10</sup>

After riding with Dr. Bryant for two years, Marcus entered medical school in Fairfield, New York, in 1825 and received a license to practice medicine on May 9, 1826.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> William Warren Sweet, The Story of Religion in America (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), p. 211.

<sup>10</sup> Drury, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

Whitman's first practice was in Sugargrove, New York, where he took over the practice of a friend of his, Dr. Jonathan Pratt, with whom he had become acquainted in medical school, and who was suffering from illness at this time. From there he went to the little village of Snyders Mill in upper Canada, where he stayed for two and one-half years, until he decided to return to Rushville to take up the ministry. There is nothing in any of the writings and correspondence of Whitman which gives any reason for his decision to return and take up the ministry.<sup>12</sup>

Whitman resumed his theological studies under the Rev. Joseph Brackett, who had succeeded as pastor of the Rushville church. Whitman had to discontinue these studies because of poor health (probably the bowel complaint, of which he periodically complained), and returned to the practice of medicine. Returning to Fairfield Medical School in October, 1831, he received his M.D. degree in January, 1832.<sup>13</sup>

Whitman then practiced in Wheeler, New York, a small pioneer community, where he became quite active in church work accepting the position of both elder and trustee. In nearby Prattsburg Whitman became acquainted with a family named Frentiss, whose daughter, Narcissa, later became

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-49.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-53.

Whitman's wife.<sup>14</sup>

Narcissa Prentiss, the future wife of Dr. Marcus Whitman, was born in Prattsburg, New York, on March 14, 1808. She received training as a teacher and taught school until she married Whitman. She and Whitman both became interested in foreign missions in 1834 through the recruitment trip of the Rev. Samuel Parker. She applied to the American Board for an appointment, but the Board turned down her first application because she was unmarried. However, after her engagement to Whitman in 1835 the Board appointed her to serve with her future husband in Oregon.<sup>15</sup>

Whitman too had been turned down by the American Board the year before Parker arrived in Wheeler. The Board had seemed favorably inclined towards him but rejected his application when they learned of his poor health at that time.<sup>16</sup>

Parker learned of this after he had interested Whitman in the cause of foreign missions and urged him to try again. Whitman did so and emphasized that his health had improved. This and other letters received from Parker and various pastors acquainted with Whitman, attesting to his good charac-

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<sup>14</sup>William A. Mowry, Marcus Whitman and the Early Days of Oregon (New York: Silver, Burdett and Company, 1901), p. 62.

<sup>15</sup>Drury, op. cit., pp. 72-91.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-67.

ter and qualifications, caused the Board to appoint Whitman a missionary physician on January 6, 1835, with the understanding that he should first accompany Parker on his trip to the Rockies that coming summer.<sup>17</sup>

Whitman started west February 19 and on his way to St. Louis spent several days in Amity, the home of the Prentisses at that time. When he left a few days later he was formally engaged to Narcissa Prentiss, and they planned to be married after his return from Oregon.<sup>18</sup>

Whitman left Amity on February 23 after only a three day visit, as he wanted to be in St. Louis on April 1 to meet Parker and to join the fur caravan westward. Whitman reached St. Louis on April 1, as planned, and there received a letter from William Greene, the secretary of the American Board, which contained his commission as a missionary physician. Parker arrived on April 4, and both called on the officials of the American Fur Company and secured permission to cross the plains that summer with the Company's fur caravan. This caravan traveled west every spring to trade for the furs which had been trapped the previous winter.<sup>19</sup>

Whitman and Parker left St. Louis and traveled to Li-

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 68-70.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 92-93.

berty, Missouri, where they joined the caravan. The first main goal in their journey was the rendezvous located on the Green River, a branch of the Colorado River, in Wyoming. They crossed the continental divide on August 10 and reached the rendezvous on August 12.<sup>20</sup>

On August 16 Whitman and Parker met with the chiefs and dignitaries of the Nez Perce and Flathead Indian tribes, who had come expressly to meet them, and explained to them the object and purpose of their visit. They spoke of the possibility of establishing missions with the assistance of the Indians. The response was so favorable and such sincerity and honesty was displayed on the part of the Indians<sup>21</sup> that Whitman made the suggestion that someone should return east immediately and recruit more workers for the actual establishment of the missions. Parker agreed and told Whitman to go ahead, insisting that he could continue alone with the Indians' help and look for possible mission sites and view conditions in the Oregon country. After a year of investigation Parker was to rejoin the missionaries and help them to get started in their missions.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 94-100.

<sup>21</sup> Archer Butler Hulbert and Dorothy Printup Hulbert, editors, "Marcus Whitman, Crusader," The Crusaders, the Charles B. Voorhis Series of Overland to the Pacific (Denver: The Stewart Commission of Colorado College and the Denver Public Library, 1938), VII, 309.

<sup>22</sup> Drury, op. cit., p. 103.

Whitman then returned to the rendezvous to prepare to return with the fur caravan back east. He had about a week before the caravan would leave, on August 27, and during that time Whitman gathered as much information as he possibly could about the Indians, tribes, languages, customs, and nature of their country, which he then planned to submit to the Board on his return.<sup>23</sup>

The caravan made excellent time on the return trip, and Whitman reached St. Louis by November 4. Sometime in December he saw Narcissa, and they discussed their marriage and their future work. They both wanted another married couple to make the trip with them, for company on the trip itself and for assistance at their mission sites. Whitman convinced the Board that this would be practical and looked about for volunteers who would be willing to go to Oregon. After weeks of searching Whitman found only one couple, Henry and Eliza Spalding, who were willing to become missionaries in the Oregon country.<sup>24</sup>

Marcus Whitman and Narcissa Prentiss were married on February 18, 1836, in Angelica, New York. Shortly after their marriage the Whitmans started on their trip west, and they picked up the Spaldings in Cincinnati on March 17. They reached St. Louis on March 29, picked up their commis-

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 107-120.

sions, and left St. Louis March 31, arriving in Liberty, Missouri, on April 7.<sup>25</sup>

While waiting in Liberty for a boat to go to Bellvue, where they would join a party heading west, William H. Gray, a layman from the New England states, joined them. He told them that he had been appointed by the Board to accompany them as a mechanic. Gray later proved to be a poor helper, unreliable, and generally useless. Together the three men assembled their equipment and purchased the necessary livestock needed for a mission farm such as they would be starting. Nothing of this nature could be purchased in Oregon, so all livestock had to be brought along. They started out on April 28 and by May 14 they were 250 miles west, near the Otoe Agency. Whitman went ahead to the Agency to give medical treatment to one of the men there. While there he saw a man by the name of Fitzpatrick, the leader of the fur caravan, with whom he had become friendly on his trip the previous year. From him Whitman obtained permission for his party to accompany the caravan across the plains.<sup>26</sup>

The caravan and Whitman's party reached Fort Laramie on June 13, remained there for eight days, and then left on June 21 for the rendezvous, leaving their wagons behind.

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<sup>25</sup>Mowry, op. cit., pp. 66-69.

<sup>26</sup>Drury, op. cit., pp. 138-143.

They crossed the continental divide on July 4, and on July 6 they reached the rendezvous on the Green River. The trip thus far had been a very difficult one, especially for the women and particularly for Mrs. Spalding, who was almost invalided and still had not recovered from the effects of her previous illness, the complicated birth of a stillborn child.<sup>27</sup>

At the rendezvous the Whitmans and the Spaldings enjoyed a great welcome by both the Indians and the mountain men. They were disappointed in that Parker was not there to meet them as he had promised. Some months previous to this date Parker had decided to go east, and instead of traveling overland, he took the sea route, traveling around Cape Horn. They were not only disappointed by his failure to meet them, but also by his failure to send or otherwise relay to them the desired information they had requested regarding the country and the mission sites and prospects.<sup>28</sup>

From the rendezvous the party decided to take the southern route to Oregon, approximately 600 miles, under the protection of John McCleod and Tom McKay, both employed by the Hudson's Bay Company.<sup>29</sup> On July 18 the party began the march to Fort Walla Walla. This last part of the journey

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>29</sup> George W. Fuller, A History of the Pacific Northwest (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), p. 129.

was the most severe in many respects. Shortage of food, traveling conditions, weather, fatigue, and breakage of equipment all conspired to make the journey as difficult a one as possible. On September 1 they reached Fort Walla Walla where they received a great reception and enjoyed a much appreciated rest.<sup>30</sup>

The party left Fort Walla Walla on September 6 and arrived at Fort Vancouver on September 12 where they met Dr. John McLoughlin, Chief Factor of Hudson's Bay Company. They remained there for a few days getting more rest and deciding just what they should do. They finally decided to leave the women at Vancouver while the men looked for possible mission sites. While at the Fort, the women earned a unique position, for they had been the first white women to cross the Oregon trail.<sup>31</sup>

