

## APPENDIX 3

### THE EVOLUTION OF THE WHITMAN-SAVED-OREGON STORY

The author wishes to draw a clear distinction between his interpretation of Whitman's contribution to the opening of Old Oregon to American settlement and the consequent influence that this had on the settlement of the boundary question with Great Britain, and the rejected Whitman-Saved-Oregon story which was so zealously promulgated by Spalding, Gray, Myron Eells, and others a century ago.

Some of the points of the Spalding version of the Whitman-Saved-Oregon story were true. Whitman did visit Washington in the early spring of 1843 where he had interviews with high government officials. He was active in promoting emigration to Old Oregon and was influential in leading the first great covered wagon train with about a thousand people across the Snake River desert and over the Blue Mountains in 1843. Whitman was active in trying to persuade the government to protect all emigrants on their way to Oregon and to extend its jurisdiction over that territory.

Spalding's theory was essentially false in that he made claims which historically were not true. For instance, he claimed that Whitman arrived in Washington in the spring of 1843 in time to intercede with President Tyler and Secretary of State Daniel Webster and to prevent them from signing a treaty with Great Britain which would have traded off United States rights in Old Oregon for a codfishery off the coasts of Newfoundland.<sup>1</sup> Thus Whitman saved Oregon!

Actually no such proposal was then being considered. It is possible that Spalding heard rumors that such might happen from Dr. White when he returned to Oregon in the fall of 1843 as a sub-Indian Agent. A number of apocryphal stories and legends about Whitman were spread abroad by Spalding, some of which became a part of the Whitman-Saved-Oregon story.

## THE BACKGROUND OF THE WHITMAN-SAVED-OREGON STORY

The Whitman-Saved-Oregon story evolved slowly. There was no deliberate conspiracy on the part of Spalding and Gray to formulate it, and then join in foisting it upon a gullible public. Each was sincere in what he said or wrote, even though some of their statements were erroneous, biased, or distorted. Spalding was the chief offender.

As explained in Chapter Sixteen of this book, one of the main reasons why Whitman decided so suddenly to go East in the fall of 1842 was to persuade the American Board to rescind its disastrous order of February 1842 which called for the closing of the Waiilatpu and Lapwai stations and the dismissal of Spalding. Naturally Spalding hesitated to speak or write about the dissensions within the Oregon Mission in which he was a central figure and which resulted in his dismissal. Instead, Spalding concentrated on the political interests of Whitman. Gray was inclined to accept Spalding's statements without questioning their accuracy, sometimes adding his own prejudicial embellishments.<sup>2</sup>

An important factor in the evolution of this theory which must be kept in mind, was Spalding's bitter anti-Catholic feeling. This can be traced back to his early life in western rural New York State where he had had no direct contacts with Roman Catholics. Anti-Catholic prejudices were common in the communities where all members of the Oregon Mission had been born and reared. The Pope was commonly referred to as "the Man of Sin"; the adoration of the Virgin Mary was idolatry; and the mass, an abomination. When Roman Catholic missionaries entered Oregon and began to seek converts among the tribes where the Protestants were at work, the latter were resentful and alarmed. If Spalding had known that the Hudson's Bay Company was subsidizing the Catholic missionaries in the Willamette Valley, he would have shouted this news abroad as proof of his suspicions that the Catholics were conspiring with the Company to gain control of Old Oregon.

Even though Father J. B. A. Brouillet had risked his life when he warned Spalding of the massacre when the latter was approaching Waiilatpu on November 30, 1847, thus permitting him to escape, Spalding had no feeling of gratitude, but turned in bitter criticism on Brouillet. When Spalding learned that Brouillet had baptized some of the children of the Cayuses, when they were seriously ill with measles and about to die, he accused Brouillet of being in league with the murderers. To Spalding,

who was evidently uninformed regarding Roman Catholic teachings on the importance of baptism for the salvation of souls, Brouillet's acts were incomprehensible.

Spalding became obsessed with the idea that the Catholic priests, in their desire to gain possession of the Whitman mission property and to drive the Protestant missionaries out of that part of the country, had incited the Cayuse Indians to perform their horrible deed. When Mrs. Spalding died on January 7, 1851, Spalding included the following in the inscription carved on her tombstone: "She always felt that the Jesuit missionaries were the leading cause of the massacre."<sup>3</sup> The most charitable explanation of this unreasonable and unchristian attitude of Spalding is that the terrible experiences through which he passed when trying to escape unsettled his mind.

### THE RELIGIOUS QUARREL BREAKS INTO PRINT

With Spalding's consent, the Rev. J. S. Griffin obtained the use of the old mission press, which was at The Dalles at the time of the massacre, and between June 1848 and May 1849 published eight numbers of his *Oregon American and Evangelical Unionist*. Griffin was as fanatical in his anti-Catholic views as was Spalding. The latter wrote seven articles, which Griffin published, in which Spalding made serious accusations against the Catholics; for instance, the following taken from the June 21, 1848, issue: "It is said that the Catholics took part in the murders and in the distribution of the plundered goods... It is said that they actually placed the seal of their bloody approbation upon the bloody deed, by baptizing the children of the murderers."

