

# A PIONEER CAPTAIN

BY H. L. DAVIS

Before a tent near the river a violin makes lively music; in another quarter, a flute gives its mellow and melancholy notes to the still night air, which, as they float over the quiet water, seem a lament for the past rather than a hope for the future.—*Jesse Applegate: "A Day With the Cow Column in 1843."*

**B**ACK in the early nineteen-hundreds, before motor-cars had got country people in the habit of avoiding each other's society, there used to be a picnic grove at Ollalla in Southwestern Oregon where the old pioneers met once a year to fill up on chicken and layer-cake, drink whiskey out of tin cups from a barrel planted in the brush, and hear some young candidate for Congress tell them, in a good old vest-busting declamation, delivered with all the more authority because the orator had usually just hit the country from Iowa or Pennsylvania, how thankful everybody was to the pioneers because they had emigrated to Oregon instead of staying back East and not amounting to anything.

That was one part of the reunion that none of the old people ever missed. The first boom of it brought them loping in from the whiskey barrel like a troop of cavalry horses to stables-call; and they sat on the plank benches and listened until the last swipe of goose-grease was laid on and the speaker's stand-up collar was melted to a rag. The benches were hard and splintery, the deer-flies were bad, and

there were pesky little wood-lizards in the leaves that sometimes upset concentration by bolting up somebody's pants-leg. But the pioneers sat it devoutly through. The orator gave them information about themselves that none of them would ever have thought of without his help, and it made them feel good.

Mostly, the things he dragged out to credit them with were pretty much overplayed. The pioneers really hadn't started the country on its road from a wilderness to fertility. If anything, it was less fertile than it had been when they first got there. They had ruined half the streams by logging off the watersheds, and all the natural grass except the broomstraw by overstocking the range and loading it with weed-pests that, before they came, didn't exist. They had less ruined it, perhaps, than had it ruined for them by the later pilgrims stampeding in after them, to root out the pastures, steal and peddle the timber, and waste and slaughter the game, not because they needed it, but because somebody else would get it if they didn't. No home-born spell-binder would have had the nerve to offer congratulations on such a job. That, perhaps, is the reason that Oregon's sons have always had to give way, in public life, to more innocent-minded invaders from the East, who don't know enough about the country to know when to stop.

It wasn't only that the rhetorician spread on the salve about what they had done to

the country, either. The worst was hearing him tell them what the country had done to them, and they took that down solemnly and respectfully, too, as if they enjoyed his congratulations upon bringing civilization to Oregon, when every one of them must have known that civilization was the very thing they had come there to get away from. It was a sight to see, those white-whiskered men and white-haired women, living out their old age at hard work or on the charity of their children, knowing perfectly well how much their pioneering had actually got them, and yet whooping and hip-hipping for the orator when he described their hardships and perils in the tone of a success-story man telling how Edward Bok earned his first big shiny dollar.

They weren't merely being polite. The spiel really raked them deep. They enjoyed receiving the thanks of civilization all the more, perhaps, because they hadn't done anything to earn it and because it seemed about all they were ever likely to get. Yet the whole occasion was ironical, because so many of them would have been better off if they hadn't emigrated at all.

Not that they weren't good men. Most of them were; and the pioneers of the earliest emigrations from the Missouri frontier, taken straight through, were the strongest and most intelligent stock in North America at the time, and possibly in the world. The trouble was that Oregon turned out to be not their game. They were cattle-raisers by trade, who needed open range and plenty of room, and emigrated to Oregon to get it, while accomplishing at the same time the good deed of taking the country away from England.

For awhile they did well. If they could have legislated against immigration from the East, as their posterity later did against the Japanese, the end of the trip would

have been as happy and prosperous as the orator made it out to be. But they couldn't reach such advanced legislation. Oregon boomed; the stampeders from the East grabbed it and shut off and ruined the range and swamped the cattle market, and left the first comers worse off than they were before they started; left them, in the end, forgetful of what they had come for, and nodding gratification over the shirt-tail-waving eloquence of any young *émigré* who was willing to swap soft-soap for votes.