It had been previously agreed that Spalding was to settle among the Nez Perces on the Clearwater, near Spokane. The next best place for Whitman was in the vicinity of Fort Walla Walla for two reasons: the Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Umatilla Indians lived in that area and could all speak the Nez Perce language, a sort of lingua franca in that area; the other reason was the strategic location of Fort Walla Walla which was on the main artery for trade and transpor-

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<sup>30</sup> Drury, op. cit., pp. 147-152.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 154-157.

tation--the Columbia River.<sup>32</sup>

Whitman and Spalding found a suitable location twenty-five miles upstream on the Walla Walla River from the Fort. On October 5 Whitman selected a spot of about 300 acres which the Indians called Wailatpu (Wy-ee-lat-poo), "the place of the rye grass."<sup>33</sup> Whitman selected for his home a site near the mouth of a small creek emptying into the main river, the Walla Walla.<sup>34</sup>

The Chief of the Nez Perces came along to keep Whitman and Spalding company on their trip back. When he learned that the Whitmans were going to stay in Cayuse territory he warned them that there would be trouble. He said that these Indians were particularly unworthy and untrustworthy. He pleaded with them, in vain, to come to his tribe, where they would be assured of a sincere and peaceful reception, but Whitman felt that this was the place for him. He thought that if the Indians were that bad they needed the Word of God more than the other tribes would. Neither was he a fearful nor timorous individual, and he felt that the Lord would protect him.<sup>35</sup>

The Spaldings were established at Lapwai in the vic-

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>34</sup> Miles Cannon, Wailatpu, Its Rise and Fall, 1836-1847 (Boise: Capital News Job Rooms, 1915), p. 47.

<sup>35</sup> Drury, op. cit., p. 161.

nity of Spokane, two miles from the same-named creek.<sup>36</sup>  
 The Nez Perce Indians showed great enthusiasm and helpfulness in the establishment and start of the mission, in contrast to the lack of interest and indifference on the part of the Cayuses at Waiilatpu.<sup>37</sup>

While Spalding was making his trip to Lapwai and returning, Whitman and Gray were building a house at Waiilatpu with as much Indian help as they could find, which was very little. On November 22 the Spaldings and Gray left for Lapwai, accompanied by 125 Nez Percés. While Whitman was finishing his house at Waiilatpu Mrs. Whitman stayed at the Fort with a family named Pambrun, who was the Chief Trader at the Fort. On December 10 Whitman came and took his wife to their home at Waiilatpu. It was built near the creek, mostly of adobe brick, in a very rough and unfinished condition. This was the beginning of the complex of buildings which was later to mark the mission site of Waiilatpu and the base for their missionary work for the next eleven years.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of the Pacific States of North America (San Francisco: The History Co., Publishers, 1886), XXIV, 136.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 331.

<sup>38</sup>Drury, op. cit., pp. 163-167.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MISSION YEARS

The first few years of the mission consisted of intense work. All the Whitmans had to start out with was their rough lean-to and the bare soil around them. Whitman immediately began to prepare the soil for cultivation, planted seeds, and tilled the soil like any farmer. Although this in itself was a full-time job, he was also required to perform the duties of a physician to the Indians and to the other whites in the country. In addition he was burdened with still another full-time job, that of the spiritual leader and advisor of the Indians, conducting worship and devotions and counseling them. Then too he could not find any assistance from the Indians, for they could not be relied upon to work steadily, if at all.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Whitmans had been sent specifically to the Indians, it was the Indians whom they were to help and to whom they were to minister. However, this seemingly simple task of helping child-like savages assumed herculean proportions because of the nature of the Indians themselves. Bancroft described the Indians with whom Whitman had to deal, saying,

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<sup>1</sup>Clifford M. Drury, Marcus Whitman, M.D., Pioneer and Martyr (Caldwell, Idaho: The Carton Printers, Ltd., 1937), pp. 169-172.

[The missionaries] . . . had to deal with tribes yet in their primitive strength of mind and body, having their intelligence not yet weakened but sharpened by contact with white men, lordly in their ideas of personal dignity, but blind to the rights of others while insisting with the utmost pertinacity upon what they esteemed their own . . . their roving habits took them away from their teachers during a considerable portion of the year, and although quick and eager to learn, they gave little time to study.<sup>2</sup>

The first year of the mission saw many blessings. The Indians were beginning to profit from Whitman's teaching, both as to religion and to farming, a few of them preparing their own fields for planting. In that same year, 1837, an abundant harvest from their fields greatly alleviated the problem of having sufficient food, as they had almost run out of the supplies brought with them from Fort Walla Walla. Their small herd of cattle, brought with them across the mountains, also began to grow and multiply. Finally, the Whitmans were blessed with the birth of their first and only child, a girl, Alice Clarissa, born March 14, 1837.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile their original rude lean-to had begun to show unmistakable signs of wear and disrepair. In the summer and fall of 1837 Marcus built an adobe<sup>4</sup> house for Narcissa and himself and used the old lean-to as a tool

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<sup>2</sup>Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of the Pacific States of North America (San Francisco: The History Co., Publishers, 1886, XXIV, 331.

<sup>3</sup>Drury, op. cit., pp. 173-176.

<sup>4</sup>Bricks made of sun-dried clay, the common building material in that area.

shed. Unfortunately, he built the house too close to the Walla Walla River, and when the river flooded during the winters and springs of succeeding years it washed away many of the supports and foundations, making it too dangerous for habitation and forcing them to rebuild a few years later.<sup>5</sup>

Another event in 1837 was the sending of William Gray, their lay helper, back east for reinforcements. Thus far Gray had proved to be of little help in whatever duty he was assigned. Both Whitman and Spalding felt that there was a definite need for additional missionaries and workers, as the field was wide open; and as Gray had expressed a desire to return east they sent him to the Board with their request.<sup>6</sup>

The year 1838, like all the others, was a busy one for the Whitmans. There were the many tasks which had to be done in the field and the home and the labors performed for the Indians and the other whites. All of these jobs took very much time, with the result that only a little time could be devoted to each duty with no thorough specialization or concentration on any one task. Marcus also imported sheep from the Hawaiian Islands and began to raise a herd.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Drury, op. cit., p. 187.

<sup>6</sup>Bancroft, op. cit., p. 136.

<sup>7</sup>Miles Cannon, Wailatpu, Its Rise and Fall, 1836-1847 (Boise: Capital News Job Rooms, 1915), p. 68.

The fall of the year saw the arrival of the first and only reinforcements for the mission: Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Gray (he had married while east); Rev. and Mrs. Elkanah Walker; Rev. and Mrs. A. B. Smith; Rev. and Mrs. Cushing Bells; and Mr. Cornelius Rogers. This brought the total personnel of the Oregon Mission to thirteen, a figure which was never exceeded.<sup>8</sup>

The Missions made some important decisions in their annual meeting on September 1 in this year. They had previously been trying to teach the natives English and carry on their work in that language, but they had not found too much success by this method because the Indians did not respond. They therefore decided in this meeting that from henceforth they would use the natives' own language in their work, and that all the missionaries should learn it as quickly as possible.<sup>9</sup> The other big decision they made was the placement of the new workers. Walker and Bells were sent to the site they themselves had picked. It was twenty-five miles northwest of the present city of Spokane, and it was called Tschimakain, or "place of springs." Smith was sent to Kamiah, a site on the north branch of the Walla Walla River which, however, was abandoned in 1841 because of Indian hostilities and never restored. The Grays were sent

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<sup>8</sup>Drury, op. cit., pp. 195-198.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 201.

to the Spaldings, as Gray seemed to get along with them the best; and Rodgers stayed at Waillatpu with the Whitmans.<sup>10</sup> This was the setup which lasted until the area was discontinued by the American Board some years after the Massacre of 1847. These other missionaries, quite some distance from Whitman at Waillatpu, never experienced the troubles with the Indians which the Whitmans had to endure. The other missionaries were among tribes of a more stationary nature, and not at all like the Cayuses, who wandered about at regular intervals every year.

The Whitmans were never quite able to make their Indians completely discontinue their nomadic habits which followed a strict pattern. They made their migrations every year during the months of December and January on hunting trips, to obtain meat and venison. Then from April to August they would leave again to search for one of their main foods, the Camas-root, or biscuit root, which by various methods of preparation could be made into many dishes. This nomadic tendency on their part interfered greatly with the Whitmans' work among them. Their fields would lie untouched during the growing season, and the Indians could receive no continuous program of teaching and training.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Bancroft, op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>11</sup>Archer Butler Hulbert and Dorothy Printup Hulbert, editors, "Marcus Whitman, Crusader," The Crusaders, the Charles B. Voorhis Series of Overland to the Pacific (Denver: The Stewart Commission of Colorado College and the Denver Public Library, 1938), VII, 4-5. This and vol. VIII both contain correspondence of Dr. and Mrs. Whitman.