The publication of Spalding's articles seems not to have aroused much public interest in what appeared to be nothing more than a religious quarrel. The one person who was moved to write a rebuttal was Father Brouillet; after reading several of Spalding's tirades, he wrote a reply in the fall of 1848. Father Brouillet collected a number of testimonials from Oregon residents to disprove many of Spalding's slanderous allegations.

In the introduction to his defense, Brouillet wrote: "But a certain gentleman, moved on by religious fanaticism, and ashamed of owing his life and that of his family and friends to some priests, began to insinuate false suspicions about the true causes of the disaster, proceeded, by degrees, to make more open accusations, and finally declared publicly

that the bishop of Walla Walla and his clergy were the first cause and great movers of all the evil. That gentleman is the Rev. H. H. Spalding, whose life had been saved from the Indians by a priest, at the peril of his own.”<sup>4</sup>

After writing his defense, Father Brouillet waited five years before he found an opportunity to have it published. It finally appeared in 1853 in several issues of the *New-York Freeman's Journal*, a Catholic publication, under the title: “Protestantism in Oregon. Account of the Murder of Dr. Whitman, and the ungrateful calumnies of H. H. Spalding, Protestant Missionary.” On the whole, Father Brouillet wrote in a much more restrained manner than Spalding, yet at times he was as biting in his criticisms of Spalding as Spalding had been of him. Some of the testimonials which Father Brouillet included in his articles are of doubtful value in resolving the contradictions in the controversy. Brouillet's articles appeared as a pamphlet in June 1853.

The publication of Spalding's articles in the *Oregon American* in 1848–49, and of Brouillet's articles in the *New-York Freeman's Journal* in 1853, marked the beginning of an acrimonious debate, which continued for decades in government publications, books, pamphlets, and innumerable articles in religious and secular papers and magazines.

### THE BROWNE GOVERNMENT DOCUMENT APPEARS

Perhaps the controversy would have died with the appearance of Brouillet's pamphlet in 1858 had not a fortuitous incident suddenly given it national recognition. The Commissioner for Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior sent J. Ross Browne in 1857 to investigate the causes of the Indian wars which plagued Washington and Oregon Territories after the Whitman massacre. Browne, in his report submitted in January 1858, referred to Spalding's claim that the massacre “was done with the knowledge and connivance of the Catholic missionaries.” He attached a copy of Brouillet's pamphlet to his report, which contained a refutation of Spalding's charges.

“A perusal of the pamphlet,” wrote Browne, “will abundantly show the bitterness of feeling existing between the different sects, and its evil effects upon the Indians. It will readily be seen that, as little dependence can be placed upon the statements by one side as by the other, and that, instead of christianizing the Indians, these different sects were engaged

in quarrels among each other, thereby showing a very bad example to the races with whom they chose to reside.”<sup>5</sup> How strange that a theological quarrel, which had originated more than three hundred years earlier in Europe, should have been transplanted to the Indian tribes of Oregon to rend them apart.

Browne’s thirteen-page report might well have become just another forgotten government document had it not been published with Brouillet’s fifty-two page pamphlet as *Executive Document, No. 38, House of Representatives, 35<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1st Session, 1858*.<sup>6</sup> As could be expected, neither Spalding nor any of his friends were readers of the *Congressional Record*; hence he was unaware of the publication of the Brouillet pamphlet for about ten years. The story of what then happened follows.

### SPALDING PREPARES HIS REPLY

Following the appearance of his articles dealing with the causes of the Whitman massacre which appeared in the *Oregon American* in 1848 and 1849, Spalding continued to speak and write against the Catholics as opportunities afforded. The first detailed account of his Whitman-Saved-Oregon story is to be found in a series of eleven “lectures” which he wrote for the San Francisco *Pacific* beginning with the May 23, 1865, issue. The *Pacific* was a New-School Presbyterian-Congregational weekly publication which served the churches of those denominations on the Pacific Slope; thus it was the best medium available for the dissemination of his views. A second series of Spalding articles, covering much of the same ground but giving some amplifications to the Whitman-Saved-Oregon story, appeared in the *Walla Walla Statesman* in February and April 1866, and a third series in the *Albany, Oregon, States Rights Democrat* between November 17, 1866, and January 18, 1868.

In these articles, Spalding turned history into propaganda. Much that he said was true. In some instances, he was guilty of giving only half-truths. For instance, he never referred to the difficulties within the Mission which resulted in the Board’s disastrous order of February 1842. Through all of his writings ran his bitter anti-Catholic prejudices. He magnified Whitman’s role on the national scene, making claims for him that Whitman never made for himself. These writings are far different from the diary he kept while living at Lapwai, which remains a reliable historical document.

