

54-40 or Fight

By Emerson Hough Author of the "Mississippi Bubble"

(Continued.)

We put cows into the yoke now, and used women instead of men on the drivers' seats, and boys who started riding finished afoot.

Gaunt and brown and savage, hungry and grim, ragged, hatless, shoeless, our cavalcade closed up and came on, and so at last came through. Ere autumn had yellowed all the foliage back east in gentler climes, we crossed the shoulders of the Blue mountains and came into the valley of the Walla Walla; and so passed thence down the Columbia to the valley of the Willamette, 500 miles yet farther, where there were then some slight centers of our civilization which had gone forward the year before.

Here were some few Americans. At Champoug, at the little American missions, at Oregon City, and other scattered points, where there were then some slight centers of our civilization which had gone forward the year before.

Messengers spread abroad the news of the arrival of our wagon train. Messengers, too, came down from the Hudson Bay posts to scout our equipment and estimate our numbers. There was no word obtainable from these of any Canadian column of occupation to the northward which had crossed at the head of the Peace river or the Saskatchewan, or which lay ready at the head waters of the Fraser or the Columbia to come down to the lower settlements for the purpose of bringing to an issue, or making more difficult, this question of the joint occupancy of Oregon. As a matter of fact, ultimately we won that transcontinental race so decidedly that there never was admitted to have been a second.

So we took Oregon by the only law of right. Our broken and weakened cavalcade asked renewal from the soil itself. We ruffled no drum, fluttered no flag, to take possession of the land. But the canvas covers of our wagons gave way to permanent roofs. Where we had known a hundred camps, now we lighted the fires of a hundred homes.

CHAPTER XXVI. The Debated Country.

The world was sad, the garden was a wild! The hermit, sighed—till woman smiled! —Campbell.

Our army of peaceful occupation scattered along the more fertile parts of the land, principally among the valleys. Of course, it should not be forgotten that what was then called Oregon meant all of what now is embraced in Oregon, Washington and Idaho, with part of Wyoming as well. It extended south to the Mexican possessions of California. How far north it was

to run, it was my errand here to learn.

I settled near the mouth of the Willamette river, near Oregon City, and not far from where the city of Portland later was begun; and I built for myself a little cabin of two rooms, with a connecting roof. This I furnished, as did my neighbors their similar abodes, with a table made of hewed puncheons, chairs sawed from blocks, a bed framed from poles, on which lay a rude mattress of husks and straw.

From the eastern states I scarcely could now hear in less than a year, for another wagon train could not start west from the Missouri until the following spring. We could only guess what events were going forward in our diplomacy.

The mild winter wore away, and I learned little. Spring came, and still no word of any land expedition out of Canada. We and the Hudson Bay folk still dwelt in peace. The flowers began to bloom in the wild meads, and the horses fattened on their native pastures.

Summer came on. The fields began to whiten with the ripening grain. I grew uneasy, feeling myself only an idler in a land so able to fend for itself. I now was much disposed to discuss means of getting back over the long trail to the eastward, to carry the news that Oregon was ours. It was at this time that there occurred a startling and decisive event.

I was on my way on a canoe voyage up the wide Columbia, not far above the point where it receives its greatest lower tributary, the Willamette, when all at once I heard the sound of a cannon shot. I turned to see the cloud of blue smoke still hanging over the surface of the water. Slowly there swung into view an ocean-going vessel under steam and auxiliary canvas. She made a gallant spectacle. But whose ship was she? I examined her colors anxiously enough. I caught the import of her ensign. She flew the British Union Jack! England had won the race by sea!

Something of the ship's outline seemed to me familiar. I knew the set of her short masts, the pitch of her smokestacks, the number of her guns. Yes, she was the *Moderate*, the English navy—the same ship which more than a year before I had seen at anchor off Montreal!

News travels fast in wild countries, and it took us little time to learn the destination of the *Moderate*. She came to anchor above Oregon City, and well below Fort Vancouver. At once, of course, her officers made formal calls upon Dr. McLaughlin, the factor at Fort Vancouver and accepted head of the British element thereabouts. Two weeks passed in rumors and counter rumors and a vastly dangerous tension existed in all the

American settlements, because word was spread that England had sent a ship to oust us. Then came to myself and certain others at Oregon City messengers from peace-loving Dr. McLaughlin, asking us to join him in a little celebration in honor of the arrival of her Majesty's vessel.

Here at last was news; but it was not wholly to my liking which soon unearthed. The *Moderate* was but one ship of 15. A fleet of 15 vessels, 400 guns, then lay in Puget sound. The watchdogs of Great Britain were at our doors. This question of monarchy and the republic was not yet settled, after all!

I pass the story of the banquet at Fort Vancouver, because it is unpleasant to recite the difficulties of a kindly host who finds himself with jarring elements at his board. Precisely this was the situation of white-haired Dr. McLaughlin at Fort Vancouver. It was an incongruous assembly in the first place. The officers of the British navy attended in the splendor of their uniforms, glittering in braid and gold. Even Dr. McLaughlin made brave display, as was his wont, in his regalia of dark blue cloth and shining buttons—his noble features and long, snow-white hair making him the most lordly figure of them all. As for us Americans, lean and brown, with hands hardened by toil, our wardrobes scattered over a thousand miles of trail, buckskin tunics made of cow coats, and moccasins our boots. I have seen some noble gentlemen so clad in my day.

It was, as may be supposed, late in the night when our somewhat discordant banquet party broke up. The flowers began to bloom in the hospitable fashion of the country, in the scattered log buildings which nearly always hedge in a western fur-trading post. The quarters assigned me lay across the open space, or what might be called the parade ground of Fort Vancouver.

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covered, flanked by Dr. McLaughlin's four little cannons. As I made my way home, stumbling among the stumps in the dark, I passed many semi-drunken Indians and voyageurs, to whom special liberty had been accorded in view of the occasion, all of them now engaged in singing the praises of the "King George" men as against the "Bostons."

I was almost at my cabin door at the edge of the forest frontage at the rear of the old post when I

caught glimpse, in the dim light, of a hurrying figure, which in some way seemed to be different from the blanket covered squaws who stalked here and there about the grounds. She passed steadily toward a long and low log cabin, located a short distance beyond the quarters which had been assigned to me. I saw her step up to the door and heard her knock; then there came a flood of light—more light than was usual in the opening of a frontier cabin. This dis-

played the figure of the night walker, showing her tall and gaunt and a little stooped; so that, after all, I took her to be only one of our American frontier women, being quite sure that she was not Indian or half-breed.

This emboldened me, on a mere chance—an act whose mental origin I could not have traced—to step up to the door after it had been closed and myself to knock thereat.

I heard women's voices within, and as I knocked the door opened

a trifle on its chain. I saw appear at the crack the face of the woman whom I had followed.

She was, as I had believed, old and wrinkled, and her face now, seen close, was as mysterious, dark and inscrutable as that of any Indian squaw. Her hair fell heavy and gray across her forehead, and her eyes were small and dark as those of a native woman. Yet, as she stood there with the light streaming upon her, I saw something in her face which made me

puzzle, ponder and start—and put my foot within the crack of the door.

"Threika," I said quietly, "tell Madame the Baroness it is I, Monsieur Trist, of Washington."

(To be continued.)

MADRID.—The duke of Benavente and Marquis Lombay were arrested following the discovery of a counterfeiting plant in a cottage they owned.

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