In 1838 the Whitmans had not been in Waililatpu long enough and had not felt enough disappointments to make them feel discouraged. In a letter dated October 3, 1838, Narcissa expressed the supreme confidence both she and her husband felt in their mission work. She said, "They are truly an interesting people. We love them most sincerely, and long to see them turning unto the Lord."<sup>12</sup>

As an example of what the Whitmans had to contend with in their work with the Indians, Bancroft further describes the ungrateful and exasperating character of the Cayuses,

The natives thought they were doing Whitman a favor by receiving instruction, and wanted pay for this and also for the ground on which Whitman lived and which he cultivated for the support of the mission and the natives.<sup>13</sup>

A brief review of the first few years of the mission's activity indicates that at first Whitman's successes with the Indians was sufficient to bring encouragements. However, as the novelty of the missionaries' presence and their teaching wore off, the interest of the Indians slackened. Another factor in the lack of interest was the influx of Catholic priests into the region, teaching by different methods and teaching opposing religious viewpoints, which dis-

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<sup>12</sup>Mrs. Narcissa Whitman, "Letters Written by Mrs. Whitman from Oregon to Her Relatives in New York," Transactions of the Nineteenth Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1891 (Portland: A. Anderson and Co., 1895), p. 118.

<sup>13</sup>Bancroft, op. cit., p. 330.

turbed the relationships between the missionaries and the natives. A further factor which added to the dissatisfaction of the natives was a number of dissipated renegade Americans and Indians, who stirred up as much mischief in the tribes as possible by slandering the missionaries and their work.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the Whitmans kept on working, doing their best, and hoping for a change for the better.

The next year, 1839, was one of great sorrow for the Whitmans, because their baby girl, Alice Clarissa, drowned in the Walla Walla River at the age of two years and three months. The Whitmans were almost overcome with grief but managed to see that in this tragedy the Lord's Will was being accomplished for them. The death of the child effected a sort of reconciliation between the Whitmans and the Spaldings, who had been bickering and finding fault with one another almost since the inception of the two missions. The Whitmans had planned to move away to promote the general peace, but the death of the child made both families swallow their pride and acknowledge their wrongs. Things were smoothed over, but this was not to be a permanent change.<sup>15</sup>

The work at the mission progressed as usual during the rest of the summer. Some of the Indians had begun to take

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph Schafer, A History of the Pacific Northwest (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905), p. 218.

<sup>15</sup> Drury, op. cit., pp. 220-222.

more of an interest in agriculture and religion, to the extent that Whitman was able to write to Secretary Green of the American Board on October 9, 1839, that,

We never had greater encouragement about the Indians than at the present time. Could they be left unmolested until their minds should become settled upon the great truths they have been permitted to hear about . . . . We desire to stay our souls upon Him, and to labor faithfully and diligently and leave the event with Him.<sup>16</sup>

Another letter, two and one-half weeks later, October 27, speaks of something which was to the Whitmans a dark cloud over their work. The Roman Catholic priests had visited the area and were visiting the Indians and baptizing them. They were disrupting the Whitmans' work and confusing the Indians by telling them that "the Americans had kept them from baptism too long and were too persevering in rebuking their bad hearts."<sup>17</sup>

The first intimation of the reaction of the Indians to the Whitmans' Calvinistic presentation of sin and grace can be vaguely seen here. More definite indications will be observed later in subsequent mission correspondence.

On the whole the Whitmans were pleased with the overall attitudes of the Indians during the winter of 1839-1840,

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<sup>16</sup>Mrs. Whitman, op. cit., p. 129.

<sup>17</sup>Hulbert, VII, op. cit., 157. The Roman Catholics with their doctrines of gratia infusa and ex opere operato had no worries about faith as the receiving means as far as the Indians were concerned, whereas Protestant theology required faith in the recipient of the sacraments to receive its blessings.

although they still had their greatest difficulty in trying to do consistent work with the Indians when they were constantly on the move. They continually tried to interest the Indians in farming as an inducement to remain settled in one place long enough so they could be taught.<sup>18</sup>

By 1840 their adobe house had become too dangerous to live in for another year. Whitman had to build another one but needed help. Word had reached them of a large party of emigrants which was coming over the mountains to Oregon, and Whitman decided to wait until they came and to try and hire hands to help him with his work at the mission.<sup>19</sup>

The Whitmans were delighted to hear of this coming emigration, because it meant that white settlers would be coming into the area. As early as 1838 Marcus had expressed belief that white settlers would be coming into the area and dispossess the Indians.<sup>20</sup> This attitude on their part had far-reaching implications, for the last years of the mission brought out the fact that when the Whitmans tried to straddle the fence between sustaining the self-respect and social integrity of the Indians on the one hand, and to further the success of the American migrations on the other, both Dr. and Mrs. Whitman found trouble.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Drury, op. cit., p. 233.

<sup>19</sup>Cannon, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>20</sup>Drury, op. cit., p. 194.

<sup>21</sup>Hulbert, VIII, op. cit., p. 13.

This attitude on their part is clearly indicated in a letter written by Narcissa to her family in New York on May 2, 1840, in which she says,

We feel that we cannot do our work too fast to save the Indian--the hunted, despised and unprotected Indian--from entire extinction. . . . We are emphatically situated on the highway between the states and the Columbia River, and are a resting place for the weary travelers, consequently a greater burden rests upon us than upon any of our associates--to be always ready. And doubtless many of those who are coming to this mission their resting place [sic] will be with us until they seek and find homes of their own among the solitary wilds of Oregon.<sup>22</sup>

In the same letter she also speaks of the character of the Indians and their own attitudes towards the Indians, as she states,

They are an exceedingly proud, haughty, and insolent people, and keep us constantly upon the stretch after patience and forbearance. We feed them far more than any of our associates to their people, yet they will not be satisfied. Notwithstanding all this there are many redeeming qualities in them, else we should have been discouraged long ago. We are more and more encouraged the longer we stay among them.<sup>23</sup>

By this time the Whitmans had been at Waililatpu for three and one-half years and had been instructing the Indians in religion as much as they were able. In a letter to Greene on July 6, 1840, Whitman describes the response of the Indians to his teaching and his worship. He says,

The apparent reception of the truth has been of four kinds--One to excite opposition of heart and complaint that it was personal when any particular illustration

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<sup>22</sup> Mrs. Whitman, op. cit., pp. 133-134.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

of sin or practical application was made. Another to call very apparent assent to truth and interest to hear. A Third--a desire to hear in order to be wise to worship in the sight of others and fourth great stupidity and indifference.<sup>24</sup>

As shown, the reception of Calvinist teachings by the Indians was fully in keeping with their basic character. Either they refused to believe what was said, or they made only a mere outward application of the truths to their lives, neither of which could be considered beneficial or lasting.

In August of 1840 the first wagons of that year's immigration began to pass the mission house. The immigrants were in such poor condition after their journeys that a great many of them stopped at Waililatpu for rest, help, and/or supplies.

Since this was only the first wagon train of any proportions, the Indians were as yet not at all worried about the influx of whites. It was from this party of settlers that Whitman hired the helpers he needed in the person of William Munger and his wife. Whitman and Munger immediately began to build a more substantial house to take the place of the old adobe house which had become thoroughly weakened, as already mentioned.<sup>25</sup> This large t-shaped structure was to be the main mission house, to house the Doctor's family and other mission workers and to serve as a meeting place.

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<sup>24</sup>Hulbert, VII, op. cit., 180.

<sup>25</sup>Drury, op. cit., pp. 234-237.

It was the beginning of their complex of buildings on the mission site, which later included an adobe meeting house, an addition to the mission house, a blacksmith shop, and a grist mill, in addition to the buildings already standing on the property.<sup>26</sup>

In the fall of 1840 the missions had their annual meeting and found that the old discords and antagonisms were still alive. The problems came to a focus in this meeting which seemed to center around Rev. Spalding. There was the old antagonism between him and the Whitmans, resulting from an old courtship between Narcissa and Spalding, in their youth, when she had turned down his suit for her hand in marriage, causing him to bear a grudge. Another source of friction was the fact that many of the members of the 1838 reinforcement were captious and hypersensitive. Everybody laid the blame for the difficulties on everybody else. Many reports were sent to the Board, many of them criticizing Spalding, but all the members of the mission getting their share of censure. These reports of discord and complaint, sent to the Board, had their result two years later in the Board's decision concerning the missionaries, which eventually led to Whitman's trip east.<sup>27</sup>

The Whitmans also had trouble with their Indians, who were beginning to resent, more than ever, Whitman's theo-

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<sup>26</sup>Bancroft, op. cit., p. 337.