And that was another irony, for most of the pioneers, if they had only thought of it, had better sense than that. The ordinary representation of the Western emigrant as a hairy-bellied diamond in the rough, with wire whiskers, a round head, fourteen children, several guns and a Bible which he believed in without ever having read, would have missed the run of them by blocks. Many of them had read, not only the Scriptures, but a great many more books than an average member of Congress today would be able to list even the names of. They could hold arguments and quote authorities on such subjects as history, theology, civics, even science and philosophy; and most of them did so whenever they could find anybody to argue with.

Not that they got, or expected to get, anything out of these studies except amusement. Forms of thinking had, with them, no relation to reality at all. Perhaps it was because reality so often meant homesickness, which they got relief from by keeping their formal ideas as courtly and as vaporish as possible. Their poetry, for example, was not rude, rugged and muscle-bound, but of a tasteful delicacy of sentiment and expression that would have made Sir John Suckling sound like a drunken teamster

arguing from a cell in jail. An old mountain man whose grammar and spelling shot high would steam up a description of a trapping party drunk on raw alcohol and molasses with an elegantly turned quotation from Pope or Campbell, and an 1843 man like J. W. Nesmith posted an enemy, for refusing to fight a duel with him, in terms that couldn't have disgraced, though they probably would have interested, Edmund Burke.

If homesickness was behind this, there was something behind the homesickness better and more dignified than a mere hankering for a native landscape, particularly one that they had gone to such heroic pains to get away from. Their homesickness was not for landscapes, but for their hopes, which had carried them so far and got them so little in the end. Few of them mention that. The ones who do, take it gamely, without complaining. How could they complain, with the record of Oregon's treatment, not only of them, but of all its leaders and builders, propped up in front of them?

## II

Equally with the pioneers, the Oregon country they came to was far different from the uncultivated, shaggy-bosomed section which most of the books and all of the speeches make out it was. Long before the first emigrant wagon was pointed West, or even built, the Northwest coast had a government, a foreign policy, fruit-raising and farming, flour-mill and lumbering industries, and an export trade with Alaska and the Hawaiian Islands. Instead of being a trackless wilderness, it produced and shipped flour, lumber and furs on regular schedule. Instead of being infested with hordes of murderous savages, it had

a system of Indian control that was strict without being, as similar systems have been since and recently, either inhumane or a joke. It had churches and a school; overland communication with Eastern Canada; and water communication and trade with the Pacific Coast, England and the Orient.

These things belonged, as assets, to the British Hudson's Bay Company; but starting and running them was entirely a one-man job. The man was the company's chief factor for the territory—a Canadian-born Scotch-Irishman married to a Cherokee squaw. His name was John McLoughlin. Trained and educated as a physician, following the profession of fur-trader, he had a genius for out-country development and government that fell below Cecil Rhodes's mark only because of a few accidental differences in character and luck. McLoughlin despised sharp practices, and he had picked Oregon to make his career in instead of South Africa.

Attacks upon his government started early, with the independent American fur-traders who couldn't stand company competition and thought, naturally enough, that it was the duty of the United States government to come out and remove it. The government, more indifferent to its duty to business than than now, didn't do it; and McLoughlin continued to hold the country down and board indigent travelers without any idea, even after the arrival of the Methodist Mission, that half the strangers on his mess-roll were considering plans to take his satrapy away from him, and put him out in the road; which, in the end, was about what they did.

The first direct attack against his authority in the land came from the preachers whom the Methodist Mission shipped out to Oregon in 1835 to deliver the gospel to the thirsting redskins. The purpose of

their attack was not greed, but anxiety lest the Mission Board should call them in from their jobs, at which they hadn't converted the expected flocks of redskins, or even any redskins at all, though they had bled the Mission of a great deal of money for the work.