Sometime during the early months of 1868, a copy of Browne's report of 1858, with Brouillet's article on "Protestantism in Oregon," came to Spalding's attention. His anger was immediately aroused, not only by what he considered to be the false and slanderous accusations of Brouillet against him and his former associates, but also by the fact that the inclusion of Brouillet's pamphlet in a government document implied an official endorsement of the views therein expressed. Spalding claimed that Browne was a Catholic and this was the reason why he included the Brouillet article. Calling upon the worst epithet in his vocabulary, Spalding stigmatized Browne as a "Jesuit" Actually Browne was a Protestant, although not an active church member.<sup>7</sup> In rebuttal, Browne claimed that the inclusion of the Brouillet pamphlet was not intentional. It had been done without his knowledge or consent.

Following his discovery of the Browne report, Spalding had a consuming desire to obtain a vindication by having his side of the controversy published in some official Congressional document. He began assembling his material. He turned first to his published lectures and took certain passages, especially those which embodied his Whitman-Saved-Oregon theory. He then turned to Brouillet's article and picked out a number of passages which he felt were false, misleading, or slanderous. These he took to such prominent citizens of the Willamette Valley as A. L. Lovejoy, Dr. Henry Saffarans, Alanson Hinman, H. A. G. Lee, William Geiger, Jr., George Abernethy, Robert Newell, and Joel Palmer (each of whom figures in the Whitman story), and asked for their endorsement of his views. This they gave.

Spalding then turned to several ecclesiastical bodies, representing the Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, Methodist, and Christian Churches of Oregon, and secured from each resolutions which denounced the Brouillet article and which extolled the work of the missionaries belonging to the Oregon Mission of the American Board, especially that of the martyred Whitmans. Most of the leading Protestant clergymen of the Willamette Valley signed one or more of these resolutions.

Thus armed with a hodge-podge but impressive collection of documents, Spalding sailed from Portland on October 27, 1870, for San Francisco. He then had to go by river steamer to Sacramento before he could take the train over the newly constructed transcontinental route for the East. As his train rolled across the plains of the Missouri River

Valley, no doubt Spalding remembered how he, his wife, Gray, and the Whitmans had made their way westward in 1836. He had lived to see the fulfillment of the prophecy he had made regarding the possibility of building a railroad over the Rockies to the Pacific Ocean. A. B. Smith had scoffed at the idea, calling it “visionary” and stating that: “a man... must be strongly beside himself to make such a remark.”<sup>8</sup>

### THE NEZ PERCE’S “LAMENT”

While passing through Chicago on his way East, Spalding called on the Rev. S. L. Humphrey, editor of the *Chicago Advance*, a religious publication. Humphrey in the December 1, 1870, issue of his paper published an account of his interview with Spalding under the caption, “An Evening with an Old Missionary.” In one of Spalding’s articles which appeared in the *Walla Walla Statesman* on February 16, 1866, he attributed an eloquent speech to one of the surviving Nez Percés, who went to St. Louis in the fall of 1831, given just before he and his companion were to leave in the spring of 1832 to return to their homeland. This speech has often been called “the Indian’s lament.” In this first version of the lament, the chief made reference to “*the Book of God*.” Spalding claimed that he got the text of the speech from a man who was in an adjoining room when the chief spoke and had written down what he had heard.

Notice, now, the account as given to editor Humphrey: “...the Flat-heads and Nez Percés had determined to send four of their number into ‘the Rising Sun’ for ‘that *Book of Heaven*.’ They had got word of the Bible and a Saviour in some way from the Iroquois. These four dusky wise men, one of them a chief, who has thus dimly ‘seen His star in the east,’ made their way to St. Louis.” There they met General Clark, who, Spalding claimed, was a “romanist.”<sup>9</sup> Humphrey’s account continues: “How utterly he failed to meet their wants is revealed in the sad words with which they departed: ‘I came to you’—and the survivor repeated the words years afterward to Mr. Spalding—‘with one eye partly opened; I go back with both eyes closed and both arms broken. My people sent me to obtain that *Book of Heaven*. You took me where your women dance as we do not allow ours to dance, and the Book was not there. You took me where I saw men worship God with candles; and the Book was not there. I am now to return without it, and my people will die in darkness.’”<sup>10</sup>

This apocryphal speech reflected Spalding's puritanical views regarding dancing, the theater, and the use of candles in Catholic worship. No Oregon Indian could ever have made such a speech.