<sup>27</sup>Drury, op. cit., pp. 238-239.

logy and preaching. Narcissa, in a letter dated October 10, 1840, relates the situation as follows,

Of late my heart years over them more than usual. They feel so bad, disappointed, and some of them angry because husband tells them that none of them are Christians; that they are all of them in the broad road to destruction, and that worshipping will not save them, as they say, but talk good talk, or tell some story, or history, so that they may have some Scripture names to learn. Some threaten to whip him and to destroy our crops, and for a long time their cattle were turned into our potato field every night to see if they could not compel him to change his course of instruction with them. These things did not intimidate us; it only drove us to a throne of grace with greater earnestness to plead for blessings to descend upon them. Our hearts only pant for time to have our whole minds given up to instructing them without being distracted with so many cares which are necessarily upon us, not for ourselves so much as for others.<sup>28</sup>

The child-like savages could not understand the finer points of sin and grace and desired something simpler than Whitman's preaching of hell-fire and damnation. Hulbert says of Whitman's approach to the Indians,

Over and over again even the Doctor's more loyal Cayuse followers begged him not to be so 'harsh'; not to make such a point of calling up to their minds their faults and shortcomings and failures.<sup>29</sup>

The Indians surely needed to be told of their sins and the offer of God's Grace, but the Indians could not realize the importance of this preaching in the way that Whitman presented it to them. The Indians, on the other hand, pre-

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<sup>28</sup> Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, "Mrs. Whitman's Letters" and "Letters from Dr. Whitman," Transactions of the Twenty-First Annual Reunion of the Oregon Pioneer Association for 1895 (Portland: Geo. H. Himes and Co., 1894), pp. 131-132.

<sup>29</sup> Hulbert, VIII, op. cit., 52.

ferred the Roman Catholic procedure of teaching by story-telling and parables much better, and many of the Indians became discouraged with Whitman and went over to the Catholic religion.

This did not discourage Whitman, who, unfortunately, had never known any other training in doctrine and its presentation aside from the one which he used with the Indians, and he did not realize the future results of his modus operandi, which is indicated in a letter of his dated October 15, 1840,

I have been pressing them the Cayuse with their lost ruined and condemned state in a particular manner; in order to remove the hope that worshipping will save them. It has stirred up no little opposition of heart to the truth, but I trust it may result in stripping [sic] them from a reliance which I think was given them before we came into the Country; that worshipping [sic] would save them.<sup>30</sup>

In another letter dated October 29, 1840, Whitman again recchoes his oft-repeated complaint, that he had much too much to do to give every one of his duties a satisfactory amount of attention. He says,

For everyone to be his own farmer, housebuilder and etc. is too much to look for great or good results in our missionary work. For one to be alone is to limit his time so much to the care of his family that little can be done for the Indians.<sup>31</sup>

The most important event in the year 1841 was the annual Mission meeting, held in the early fall. In this meet-

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>31</sup> Hulbert, VII, op. cit., 200.

ing all the missionaries bared their consciences and confessed their wrongs to one another. Spalding acknowledged that he had been difficult and had contributed much to the ill feelings there. He pledged himself not only to forsake his jealous attitude but also to cooperate with the mission and with the Whitmans in the future. All the other missionaries made like confessions, and for the first time the air was completely clear of antagonisms and recriminations against one another; and this is the way it remained. They immediately sent minutes of the meeting to the Board in Boston to counteract the bad reports which had been sent the last few previous years, but these minutes came too late to stop the letter from Secretary Greene which arrived in 1842 and disrupted the entire mission.<sup>32</sup>

The Whitmans now were beginning to find out just how childish and undependable these savages of theirs were. Narcissa writes on November 11, 1841,

It is difficult for them to feel but that we are rich and getting rich by the houses we dwell in the clothes we ware [sic] and hang out to dry after washing from week to week--and the grain we consume in our families.<sup>33</sup>

Narcissa also copied one of Marcus' letters to the Board and included its contents in her letter dated November 18, 1841. In it Whitman related some of his troubles with the Indians. He tells of their insolence and their

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<sup>32</sup>Drury, op. cit., p. 254.

<sup>33</sup>Hulbert, VII, op. cit., 250.

attempts to blackmail him for the land which they had given to him for a mission. He lays much of this trouble to the actions of Joe Gray, an Iroquois half-breed, who had been circulating about the tribes and spreading evil rumors about the Whitmans, saying that they were going to kill the Indians and take their lands. He also relates how an Indian had been bothering William Gray, their lay helper, and Gray had put the Indian out of the house, whereupon the Indian tried to steal Gray's horse. Whitman prevented him from doing this, and the Indian after arguing with Whitman for some time became angry and struck him in the face a few times and threw his hat into the mud, trying to bully Whitman into a fight. Whitman kept turning the other cheek, and the Indian grew tired of the one-sided combat and left.<sup>34</sup>

The Whitmans, according to their correspondence, were never able to successfully combat the almost inborn instinct of thievery in the Indians. In a letter of February 4, 1842, Whitman tells of his experience with a group of Indians who had stolen a herd of horses. He finally prevailed on them to return the stolen property, but the Indians still did not like his attitude towards their actions.<sup>35</sup>

This delicate situation was not helped any by the presence of the Roman Catholics, for Narcissa wrote to her parents on July 25, 1842, that,

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<sup>34</sup>Mrs. Whitman, op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

The influence of Catholicism adds much to distract their minds. They are constantly told by the followers of the priest that all who attend upon our instructions are in the sure way to hell--and all who go to the priests worship will go to heaven.<sup>36</sup>

The problem of the Indians' worship was always a difficult one with the Whitmans. The Roman Catholics had no trouble with their doctrines of work-righteousness and good intentions, but the Whitmans could not--theologically--operate that way. On August 23, 1842, Narcissa writes,

The Kaiuses [sic], Nez Perces, Spokans [sic], and all the adjacent tribes need your prayers, for they are a dark-minded wandering people, having heart but understand not the truth. I will give you the language of one of them in a talk made three Sabbaths ago. After listening to an exposition of the truth contained in Proverbs, 5th chapter, he said: 'Your instruction is good; the wise and discreet appreciate it; for the mass of us, we hear it, but it falls powerless upon our hearts, and we remain the same still.'<sup>37</sup>

The big event of 1842 was the visit of Dr. Elijah White in September. He had formerly been connected with the Methodist Missions in the Willamette Valley but had returned east and had been appointed Indian Agent for Oregon. He stopped off at Wailatpu on his way west and brought with him a letter from the American Board in Boston. In this letter lay the significance of his visit.<sup>38</sup>

This letter from Greene, indicating the wishes of the

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<sup>36</sup>Hulbert, VII, op. cit., 267.

<sup>37</sup>Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>38</sup>Drury, op. cit., p. 272. Mail service was poor at that time, and it was the custom for travelers to carry the mail west, as far as they were going.

Board, in view of the previous correspondence received from the Oregon Missions, stated the following directives: Spalding was to be dismissed; Gray and Smith were to return east; and Whitman and Rogers were to move to Tschimakain to live with Walker and Eells. Both Lapwai and Waiilatpu were to be closed.<sup>39</sup> As already stated, the distance between Oregon and Boston was such that the report of new harmony and good will had not been able to reach the Board in time.

In view of the settlement of their past differences the mission disagreed with the Board's decision. In the emergency meeting held in late September they decided to wait until they heard from the Board again before following through on the Board's orders. Since the situation seemed to be so delicate and the mission locations so important, Whitman asked the other members of the mission to permit him to go back east and intervene personally with the Board. The members reluctantly agreed; and on October 3, 1842, Whitman set out for Boston, accompanied by a lawyer who had come in that year's emigration, Amos Lovejoy. Lovejoy only traveled half the journey with Whitman, leaving him because of the severe climatic conditions they encountered.<sup>40</sup>

Whitman arrived in Boston on March 30, 1843, where he informed the Board of the developments of the situation in Oregon, which the Board by this time had fully realized.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 273-279.