The leader of the apostles was as remarkable a man as McLoughlin—less able, perhaps, but of an energy and resource that, nowadays, would probably be turned to reclaiming denatured alcohol in Chicago and making a million dollars a month. The Rev. Jason Lee was his name; and, besides evangelizing the heathen, which he had about as much business at as trying to command a battleship, he was a member of the United States Secret Service, and under suspicion of buying colonists for Oregon at \$50 a head and board out of the Federal privy purse. Intrigue he loved like a medieval pope; he played at it with ferocious relish, and showed a truly popish bunglesomeness at getting caught at it. On halfway decent ground—medieval Italy, perhaps, or modern Virginia—an ecclesiastic of a third of his talent might have laid down the law to a hemisphere. In Oregon he could only try.

The kind of stab he made showed how his imagination worked. The Mission's finance board complained that it had blown in a lot of money on Oregon, and that there were no Wesleyan Indians to show for it. To round up a bunch, all in a hurry, was impossible, for they were not only perverse and stubborn, but actually dangerous, and one missionary at a Columbia river station had been compelled to sit up all night with a shotgun to keep them from walking in and stealing all his Winter underclothes. In Indians, plainly, the Mission was not going to pay its way.

They must find something else to balance the books with, and find it quick.

What they did, ignoring McLoughlin's actual sovereignty over the territory and everything in it, was to get up a government of their own, with a home-made constitution awarding general control and 22,000 acres of first-class farming land to the Methodist Mission, and to get the whole code voted in by a packed citizens' meeting called for the published purpose of offering a bounty on timber-wolves and appointing a trusteeship for a dead settler's estate.

It was a stately stratagem. As law, for the settlers who didn't like McLoughlin because he expected them to pay for their groceries at the company store, it more or less worked, though there was considerable indignation outside of sanctified circles about the 22,000 acres of land, which seemed about the only part of the code that the framers had taken any pains with. Still, even the kicks showed that it was regarded as valid and binding, and the missionary band had every reason to feel that, whether the Indians learned hymns or cusswords, they had at last pulled off something worth taking back East to show off.

But, instead of cinching all their careers, it simply stopped them all in their tracks. The Eastern finance board of the Mission refused to see Oregon real estate as a substitute for salvation-shouting savages. The Rev. Mr. Lee was pulled off his job, and went to Canada to die without ever again laying eyes on the country on which he had spent the best years and thought of his life; and the entire mission was called in four years later, with nothing to show for its work except the assurance of having wasted a whole lot more money than the job was worth.

## III

As the Rev. Jason Lee departed for good, the 1843 emigration came in; and the missionaries had not yet got their walking-papers when one of the newcomers, a surveyor and cattleman of thirty-two named Jesse Applegate, stepped ahead of the others into a leadership of the same kind that had broken Lee, that was about to flatten McLoughlin into obscurity, and that, in the end, was to break Applegate himself in the successive careers of commander, lawmaker, statesman-diplomat, and man of property. Each of them he played at superbly, and quit only when the drift of Oregon had taken it out from under him; and he ended, not merely in obscurity, but in humiliation and poverty, herding sheep for wages, although he had never failed in a single one of all his undertakings. In the writing which he turned to in his old age, he speculated about that more than anything else, and, entirely without bitterness, blamed everything on himself for having come out to Oregon in the first place.

There was plenty to blame. Applegate left Missouri at thirty-two, the owner of one of the best stock-farms in the State, the friend of all the first-class men in it, and the admitted equal of any of them. Thomas H. Benton, the great Missouri Senator, was one of his patrons; Edward Bates, Attorney-General in Lincoln's Cabinet, was another; and, if he had cut loose from them and everybody else, and merely run his ranch, he would have come out as one of the wealthiest men in the State. He brought to the 1843 emigration the biggest herd of cattle in it. It was partly on account of that contribution that the pioneers elected him to command over themselves and all their property.