The final version of the lament appeared in print thirty-nine years after the words were reported to have been spoken! There is no evidence that Spalding ever met either of the two survivors, whose portraits were painted by George Catlin when they were passengers aboard a river steamer that ascended the Missouri River in the spring of 1832.<sup>11</sup> There is good evidence to indicate that neither of the survivors ever returned to their homeland but had died long before Spalding had settled at Lapwai.<sup>12</sup>

Spalding was so pleased with the account of his interview with Humphrey, which was published in the *Chicago Advance*, that he included it in the collection of documents which he intended to present to some Congressional committee for publication. This account of the visit of the four Nez Perces to St. Louis, with the apocryphal lament, was given wide publicity, especially in Protestant church circles. Spalding was more eloquent than accurate. He did what many do. He fictionalized history for propaganda purposes.

## THE SPALDING GOVERNMENT DOCUMENT

After leaving Chicago, Spalding went to Prattsburg where he visited old friends and familiar scenes. He then went to New York City where he solicited the support of the Hon. William E. Dodge, who had once been a Vice President of the American Board, in his project to get his collection of documents published by the government. Dodge, perhaps more than any other person, was largely responsible for Spalding's success in Washington. After visiting Boston, Spalding went to Washington where he arrived on January 5, 1871. Armed with a letter of introduction from Dodge, Spalding met Senator H. W. Corbett of Oregon. Through the Senator's influence, Spalding was given a hearing before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on January 25.

Just before he was to appear, Spalding wrote a hasty note to Rachel, his second wife, which reveals his anxiety: "Dearest Wife, may God help your husband. In 5 minutes... appear before the Senate... my case... this infamous outrage is corrected." The original letter has been mutilated,

possibly by mice, so that the complete text is not available, but enough remains to give the meaning.

On February 9, Spalding wrote another note to his wife: "Glory to God. Bless His Holy Name. Victory complete. The Senate has just ordered by a unanimous vote my manifesto printed and committed to Committee on Indian Affairs."<sup>13</sup>

Spalding's collection of documents appeared in the *Congressional Record* and was then reprinted as an eighty-one page pamphlet under the title *Executive Document, No. 37, U.S. Senate, 41<sup>st</sup> Congress, 3d Session*. The first edition contained 1,500 copies. Spalding was jubilant. He felt that he had been completely vindicated. Brouillet had been answered. Spalding's account of Protestantism in Old Oregon, with his Whitman-Saved-Oregon story, had been given the stamp of Congressional approval. A second edition consisting of 2,500 copies appeared in January 1903. Spalding's *Senate Document* together with Brouillet's *House Document* are prime sources for the history of both Roman Catholic and Protestant missionary work in Old Oregon.

APPENDIX 3 FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Spalding, *Senate Document*, p. 22. Bourne, *Essays in Historical Criticism*, p. 82, quotes from a letter of Daniel Webster, August 23, 1842: "The only question of magnitude about which I did not negotiate with Lord Ashburton is the question respecting the fisheries."
- <sup>2</sup> Gray claimed that he never heard of the Board's order of February 1842 which called for his dismissal. See circular 8, reprint from *Daily and Weekly Astorian*, p. 5, no date, probably sometime during 1883–85. Circular in Coll. W. The same amazing denial was made by Gray in the *Portland Oregonian*, Feb. 1, 1885. Gray stated: "Of this object (i.e. the Board's order) I have no personal knowledge of its being talked about at the time." See also Marshall, *Acquisition of Oregon*, II:138, and ante, Chap. 16, fn. 8.
- <sup>3</sup> Drury, *Spalding*, p. 361.
- <sup>4</sup> Brouillet, *House Document*, p. 14.
- <sup>5</sup> Brouillet, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
- <sup>6</sup> A fine account of the history of this document by George N. Belknap appeared in *Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America*, Vol. 55, 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 1961, pp. 319 ff. Reprinted as a pamphlet.
- <sup>7</sup> Spalding, *Senate Document*, p. 64. On the same page, Spalding erroneously referred to Brouillet as being a Jesuit. Belknap, *op. cit.*, p. 332, fn. 27.
- <sup>8</sup> Drury, *Spalding and Smith*, pp. 159 & 235.
- <sup>9</sup> Marshall, *Acquisition of Oregon*, II:17, claims that Clark was not a Roman Catholic, and that he was a Mason and was buried by that fraternity.
- <sup>10</sup> Spalding, *Senate Document*, p. 8. Italics are in the original. See also Chapter One, "Nez Perce Delegation to St. Louis." Also, *W.H.Q.*, II (1907):195 ff., for article by C. T. Johnson (pseudonym for T. C. Elliot), "The Evolution of a Lament."
- <sup>11</sup> Catlin's paintings of the two survivors are in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Reproduced as illustrations in Drury, *Spalding*, p. 83.
- <sup>12</sup> McBeth, *The Nez Percés Since Lewis and Clark*, p. 31, gives the Nez Perce tradition regarding the fate of the two survivors.
- <sup>13</sup> Original letters are in Coll. O.