The end result of his visit was the authorization by the Board for the mission to go on as before. Thus Whitman accomplished his purpose in riding east, to secure permission to continue in Oregon, especially his own station, Waiilatpu, which he felt to be of great importance in the coming years because of the increased immigrations.<sup>41</sup>

Whitman returned with the 1843 emigration which left from Liberty, Missouri, towards the end of May. He gave them some assistance in his assurance that wagons could be taken through to Oregon, and also by his services of physician and guide. He reached Waiilatpu September 28, 1843.<sup>42</sup>

Many historians, mostly those men holding the Whitman-saved-Oregon theory, have attached political and national significance to Whitman's ride east and his return. They contended that Oregon would have been completely lost to the United States had it not been for the efforts of Whitman to convince President Tyler and Congress that the territory was worth saving, and also by his efforts in forming and directing the emigration of 1843. An investigation of the sources and a review of the opinions of all reliable historians disprove both of these contentions.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., pp. 316-320.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 330-339.

<sup>43</sup> For a more detailed analysis of this historical problem and its solution, see Edward G. Bourne, "The Legend of Marcus Whitman," Essays in Historical Criticism (New York: G. Scribner's Sons, 1901), pp. 3-112.

While Whitman was on his trip east, Narcissa had her troubles in Wailatpu. Shortly after the Doctor left, an Indian tried to break into the mission house one night. Narcissa awoke and called for help, and the Indian fled. She then had a trustworthy Indian stay at the house with her until she moved for the winter to Fort Walla Walla, where she wrote, "Doubtless it is not safe for me to remain any longer."<sup>44</sup>

Another event during Narcissa's absence from the mission site was the burning of their grist mill. Whether this was done by accident or by purpose was never known. It was thought that some Indian boys were playing with fire, and accidentally set fire to the mill itself.<sup>45</sup>

Narcissa doubted that the Indians did it on purpose, for she knew they realized how important that structure was for them in grinding their wheat into flour. Another indication of their possible innocence was their great feeling of loss, as she states in a letter written March 4, 1843,

Others that I have seen manifest feelings of the same character, concerning the loss and I doubt not it is the universal feeling of the tribe. . . . There are redeeming qualities in the character of the Kaiuses notwithstanding they are insolent proud domineering arrogant and ferocious, and I hope we shall feel encouraged to labour in more faith and patience for their salvation--not from any good in them but from a firm reliance on the promises of God.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Mrs. Whitman, op. cit., pp. 163-164.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>46</sup>Hulbert, VII, op. cit., 277.

Another serious problem which developed during Whitman's absence was brought on by Dr. Elijah White, who tried to force a set of laws and regulations upon the Indians. The Indians around Rev. Spalding had willingly accepted a set of laws which had been made for them, and in view of the general character and actions of the Cayuses Dr. White thought it would be a good idea to have laws for the Cayuses too. He proceeded to force them to adopt a similar set of laws which he had drawn up, which were to make them law-abiding citizens, as one thinks of the term. These laws were similar in nature to a set of rules and regulations. Murder, theft, adultery, lying, etc., were forbidden and subject to punishment. For example, if an Indian killed a white man, he was to be tried and hanged. The same, of course, held true for a white man killing an Indian. The laws were just and right, and the Indians would no doubt have adopted their own version of them if left alone. However, White forced the issue, and the Indians had to accept and adopt White's Laws under threat of punishment. As a result the Indians viewed these laws as repugnant, thought of them with aloofness, and finally treated them with artificial and meaningless acquiescence.<sup>47</sup>

In a letter dated April 14, 1843, Narcissa speaks of the reaction of the Indians to these laws. She first of all tells how the Indians missed the presence of Dr. Whit-

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<sup>47</sup>Hulbert, VIII, op. cit., 17.

man, since they had no one in whom they felt as much confidence as he. That there was a definite antagonism to the laws is expressed later in the body of the letter,

The Indians . . . have been led to believe that deceitful measures are being taken to rob them of their land, to kill them all off. Language like this had been told them, and at the meeting last fall, 'that if you do not make laws and protect the whites and their property, we will put you in the way of doing it.' They consider this a declaration to fight and they have prepared accordingly. We hope no deprecation will be committed upon us or the mission property, and think the difficulties can be removed and adjusted to their minds, but not without the most prudent and wise measures. The Indian agent is quite ignorant of Indian character and especially of the character of the Kaiuses.<sup>48</sup>

The coming emigration of 1843 finally began to arouse the Indians' suspicions that they would someday be driven from their lands. They had heard of a large emigration coming west, and various renegade Indians and Whites told the Cayuses how the same thing had happened back east, that the Indians were gradually dispossessed of their lands by the increasing number of white settlers. The fact that Whitman played a part in helping to bring these immigrants into their country caused them to feel, in subsequent and even greater emigrations, that he was the man directly responsible for all of this.<sup>49</sup> Later mission correspondence will show how the Indians became more and more concerned over the future, and how their association of Whitman with

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<sup>48</sup>Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>49</sup>Marvin M. Richardson, The Whitman Mission, the Third Station on the Old Oregon Trail (Walla Walla: Whitman Publishing Co., 1940), p. 29.

these immigrations had its disastrous results.

However, the Indians did welcome Whitman back to the mission and were truly glad to see him. This, however, did not change the situation as it was to develop in the coming years. The moral character of the Indians did not improve at all, although their temporal condition continued to improve chiefly through the increase in the number of those who cultivated the ground, raised cattle, and traded their goods with the new white settlers.<sup>50</sup> These points are brought out in a brief excerpt from a letter of Whitman dated November 1, 1843, where he writes, "The Indians have succeeded well in cultivating and never treated me and the mission better than at present."<sup>51</sup>

Although encouraged, Whitman in the following year saw more trouble and friction developing between the Indians and the whites. In a letter dated April 8, 1844, Whitman tells of a white man, a mountain man named William Craig, who was inciting the Indians and trying to start trouble, using White's laws and the presence of the Roman Catholics as levers to stir the people's feelings.<sup>52</sup> In the same letter Whitman shows the mercenary and ungrateful character of his Indians, saying,

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<sup>50</sup>Bancroft, op. cit., p. 346.

<sup>51</sup>Hulbert, VII, op. cit., 328.

<sup>52</sup>Hulbert, VIII, op. cit., 88.

They also forbid me to break a new field as I desired lest I should make money out of their lands by supplying emigrants. They probably have a desire so far as they can to engross the proffits [sic] of supplying the emigrants themselves and do not wish to have competition.<sup>53</sup>

By this time White's laws had been in force for almost a year, but the Indians had lost none of their distaste and antagonism towards them. In the same letter just quoted Whitman describes their reaction to the laws as follows,

There has been several peculiar causes of agitation among the Indians in the past year, such as the introduction of laws by Doct [sic] White as Indian Agent in the name of the American Government. He represented himself as having power to settle all difficulties between Whites and Indians and to send any person out of this Upper Country including Missionaries in case they do not teach as they ought. This brought him to be the repository for all supposed grievances both civil and religious. It is in vain to urge that the Indians adopted the laws of themselves. The principal chief said, they would have preferred [sic] their own, if left to their own choice. They have become a mere form as there are none to execute them. They wish mostly to use them to establish complaints against white men rather than punish offenders of their own people.<sup>54</sup>

It took this intervening year for the results of the forced adoption of these laws to become evident. Dr. White had forced the Indians to accept these laws, and the Indians did not like them. Once made, they had to be enforced. White could not be around all the time to take charge of this, and the responsibility fell to the person in charge. Whitman was thus required to enforce these laws. This then was a definite factor which might account for the animosity

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-87.

on the part of the Indians. Because Whitman had to enforce the laws which the Indians despised this led to an association--in the mind of the Indian--between the hateful laws and Whitman, who then became just as despised as the laws themselves.<sup>55</sup>

In this same year Whitman began to express his beliefs concerning the future of the Indians in relation to that of the whites in which the Indians came out second best. This was perhaps the big mistake of Whitman, for his own thoughts, no matter how carefully hidden, were bound to find expression in his actions and attitudes. Another result was this, that by his attitudes and actions the Indians began to lose confidence in him, just as any group loses confidence in a leader who forsakes them. By these thoughts, listed below, Whitman was shaping his own future. His first detailed words on the matter were in a letter dated April 18, 1844,

Although the Indians are doing much by obtaining stock and cultivating as well as advancing in knowledge, still it cannot be hoped that a settlement will be so delayed as to give time for the advance to be made so that they can stand before white settlement. For when has it been known that an ignorant, indolent man has stood against Money, intelligence and enterprise? And besides is not the providence of God in this matter in one respect if no more. For the command is multiply and replenish the earth, neither of which the Indians obey. Their indolence, violence and bloodshed prevent the first and indolence and improvidence the second. How then can they stand in the way of others who will do both.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

Another more detailed expression of Whitman's ideas on the future of the Indians are contained in a letter dated May 16 of the same year,