Not entirely, of course. Property alone didn't mean ability with those men. A man had to show more, and Applegate had more to show. He knew the West better, for he had spent most of his youth finding out about it from trappers and plainsmen; he had a clear idea what they were starting out to do, and how to direct the job of doing it; and, lastly, he was the best read man in the emigrant column. Self-educated, as all of them were, he had read all of English literature, history, military strategy and campaigns, and books on law and theory of government; he had taught himself surveying, kept up with the sciences, especially mathematics, and had read Latin poetry and history.

Probably, as some of the 1843 memoirs observe, Applegate was not the strongest man they had. But none of them ever denied that he was the ablest, or alleged that a stronger man could have run things better. He landed the train—60 wagons, 1000 people, 5000 cattle and horses—at Waiilatpu in the basin of the mid-Columbia with fewer casualties than the same *manada* would sustain today covering the same ground in automobiles. No other train, in all the subsequent emigrations, came through so well, or with so little hardship and loss.

It was not luck; but part of the success was due to the intelligence of the men Applegate commanded, and he made the mistake of supposing that all the emigrants would grade as high. The hard point of his own trail had been crossing the Cascade Mountains. He himself had a son drowned shooting the gorge of the Columbia river to get round them; and he decided to save the later trains that danger by finding them a line in from the plateau of the Great Basin, to hit the Cascades from high ground in the South through

Nevada. He lined the new route himself, headed off the 1845 pilgrims, and explained to them that, with an early start and a little work grading out a roadbed, Oregon was in their laps.

The emigrants believed his promises without paying the smallest attention to any of his conditions. They didn't take an early start; storms caught them in the mountains, and they made things worse by refusing to blister their hands grading out roads. Most of their wagons stuck and had to be abandoned; most of their stock got lost; several people died, and the rest were helped into the Coast country starved, naked, mad, scared half to death, and bellowing in unison that Applegate had tried to murder them all for plain meanness.

In the end, of course, their scare wore off, and they took to bragging about their hardships instead of roaring against the man they blamed for them. They had roared enough, however, to teach Applegate something about the nature of second-run emigrants, who, coming from the crowded sections of the East, were only too apt to let wild country stampede them out of what little sense they had to start with. Pioneer trains of this cut kept rolling in, but he never tried to guide or advise any more of them. Instead, he went back to his own 1843 men, who, still in the majority, needed him to draft a new code of laws for the territory.

The appointment was an honor, but the job was not one to build up fat on. The law had to be strict and workable, or it would be useless; if it were too strict, the settlers would refuse to vote it; and it had to bear with the most exact equality on the different factions in the country, or each would swear the others were being favored, and the meeting would simply break up in

a row. Most particularly, it must offer partnership and fair treatment to the Hudson's Bay Company British, and do it against the opposition of the settlers, who longed to show those slaves of tyranny that the eagle which soared over Lexington and New Orleans could peck as hard on the Pacific Coast as on the Atlantic.

It was a fine, old-fashioned sentiment, and Applegate may have felt a touch of the spirit himself. The catch about it was that a law framed to shout patriotism wouldn't do anything else. The British, by ignoring it, would turn it into a joke, as the missionary code had become almost as soon as it was passed. Getting rid of the lime-juicers was a good deed, but it was one that no law could perform. They were too powerful. The way to move them was not to legislate them out, but to overcrowd and swamp them with settlers, which an American-run government would be sure to bring in.

With that for his mark, Applegate wrote his code, standing off his own men with one hand while he baited and beamed upon the British, and keeping both sides friendly by cutting up the old missionary code into hunks for them to play with. The 22,000 acres of church-land went back into public ownership, subject to entry; the ecclesiastical systems of administration and finance passed, with the schemes of Christianizing the Indians, into history. As a confidence-builder, that worked. The settlers voted the Applegate laws through at a general election, and the land, though it may have lost some of its name for piety, had peace.

It had also no more use for Applegate's experience as a lawmaker. There was another constitution to draw up, when the country was admitted to the Union a few years later; but by then the Territory had

filled up with settlers of the new strain, the 1843 men were in the minority, and the late arrivals preferred to take their law from some more tested source than merely the authority of a leader. The source they used was a copy of the statutes of Iowa, which seemed to fill the bill very well, as it still does.

