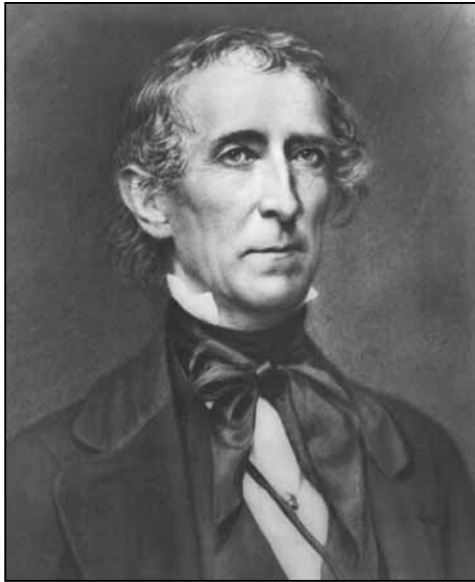


XXIII. WHITMAN'S RIDE.

HARRISON being dead, John Tyler had to take his place. During his one term, Florida, the twenty-seventh state, was added to the Union. Although our country was already very large, the time was near when it was going to be even larger still.

We are told that, in the time when Jackson was President, a party of Indians traveled from Oregon to St. Louis, in quest of "the white man's Bible." They had heard of it from



John Tyler.
Library of Congress.

some traders, and the stories seemed so wonderful that they had journeyed many miles to get the book and someone to read and explain it to them.

It happened, however, that the people whom they asked for it were too busy or indifferent to pay much attention to this request. Still, they kindly fed and clothed the Indians, and gave them many presents. After two of the messengers had died in St. Louis, the others sadly went home to tell their people that no one would listen to their prayer. The story of the long journey taken by these Indians, and of their pitiful requests, was told in the East, where it touched the hearts of

many people; and missionaries were soon sent out to Oregon to convert the Indians. Two of these missionaries set out with young brides, and journeyed slowly all the way across our continent. They traveled by boat most of the way to Missouri, and from there in wagons and on horseback; and they were the first to take white women over the Rocky Mountains. When they reached the Oregon country, which was still open to Americans and British alike, they found that the latter were trying to get sole possession of the land. Still, the Americans claimed that Oregon should belong to them, not only because Captain Gray first sailed into the Columbia River, but because Lewis and Clark explored it from the mountains to the sea, and Astor built the first trading post there.

After living near Wal-la-wal'la five years, one of the American missionaries, Dr. Marcus Whitman, heard that his fellow-Christians in the East had decided to give up his mission station, just when it was most needed, he thought; for many Americans were

coming to settle in the new country. Therefore he resolved to journey east, in order to persuade the Board of Missions at Boston to keep up his station.

Whitman set out at once for his five-months' ride, but as it was already late in the season he knew he would not be able to pass over the mountains by the way he had come, so he took the southern route.

Through blinding snow and deep drifts, across frozen streams, and over mountains so steep and rough that it seemed almost impossible to climb them at all, Whitman made his way. After thrilling adventures with wolves and bears, and many hairbreadth escapes, he reached Santa Fe, and following the trail from there, came to St. Louis. The rest of the journey was easy. On his way to Boston, he stopped in Washington and tried to get the government to make some arrangement whereby the emigrants could reach Oregon more easily. He also declared that emigrants could take their wagons over the mountains, though many claimed it was impossible to do so.



Traveling West in a Covered Wagon.

By this time many Americans were thinking of settling in Oregon, and were asking our government to extend its laws over that country. The Ashburton treaty with Great Britain (1842) settled the boundary between Maine and New Brunswick, but said nothing about Oregon, and no one knew just what the future of that country would be. Still,

by the time Whitman had obtained leave to continue his mission and had started to return, two hundred emigrant wagons, or “prairie schooners,” were on their way to Oregon. Whitman joined this train of pioneers and helped them to overcome all the difficulties of the way.

Although the British made sundry attempts to discourage these settlers, they were followed by so many others that, three years later, no less than twelve thousand Americans had passed into Oregon. Our countrymen thus proved so much more numerous



Oregon Territory and the Disputed Boundary.

than the English that they soon claimed the whole territory, asking that the boundary be drawn at the parallel of $54^{\circ} 40'$. The British, however, did not wish to give up so much land. So, before long, a quarrel arose, and the Americans began to cry that they would fight Great Britain unless it consented to what they wished. But after a great deal of talk, and many threats about “fifty-four forty or fight,” the United States finally thought best to accept the 49th parallel as its northern boundary from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean (1846).

The next year, Whitman, his wife, and twelve other white people were murdered by the Indians in an attack on his mission. Many years later it was claimed by Whitman’s friends that he had saved Oregon—that had it not been for his daring winter ride, and for what he told the President about Oregon, this part of our country would now belong to the British. This is claiming too much; but Whitman was nonetheless a hero, for he was true to his country and died a martyr to his faith.