It gives me much pleasure to be back again and quietly at work again for the Indians. It does not concern me so much what is to become of any particular set of Indians, as to give them the offer of salvation through the Gospel and the opportunity of civilization, and then I am content to do good to all men as 'I have opportunity.' I have no doubt our greatest work is to be to aid the white settlement of this country and help to found its religious institutions. Providence has its full share in all these events. Although the Indians have made and are making rapid advance in religious knowledge and civilization, yet it cannot be hoped that time will be allowed to mature either the work of Christianization or civilization before the white settlers will demand the soil and seek the removal of both the Indians and the Mission. What Americans desire of this kind they always effect and it is equally useless to oppose or desire it otherwise. To guide, as far as can be done, and direct these tendencies for the best, is evidently the part of wisdom. Indeed, I am fully convinced that when a people refuse or neglect to fill the designs of Providence, they ought not to complain at the results; and so it is equally useless for Christians to be anxious on their account. The Indians have in no case obeyed the command to multiply and replenish the earth, and they cannot stand in the way of others doing so. A place will be left them to do this as fully as their ability to obey will permit, and the more we can do for them the more fully this will be realized. No exclusiveness can be asked for any portion of the human family. The exercise of his rights are all that can be desired. In order for this to be in its proper extent in regard to the Indians, it is necessary that they seek to preserve their rights by peaceable means only. Any violation of this rule will be visited with only evil results to themselves.<sup>57</sup>

Although the Indians probably did not realize Whitman's feelings in this matter as yet, the constant flood of immigrants was certainly not contributing to their peace of mind.

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<sup>57</sup> Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

In a letter of May 20, 1844, Narcissa writes,

The Indians are quite quiet but are solicitous about so many coming into the country. None are settled near us. . . . Yet but it will not be long before there will be settlers among us, when we may look for trouble as the Indians will not like either to respect the interest of the Whites as they ought nor the Whites to forbear with the Indians.<sup>58</sup>

One might see how the Indians realized, on the basis of Whitman's feelings, that the Doctor was more of a friend to the whites than he was to the Indians. This came as a shock to the Indians and began to throw them into such consternation so as to make them later resort to desperate measures to protect what they thought was their own.

As the final years of the mission drew ever closer, it became more and more evident that the Indians were gradually losing confidence and trust in the Whitmans. They began to regard Whitman and his wife with suspicion and to think all manner of evil things about them. In a letter of 1845 Whitman states that the Indians suspected him of possessing medicines which he intended to use to poison them. True, the Doctor did have poisons, but they were only a standard part of his drug supply. The missionaries had used poisoned meat to kill wolves, and had also spiked some melons with an emetic, to discourage the thieving instincts on the part of the Indians. Some of the renegade Indians used these simple acts to show undeniable proof to the other Indians

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<sup>58</sup>Hulbert, VIII, op. cit., 107.

that the missionaries were trying to kill them all off so the whites could have the Indians' land.<sup>59</sup>

This belief on their part also caused the Indians to lose confidence in Whitman's skill as a physician. When one of his Indian patients would die he was accused of being personally responsible for the death. Narcissa brings this out in a letter dated April 8, 1845,

We have had some serious trials this spring with the Indians. Two important Indians have died and they have ventured to say and intimate that the doctor has killed them by his magical power, in the same way they accuse their own sorcerers and kill them for it.<sup>60</sup>

This last phrase in her letter, ". . . in the same way they accuse their sorcerers and kill them for it", indicates another tribal custom which gave Dr. Whitman a great deal of trouble and can be listed as another possible factor for the massacre of 1847. This was their belief concerning their medicine men, or "te-wat", as the Indians called them. The "te-wat" was an integral part of the tribal life of the Cayuses, moreso perhaps than of any of the other Indian tribes. He had a tremendous hold on the superstitious fears of his patients, and he was able to exact almost any amount of payment for his services. Yet, at the same time, he was held directly responsible for success. If he would fail to cure the patient, the subject then selected another "te-wat"

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<sup>59</sup>George W. Fuller, A History of the Pacific Northwest (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931), p. 144.

<sup>60</sup>Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, op. cit., p. 71.

who had boasted of having better medicine. But if the patient would die, the relatives of the dead patient took the life of the "te-wat". They believed that he held the power of life and death, and if the patient died he was responsible and thereby forfeited his life. The Cayuses looked on Whitman as a "te-wat", and he was threatened by them on a number of occasions when his patients died.<sup>61</sup> The implications of this tribal belief became more openly pronounced during an epidemic of measles immediately preceding the massacre, which will be discussed below.

There was another curious tribal belief of the Cayuses which had a definite bearing on the Indians' appreciation of the Whitmans' efforts and in their attitudes towards them. This was the challenge which Whitman presented to the Cayuse domestic relationship which Hulbert describes,

Dr. Whitman's constant effort to make Mrs. Whitman's tasks easier, his great solicitude for her when she was worn out or sick, and his eagerness on any pretext to take her with him on journeys from home in order to relieve her of the wearing grind of a large household, was a challenge to the whole ancient system of Cayuse domestic economy.<sup>62</sup>

The Cayuse Indian brave did very little actual work in their domestic relationship and mistreated their squaws without any feeling at all of personal wrong. The Indians could not understand the love and tenderness of Whitman to his wife, particularly when he would help her with some task or

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<sup>61</sup>Hulbert, VII, op. cit., 7-8.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

another. The Indians feared that their women might get such ideas from the way Whitman treated his wife that the squaws would demand the same treatment from their husbands. This fear became more pronounced as the years passed.<sup>63</sup>

The summer of 1845 saw the beginning of what was to be the largest immigration thus far. When the news of this large party reached the Indians they were quite disturbed and decided to do something about it. They laid plans to attack the wagon train in the mountains just before they would reach the mission; but Whitman heard of the plot; and after a forced ride he beat the war party to the wagon train. The Indians were understandably surprised and chagrined to meet Whitman at the head of the wagon train. He dispersed them, kept one of their chiefs hostage, and sent them all home.<sup>64</sup>

Whitman must have known that the Indians would react very unfavorably to this, but he had no choice in the matter. He had been sent specifically to minister to the Indians and to watch over them; but as a missionary, a doctor, a Christian, and a human being he owed a very definite responsibility to the innocent white settlers coming into the area. The results of this action were increased hostility of the Indians to the immigrants and a strong belief, now proven, as far as the Indians were concerned, that the Doctor had

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>64</sup>Drury, op. cit., p. 362.

forsaken his Indian friends and was now a friend to the white man.<sup>65</sup>

A further indication of this hostility is found in a letter dated May 20, 1845, in which Whitman wrote,

As it is at present, there is no force to keep the vagabond part of the Indians in order--and as the Immigration are [sic] passing some horses are stolen from them and others stray or are lost, all of which are charged to be stolen although few indeed are--and the Chiefs exert themselves to a very considerable degree to prevent theft.<sup>66</sup>

Whitman was still having some measure of success with the Indians of the mission, even though some of them were indulging in hostile and inimical actions.<sup>67</sup> This is more clearly brought out in a letter of Whitman's dated April 13, 1846, as follows,

We from time to time have found trials with the Indians but all end only to make me feel the more satisfied of the general good intentions of the people. I am sure no one wishes to disturb or harm us--but more than that we are held in high esteem by them.<sup>68</sup>

This highly optimistic attitude was maintained throughout the spring and summer, and Whitman indeed felt that he was making headway with the Indians, as he writes on September 8, 1846,

I think we have at no time been as much in the affections of the people as now. A much kinder disposition

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<sup>65</sup>Hulbert, VIII, op. cit., 15.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 168.

is manifested toward us, now more than at any former period,--exhibiting the feeling that they could not do without us. No abatement is seen in attention upon religious instruction and more consistent views of religion are manifested.<sup>69</sup>

This rosy prospect of a bright future among the Indians was blighted by the severe climate of the winter of 1846-1847. This winter, the last the Whitmans were to see, was unusually severe. The Indians and the Mission both lost many of their cattle and crops. The Whitmans had a stockpile of reserve food, but the Indians were not so lucky as to have been blessed with this degree of foresight. The Indians were particularly hard hit by the severe winter because it killed off their main meat supply, their main source of food--the wild game in the mountains.<sup>70</sup>

Along with the prospective lean months ahead there came an infinitely more terrifying scourge which caused many deaths among the Indians--the disease we call measles! To the whites the epidemic of this disease was only aggravating and irritating, but to the Indians it was death. They had never come into contact with such a thing before, and their bodies had absolutely no resistance built up against the disease. It was the white man's disease, for he was the source; and the Indians' hostility increased.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>70</sup> Drury, op. cit., pp. 371-372.