#### IV

Applegate, however, had not waited around for new employment. As soon as his provisional code was voted through, he began his work of persuading the Hudson's Bay British to accept it. An appointment as negotiator was not necessary. It was something that had to be done, and none of the other settlers stood well enough with the company men to do it. Even with Applegate's handling, it took management and time to bring them in, and the actual signing was finished by the company officials only a few days ahead of the arrival from England of two military agents sent to report upon the possibility of defending the country through the British possessions in Canada.

McLoughlin, the real beginner of Oregon, did not follow his company when it withdrew from American territory. He had started with the country, and he preferred to stay and see it through. He resigned his post, took out naturalization papers, and spent his last years running a store and answering attacks on his character and the validity of his homestead entry, which the men of the Methodist Mission had been far-sighted enough to plot against even in the days when he was saving some of its preachers from starving to death.

By 1849 Applegate's last throw in public life had ended. He had made a success of

every job the country offered him to do, and it didn't need him any longer.

About the only thing it did need, as far as anybody could judge, was an endowment. Stampedes of emigration had sunk it to the hubs; overpopulation and overproduction without a market were choking it to death. Every man who hit the country lit in to raise grain, food and beef; and there was nobody to sell them to. Crops rotted on the ground, fruit on the trees. Cattle were not even worth herding, and were turned loose to run wild in the mountains until, becoming a menace, they had to be hunted out and exterminated like wolves. A man needed only a rifle and a gunnysack to board himself in luxury. Nobody spent any money, for nobody had any to spend. Note-shavers and cattle speculators had starved out, the preachers of the Methodist Mission had been called home; and, for a man who could stand buckskin pants and home-grown tobacco, life in Oregon was better than anywhere else in the world. It was exactly the kind of place that Applegate and his 1843 train had pointed West to find.

It was no fault of theirs that it didn't stay that way. What set it back on a cash basis was the gold strike in California. The miners had to eat; Oregon was the closest—and, except Chile, the only—market; and prices rode the tail of the Sacramento kite to altitudes that a farmer now would burn at the ears to dream of. Laborers got \$16 a day; flour was \$1.10 a pound; wheat \$5 a bushel; apples as high as \$1 apiece; butter \$1.25 a pound; beef \$25 a hundredweight in the pasture, with hoofs and horns on. The country began once more to be the kind of money-maker it had become under the control of the Hudson's Bay Company, and its public offices began once more to amount to something.

But the new times had brought in a new way of picking men to fill them, and under it, men of Applegate's ability became ineligible. All the settlers with any get-up jumped in to turn the price-boom into money, leaving politics and elections to the more sluggish-witted who couldn't keep up anywhere else. Only one first-class man—J. W. Nesmith, from the 1843 train—held public office in the next thirty years. He was the greatest United States Senator Oregon ever had, and one of the greatest the Senate ever saw; and he was beaten, after one term, by a good old standard-gauge nincompoop who could be trusted to vote with the boys and not make speeches about anything more dangerous than Western scenery.

Applegate himself escaped the voters' judgment by not giving them a chance at him. He was too thin-skinned to risk the kind of pelting a public election would let him in for, too confident, then and always, of his own ability to go peddling it around among the kind of voters Oregon was filling up with, and too touchy and high-tempered to accept a rigged election and pay for it with instalments of legislation afterward. Thus, according to the evidence of witnesses, he turned down a United States Senatorship, offered him if he would agree to boost for an appropriation to pay back the ever-aspiring Methodist Mission for certain lands in Oregon which it had abandoned in 1847.

Refusing did neither the State nor Applegate any good. The Mission got its money on a second-choice candidate whose ambitions were more practical and less uppity; and Applegate came in, in the end, for exactly the kind of scolding he had kept out of political campaigns to avoid. The reason was that the cattle business, from which he was getting rich, was not

enough to exercise his mind on. It paid plenty. The gold strikes, the Civil War, the Indian campaigns, combined to boost the price of beef until it seemed as if it never could sag. Applegate made it fast and used it grandly, which, to a man of his life and training, was the only excuse for having it. He financed friends in the cattle business, and went surety for a young man who had started a fine public career by getting elected State secretary. He fed and slept visitors by the wagonload; and for them, and for his books of Latin poetry and science and history, he built himself a ranch-house which the people of the Yoncalla valley still tell about—the loopholed arsenal, the study, the big drawing-room panelled in cedar between full-length mirrors—although the place burned to a pile of rubbish fifty years ago.

Applegate's authority upon affairs of state went earlier than that. A cattle-ranch in Southwest Oregon was a perfect place to entertain travelers of fame and learning; but it was no location, in the sixties, from which to keep track of national business. That was what Applegate tried to do, at first with some success—as when he rigged the nomination of Abraham Lincoln over William H. Seward in 1860—but he was gradually replacing real knowledge with long-range guesswork without knowing that any substitution was going on.

The show-up came when the Hon. Schuyler Colfax, famous both as Vice-President of the United States and as the owner of a lot of *Crédit Mobilier* stock that seemed to have got into his satchel by mistake, stopped off at Yoncalla for a visit and asked his host to send in some suggestions on reconstruction in the South. Applegate exposed his ignorance cruelly. He made it public that he was proud of Colfax's visit and request—which was as if

John Adams should gloat over a Christmas card from Albert B. Fall—and he composed and had printed a series of letters to the administration which innocently took it for granted that Thaddeus Stevens and B. F. Butler hankered to treat the South honestly!

Even for a man of his record, that was too much. Oregon's remoteness had beaten him out of even giving opinions on the public events it had forced him to give up handling. He never tried the Colonel House business again; even when Grant's administration offered him a chance to serve as a peace commissioner with the Modoc Indians, he refused. National affairs he had been flattered, through ignorance, into tackling; but those Modocs were a subject he knew. All were renegades; the leader was under indictment for murder, and the second in command a prostitute squaw from Northern California, getting even for a good-morals wave that had ruined her business. An embassy to that gang was ridiculous even if it succeeded, and even though it was being plugged for in the East by the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher and his disciples, who, during Grant's administration, could find nothing to be indignant about except a very small tribe of unsanitary Siwashes three thousand miles away. To a man who knew the ground, the canonization these divines offered was no temptation. And no regret, either; for, of the embassy that did fall for it, two were killed, one got away by running, and one was knocked out and half-scalped alive.

That, though it was not much to have missed, was the last gift Applegate's country ever offered him. If it hadn't offered him that one, he would have been as well off; and, if it had never again noticed his existence, it would have been a whole lot

better. Power, fame, and even influence were gone; but there was still another layer to peel off, and, acting officially, the State of Oregon peeled it. The boom in the cattle business was flattening out. The friends he had staked in it flattened out too, and went into retirement on his money, which he was too proud to dun them for until they had got out of reach. Lastly, the promising young man whose political career he had stood good for decided to quit politics, and did so, taking along all the public funds he could find loose; and the State cinched down on Applegate as his bondsman.

Oregon might possibly have managed to stand the loss without going completely broke. Applegate couldn't. He turned over, not only all his own property, but all his wife's with it—every hoof, acre, nickel, and nail—and, totally destitute for the first time in his life, went out and hunted up a job, at past sixty years old, working for wages as a shepherd on the Klamath Falls range. He and his men had cleaned the British and the missionaries out of the country. It was not human hoggishness, probably, but merely anxiety to make an artistic finish, that made the new men in the country attend so thoroughly to the job of cleaning him out too.

But even their thoroughness couldn't make him slump into nonentity as the men before him had done. He was poorer than his work had left any of them, and harder-worked; but he was the farthest of all of them from letting a turn of luck do him in. Bankruptcy was rather a way of setting him back into the life he had fixed for himself when he first threw in with the pioneers—that of trying new trades to see what they were like and whether he could learn them. Now he set himself to learn another. He became a poet.