<sup>71</sup> Charles C. Creegan, Great Missionaries of the Church (New York: T. Y. Crowell and Co., 1895), p. 151.

In view of the fact that many Indians thought of Whitman as the white man's friend, he too came in for a share of the hostility and resentment of the Indians. The most specific indication that the epidemic was one of the factors contributing to the massacre of 1847 was in the Indians' reaction to Whitman's treatment of the disease. Most of those who had measles, white and Indian alike, were treated at the mission house. Because of the difference in resistance to the disease, the white children walked away healthy, while the Indian families and tribes mourned the deaths of their hardest braves. It was only a natural conclusion to the uneducated Indians that Whitman was poisoning and killing off those Indians under his care.<sup>72</sup> After the massacre one of the Indians told that a story had been circulated around his own village which told how Whitman had been induced to give medicine to three Indians, two of whom were sick and one was only shamming illness. All died, and the Indians were then convinced that Whitman was poisoning them.<sup>73</sup>

The last year of the mission, 1847, confronted the Whitmans with a dilemma. They were definitely aware of the bad feelings harbored by some of the Indians, and realized that this was dangerous. Nevertheless, there seemed to be

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<sup>72</sup>Oscar Osburn Winther, The Great Northwest (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), p. 152.

<sup>73</sup>Fuller, op. cit., p. 144.

such wonderful opportunities for work among the Indians, especially now, when they needed the presence of spiritual leaders most of all. Moreover, a large immigration was on its way to Oregon, and Whitman knew that these people would need help.

Whitman considered the possibility of relocating somewhere else, or of moving on with the immigrants. He decided in the end to stay. He knew of the dangers, but he felt that he had already done so much for the Indians that he and his wife ought to remain. The mistake in making this fatal decision to remain at Waiilatpu consisted in relying too much on the shallow gratitude of the Indians.<sup>74</sup>

Narcissa also shared her husband's confidence in being able to continue the work among the Indians, for in a letter of May 18, 1847, she says, "I should like to say much about the Indians, but cannot. Our prospects for usefulness among them have never been more encouraging than at present."<sup>75</sup> She writes again on July 15, ". . . but for the present I desire to speak of our own prospects as a mission, which we feel were never brighter than at present."<sup>76</sup>

The last mention Narcissa made of the Indians was in a letter dated August 23. She says,

The poor Indians are amazed at the overwhelming number

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<sup>74</sup>Drury, op. cit., p. 377.

<sup>75</sup>Marcus and Narcissa Whitman, op. cit., p. 208.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

of Americans coming into the country. They seem not to know what to make of it. . . . The remaining ones seem attached to us and cling to us all the closer.<sup>77</sup>

Her last words, "The remaining ones . . . ." give a clue to the perplexing paradox presented in the history of the mission. Many times the Whitmans wrote of their Indians, how pleased they were with them, how they expected such good results, and how faithful the Indians had become. Yet it was these very Indians who killed them. The problem of the good Indians resorting to murder is solved by the fact that there were two factions in the tribe, the Christian and the Savage. The Whitmans had a strong influence on the Christian faction of the tribe. They had worked with them these many years and had led them to an agricultural and agrarian life, which irritated the Savage faction, who still stuck with their nomadic tendencies and savage practices, and had not been overly affected by the power of the Gospel which Whitman preached. When the immigrants started coming, those Indians who had remained with the mission and had tilled their fields acquired a great deal of property, goods, and other material blessings, through trading and doing business with the white settlers. Because the Savage faction had none of the wherewithal to trade they became jealous and wanted to get some of the profits too. Many of the Indians then joined the ranks of the mission solely for whatever material gain they could receive. These Indians were

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

not so kindly disposed toward the doctor, and when things went wrong and their attempts to become rich proved abortive, they blamed the Whitmans. The number of the good Indians who joined in the massacre can possibly be ascribed to the influence of mob psychology, strengthened by the other factors mentioned which were called to the attention of these Indians.<sup>78</sup>

There were a number of renegade Indians who had periodically stirred up the Cayuses with stories and accusations, but the ones who had the most deleterious effect were two half-breeds, Joe Lewis and Nicholas Finley. They passed nothing by which might have been used as a tool for inciting the hatred of the Indians against the Whitmans. That these two were directly associated with the conspiracy against the Whitmans is shown from the fact that Finley's house became the headquarters for the conspirators.<sup>79</sup>

During the summer of 1847 the wagons of the immigrants began pouring through the Columbia Valley in an ever-increasing stream, and the Indians grew very concerned over the great number of whites. Some of the Indians took matters in their own hands, and the members of the 1847 immigration suffered from the deprivations of the Indians, who stole and looted whatever they could. Whitman tried hard to regain the stolen property and to smooth the way for the immigrants

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<sup>78</sup>Hulbert, VIII, op. cit., 46-47.

<sup>79</sup>Drury, op. cit., p. 387.

and to prevent clashes with the Indians.<sup>80</sup> Sometimes Whitman even had to force the Indians to return their stolen goods. If any of the Indians still thought that the Doctor was their friend, this showed them decisively, according to their logic, where Whitman's loyalty lay, especially when he told them that they might suffer reprisal for their thefts.<sup>81</sup>

About a year before this the Roman Catholics had started established work in Whitman's immediate area. This has been proclaimed by some historians as one of the major factors in the causes of the massacre. The fact that they were there, as Hulbert says,

. . . could not help but weaken the Indian adherents of the protestant faith by making it plain that its representatives had no copyright on the ways or means of salvation and that other creeds were equally efficient to attain the same end.<sup>82</sup>

Just because they happened to settle in the region a short while before the massacre has caused people to associate the one as the cause of the other. The Whitmans never once mentioned the Roman Catholics as directly inciting the Indians to cause them trouble. The Roman Catholics come into the picture only as pawns of the savage element of the tribe, who were looking for an excuse to discredit and do away with the Doctor and found one in the opposing religious

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 380-381.

<sup>81</sup> Hulbert, VIII, op. cit., 244.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

views of the Roman Catholics, which, understandably, had upset the people.<sup>83</sup>

The conspirators were laying their plans, and the day of the massacre was very near. Somehow or another their secret had leaked out, and Whitman heard of it. He was not worried, disclaiming it as only talk and nothing else.<sup>84</sup> Whitman was very definitely aware of the danger, for Spalding himself had heard of the plot too, and had relayed the information to Whitman, whose lack of concern was probably due to the fact that he had heard the same threat so many times before.<sup>85</sup>

The stage was now set, and all the plans were laid. All that was lacking was the act itself.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>84</sup> Drury, op. cit., p. 396.

<sup>85</sup> Hulbert, VIII, op. cit., p. 61.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DISASTER AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

On the morning of November 29, 1847, there were an unusually large number of Indians in and about the mission settlement, all with their blankets wrapped about them. No one thought this strange because a cow was being butchered that morning, and the Indians liked to come and watch. While Whitman was in the mission house reading, several Indians came to the house under the pretext of wanting medicine. One of them, Tomasaky, engaged Whitman's attention, while the other, Tiloukaikt, struck him on the head with his tomahawk. As Whitman fell to the ground, Tiloukaikt struck him several more times. One of the men from the mission, Francis Sager, happened to be in the house at the time, saw this happening and tried to spread the alarm. However, Tomasaky pulled out a rifle from beneath his blanket and shot him. This shot was a sign for battle to the other Indians about the mission, who pulled out rifles, pistols, and tomahawks from beneath their blankets and started shooting and killing. Because of the surprise of the attack and the lack of preparedness in the mission for the attack, the Indians met with but little resistance. Soon the men of the mission had either been killed, wounded, captured, or had run for their lives. Mrs. Whitman, who had been watching the carnage from a window of the mission house, was shot in

the breast by a ball from the rifle of Joe Lewis, one of the conspirators. Although wounded and bleeding she gathered all the children together and stayed in an upstairs room. Later, the Indians promised her safe conduct out of the house; but as she was carried out on a makeshift stretcher she was dumped on the ground. The Indians opened fire, killing her instantly. With Mrs. Whitman dead and Doctor Whitman dying the Indians indulged in an orgy of sacking, looting, and destroying, burning all the mission buildings to the ground. The total duration of the massacre was two days. Of the total number of seventy-four persons who were at the mission, eleven men, one woman, and two children had been killed by the time the hostilities ceased.<sup>1</sup>

After the massacre the Indians took the remaining members of the mission captive, fifty-one in all, having been unable to track down and find the few who had escaped. As soon as word of the massacre reached Fort Walla Walla Peter Ogden, of the Hudson's Bay Company, came down for the purpose of ransoming the captives. He gave blankets, shirts, guns, ammunition and tobacco, valued at 500 dollars, to the Indians for the release of the captives. A few of the prisoners had been mistreated, but for the most part they were alive and well. Ogden brought the captives back to Fort

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<sup>1</sup>Clifford M. Drury, Marcus Whitman, M.D., Pioneer and Martyr (Caldwell, Idaho: The Carlton Printers, Ltd., 1937), pp. 401-411.