That, by itself, would not have been unusual. What made it so was the kind of poetry he wrote. It was neither tags for valentines nor descriptions of scenery. Most of it was not even in verse, and escapes the label of prose only because the man's thought and instinct made poetry of everything he wrote.

His subject was, through all of his writing, the pioneers. The job he set himself was not to do any hymn-shouting or yarn-spinning, but to explain them and their function, and to size up what both amounted to in relation to the balance of humanity and the world. A letter written when he was sixty-three, to be read before the Pioneers' Association, shows how he went at it:

When the world is ready for a physical advance, the agent is found to carry it into effect; and though the physical forces have existed through all time precisely as they exist today, they remain hidden in the womb of nature until a knowledge of them is a necessity. . . . So it is with the race of pioneers. We were in our day precisely adapted, mentally and physically, to perform the part assigned us in the march of civilization, and no matter what our individual motives, we have as a class well executed the purpose of our creation. But, like the scythe, the sickle and the shovel-plow—the best of tools among the roots and stumps of a new land—we will be thrown aside and forgotten now our work is done. . . . I claim no higher motive for coming here than inherent restlessness; so far from being proud of the years I have been in this country, I am ashamed to remember how insufficient were the reasons upon which I acted in coming at all. . . .

One wonders how the 1874 orator of the day got his declamation by with the crowd that had listened to that. Without any trouble, probably. They usually waited out the early part of the programme around the whiskey barrel in the brush.

## V

Even his accounts of the great days carry an undertone of sadness that makes them sound almost like an elegy. The pioneers' work would be fed on by generations; they themselves would not even have the run of their own.

Yet he was happy in his writing. My mother remembers how, almost in the last year of his life, he came visiting the farm where she lived, walking in the middle of the road and studying over paragraphs of his book as if he had picked that style of travel as a way of prodding his imagination. His eyes were extraordinarily bright and wide-open; and that and his reticence about the book he was working on made him, at seventy-five, seem like a youngster of twenty learning to write poetry on the sly. Not that he lacked confidence in his writing. He never lacked that, in himself or in anything he ever did; but he didn't like to discuss his writing with people who, he felt, asked about it merely to be polite.

What he did like was to tell satirical stories. One was about a tribe of Indians in Southwest Oregon who claimed for their god a pocky-looking boulder about as big as a man's head in one of Applegate's fields. None of the Indians ever paid the slightest attention to the thing, which was probably some kind of meteorite, until, long after Applegate had lost his land, and the tribe, with epidemics, casualties and trade whiskey, had dwindled to exactly three Indians, a party of scientists came across the neglected shrine and decided, both on account of its godhead and because the boulder looked geologically interesting, to freight it to a museum. Then piety revived. The three Indians came, bawling and blubbing, to beg Applegate not to let the boulder be moved.

He promised to do what he could; but, he asked, what was their objection? Wasn't God upon the museum just the same as on the land?

The weeping three replied that He was not. Transportation, according to all their best revelations, would hop Him to a perfect frenzy of spite. He would be mad and mean, and He would take it out on their tribe by shellacking it with some terrible vengeance, they didn't know exactly what. Three rickety Indians, blubbering to maintain God's favor over a tribe that He had already plastered with every plague and every calamity that a people could possibly be hit with. To their relief, the scientists promised to let the boulder alone; and they tottered back up the creek to drudge out a living tanning deer-hides and peddling blackberries, beaming with pleasure at having looked out for a divinity that hadn't looked out for them.

Applegate died in 1888, on his son's farm in the Yoncalla valley. His death was one that any man might envy. His book suited him; he was lying down in the evening, resting and laughing with his son at one of his own stories, when his heart stopped. The godly of the State, remembering how many times he had crossed the preachers, straightway filled the air with the usual stories about his deathbed repentance and his desperate last-breath supplications for grace at the Throne. It was a satisfaction to them, and it did no harm to him. Even living, he would not have minded them. The pioneers had scattered and gone downhill so much that for their captain to beg divine favor would have been like the three old Indians weeping for help to stand off a celestial retribution that had already wiped them from the earth.

## VI

Tallying up, one is apt to blame Applegate's unfinished callings on his own restlessness and impracticality. He himself did. And yet, outside of that self-judgment are all the other men who helped bring Oregon from heathendom to Hoover. Not one of them came off better, and most of them did worse. They died, either early and violently, or else late, out of work, and totally forgotten.

McLoughlin and the preachers are only a middle-cut from the chronicle. Of the first overland explorers, Meriwether Lewis committed suicide, and William Clarke ended as a political hack-horse in Ohio. Hall J. Kelley, who wrote the first book on Oregon, left after one year of living there, and died a hermit in New England. John C. Frémont, who first mapped it, blew up in the Civil War and lived on thirty years more, unnoticed. The first Governor, General Joseph Lane, died broken-hearted after having been beaten for the State Legislature.

The score is too long to list more than the high spots. Marcus Whitman was butchered by the Indians of his curacy; the redskins also killed the first secretary of the State government, and the succeeding two were drowned in the Clackamas river. David Douglas, the first botanist of the region, was gored to death melodramatically by a bull.

Modern times run as religiously to form. The inventor of the initiative and referendum, Jonathan Bourne, was about the last. He was beaten for Senator in 1912 by a lumber millionaire, and left the country for good.

Since then nobody has ventured.

## EDITORIALS

### *The Passing of a Hero*

To believe in such world-savers as Dr. Hoover seems to require a special type of mind—roughly speaking, the same sort that it takes to believe that Sacco and Vanzetti had a fair trial. Such a mind rejects the ordinary laws of evidence, and proceeds by logical landmarks hidden from normal eyes.

There was, in point of fact, nothing whatever in the early career of Dr. Hoover to indicate that he would make a competent President of the United States, and there was precious little more in his operations as an aide to Harding and Coolidge. He was, early in life, a go-getter of a very familiar type—eager for the main chance, not overly finicky, more successful than most, but far less successful than some. In Belgium he performed a job that any railway freight agent might have done quite as well, given the same free hand and the same friendly gallery. As Food Administrator he seldom departed from the obvious, and when he did he commonly came to grief. In the Cabinet he divided his time between teaching business men what every boy of ten should know, and inhaling the fragrance of Fall and company. To this day he has never uttered a word against the gross crimes and corruptions of these colleagues, just as he has never uttered a word against the obscene operations of the Ku Kluxers who made him President. For all anyone knows to the contrary, he may regard Fall as a martyr to this day, and Tom Heflin as a prophet.

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Having little apparent capacity for making friends, he is getting small sympathy in his present melodramatic failure. Even those who were but lately hailing him as a messiah seem to regard complacently his writhings upon his brummagem cross. In this there is some injustice, or, perhaps more accurately, an excess of justice. For the learned gentleman's troubles are all due to weaknesses rather than to sins, and in that department we are all so vulnerable that it is imprudent for us to withhold mercy. The chief of these weaknesses is timorousness. He is fundamentally a very nervous and skittish man, and so he has never got past the first page of the political primer, which teaches that durable success goes only to the bold. It would be hard to imagine anything more faint-hearted and preposterous than his dealings with Prohibition. He feared the subject, and tried to avoid it. But avoiding it was quite as impossible as avoiding a mad bull, and so he was forced into grips with it at last under great disadvantages, and came out of the encounter sadly damaged. A bolder man would have tackled it resolutely, taking either one line or the other, and holding the advantage of the offensive. But Dr. Hoover sought refuge in weasel words, and they failed him just as sadly as they have failed every other man (I except, of course, Dr. Coolidge: the great exception to all rules, perhaps the one authentic miracle since Apostolic times) who has put trust in them.

Such timid fellows always break out, now and then, into an uneasy and ludicrous bellicosity. It never deceives anyone,