Walla Walla on December 30, where they received medical attention, food, rest, and a chance to start anew somewhere else.<sup>2</sup>

Governor George Abernathy, head of the provisional government of Oregon, received word of the massacre on December 8 and dispatched Colonel Gilliam and a force of Oregon volunteers to apprehend and punish the murderers. The Indians refused to fight and fled to the hills, where they remained for two years. They remained there until 1850 when another force of Oregon volunteers, under Colonel Kelly, flushed them out of the hills and into the plains. There, to avoid further bloodshed, five of the Indians gave themselves up as the murderers. Trial was held on May 22, 1850, at Oregon City, Oregon; and a few days later all five were sentenced to be hung on June 3, 1850. Tomasaky, Tيلولkaikt, and Joe Lewis had all died during their exile in the hills.<sup>3</sup>

The Indian wars after the end of the massacre ended the work of the American Board in Oregon. Walker, Bells, and Spalding were all commanded to leave their posts and seek a place of safety. In 1851 the Indians wished another mission established, and Walker investigated the situation. He concluded that the area was still too dangerous for mis-

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<sup>2</sup>Marvin M. Richardson, The Whitman Mission, the Third Station on the Old Oregon Trail (Walla Walla: Whitman Publishing Co., 1940), pp. 135-137.

<sup>3</sup>Drury, op. cit., pp. 414-417.

sion work, so nothing more was ever done. In January of 1853 the American Board permanently suspended missionary operations in the Oregon country and disbanded the missions they had there: Wailatpu, Tschmikain, Lapwai, and The Dalles. The Board subsequently relinquished its claims and sold the mission sites to various interested parties.<sup>4</sup>

The site at Wailatpu changed hands a number of times and through the years was split up into small plots. Bit by bit the parts of the site, owned separately, were conveyed to the hands of various memorial, historical and religious associations, all anxious to obtain the whole plot as a memorial to Dr. Whitman.<sup>5</sup> On June 29, 1936, some forty-six acres of the desired land were given to the Historic Sites Division of the National Parks Service with a clear title, to be used in the completion of the Whitman National Monument, as it remains so today.<sup>6</sup>

Even though the Indians had massacred the Whitmans, the good effects of their missionary activities still remained. Subsequent visitors to the area, among them Rev. Spalding, remarked on the continuance of worship, singing

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<sup>4</sup>Archer Butler Hulbert and Dorothy Printup Hulbert, editors, "Marcus Whitman, Crusader," The Crusaders, the Charles B. Voorhis Series of Overland to the Pacific (Denver: The Stewart Commission of Colorado College and the Denver Public Library, 1938), VIII, 72.

<sup>5</sup>It was at this time, the last few years of the nineteenth century, that the Whitman-saved-Oregon story was most popular and prevalent.

<sup>6</sup>Richardson, op. cit., pp. 140-147.

of hymns, and prayers by the Indians. Some of the Bible had been translated into their own tongue, and the reading of this translation was an important part of their service.<sup>7</sup>

The work of the Whitmans in Waiilatpu was, at least, not utterly useless; for, if nothing else, it showed that the Word of God ". . . shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Oliver W. Nixon, How Marcus Whitman Saved Oregon (Second edition; Chicago: Star Publishing Co., 1895), p. 233.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 55:11.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION AND EVALUATIONS

The bright beginning of the Whitmans' mission at Waiilatpu, its gradual decline, and its tragic ending, as traced in the preceding chapters, give rise to a host of seemingly unrelated factors and causes. All the factors which, in the writer's estimation, contributed to the decline, failure, and massacre of the mission were mentioned in Chapter IV. All that yet remains is to gather together in a unified pattern and system all these related factors and to evaluate the personal responsibility of Dr. Whitman in his work at the mission.

The factors, or circumstances, leading to the massacre, can be grouped in two major divisions: the circumstances outside of Whitman's control, and the circumstances under his control.

The first, those circumstances over which Whitman had no responsibility or control, was the basic character of the Cayuse Indians. They were untrustworthy, ungrateful, capricious, unpredictable, nomadic, superstitious, captious, savage, and childlike, more than ready to listen to the renegades who conspired among them against the mission. The second was the ill will and bitterness resulting from the forced adoption of Dr. White's Laws in 1842, which provoked and aroused the Indians to hostility against Dr. Whitman,

who was required to enforce these laws. The third was the growing stream of immigrants, coming in everincreasing numbers, which made the Indians fear that they would lose their lands. The fourth was the climatic conditions in the fall, winter, and spring of 1846-1847, which killed off the crops and game and made the Indians hungry and angry, causing them to seek revenge on the man who had accustomed them to depend on an agricultural type of life. The fifth was disease, epidemic, and death, which ravaged the Indians, killing many of them, who then blamed it all on Whitman.

The other half of the major division of factors, the circumstances under Whitman's control, are also divided. They are: those circumstances under his control, which he had no choice in carrying out; and those circumstances under his control, carried out by choice.

The first part, those circumstances he had to carry out without any choice, were the excessive duties he was required to perform so that he was unable to devote a full amount of concentration to any one of them for any length of time. The second was the aid he gave to the immigrants, who also claimed a share of his concern, as well as the Indians to whom Whitman was sent. His actions in counteracting the ill effects of Indian raids and depredations on the immigrants further embittered and antagonized the Indians.

Those circumstances which were carried out strictly by his own personal choice also number two factors. The first,

and probably the most dangerous, was his view on the future of the Indians. As early as 1843 he gave up hope of the Indians ever being able to settle on the land. This was hardly a decision calculated to inspire confidence and trust, and only resulted in the opposite--distrust and loss of confidence. In trying to work among the Indians and yet encouraging the white settlers to come and live near his mission, the Indians began to look on Whitman as more of a friend to the whites than to themselves.

The second factor was his approach in teaching religion to the Indians. They were childlike savages, not religiously experienced adults, and his Calvinistic presentation of sin, death, hell, and damnation only confused and frightened the Indians, who didn't have the religious background to fill in the essentials needed to understand and apply such preaching. His preaching only aroused half-hearted and insincere response and eventually antagonized his Indian parishioners.

These are the factors; all of them caused antagonism and aroused the animosity of the Indians. This, then, leads to the second problem presented in the introduction. How much responsibility for the failure of the mission can be laid directly to the work and/or person of Dr. Whitman? Were his personally chosen plans of action the main reason for the downfall and massacre of the mission? Or, were his actions only contributions to a whole series of factors, neither of which, individually, would have been enough to precipitate the disaster but which, collectively, tipped

the delicate balance of the relationship between Dr. Whitman and the Indians?

The writer has fixed upon the last statement as best answering the total problem. The last two factors mentioned, those performed by the direct choice of Dr. Whitman, were serious ones and were definitely mistakes on his part. However, it is doubtful if these two factors could be isolated as being the main causes for the massacre and failure of the mission. There is no indication in the mission correspondence that the reaction over against these two things, taking sides with the whites and his preaching, had grown and developed to such a pitch which would explode into murder. Moreover, neither of these two factors are, in themselves, sufficient grounds for a mass murder as was perpetrated. The Doctor's actions were important, in that they added grist to the mill of the Indians' wrath, but his actions were not primarily important.

The reason for the massacre, according to the writer, lay in the fixation of the Indians upon the white people as the reason for all their troubles. All these factors, the sources of the Indians' antagonism, had to be caused by something, according to the Indians' logic, and since the majority of these factors were woven so closely with the coming of the whites, it was obvious to the Indians that here was the cause of all their troubles. What symbolized the presence of the white man more than the mission of the Whitmans'

at Wailatpu? What better way to drive out of the country the present settlers and to discourage new ones from arriving, than by destroying this mission and its people?

To the Indians this was their solution, and on that rainy day in November they carried out their plans. It accomplished their desired objective, the removal of the whites from their country. However, this temporary victory also brought suffering, shame, defeat, and eventual subjugation under those same whites. The greatest sorrow, though, that the Indians carried with them to the grave, was the realization that the man they had killed, Dr. Whitman, was for all his human faults and shortcomings the best friend they had ever had or ever would have. No one else ever showed them the kindness, consideration, and help which they had received from the Doctor. Whitman may have made mistakes and may not have shown discretion; but for all of this he was sincere and honest and a credit to his church, as a Christian, and to his countrymen, both Indian and White, as a missionary of the Word of God.

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