

DAVID WHITNEY PIONEER SOLDIER SUCCESSFUL FARMER

Descendant of a Long Line of Energetic Men and Women Scaffs at a Gloomy Prophet and Makes His Way Out West to Many Adventures and an Old Age of Peace and Plenty

OLD "UNCLE" ELIPHALET POTTS, back in Massachusetts, shook his white head slowly and frowned when he heard that the Whitney boys and their father were going away out to the wilds of Wisconsin. That was back in 1843. As he sat in his accustomed place in the corner store at Stow, Mass., he delivered himself of wisdom thus, after his accustomed manner:

"There ain't going to no good come to folks that bean't satisfied to stay where the Lord put 'em. I was born here and I stayed here all my life and here I be waitin' for the Lord to call me hum."

It was true Eliphalet had stayed there all his life and there he was. But beyond that nothing much could be said in his favor. He had been one of the most rampant opposers to the railroad. He had pointed out that when the steam cars were started it would put all the horses out of business, to say nothing of the keepers of taverns along the high road. Eliphalet was a conservative of the hardest shell.

The "Whitney boys," of whom he prophesied such a dire future, were the rising generation of a family which has achieved much all over the world and which at that time had been a leading one in New England affairs for two centuries. In spite of "Uncle" Eliphalet's calamitous croaking, the Whitney boys went west in 1843, going by rail from Springfield, Mass., to Albany, N. Y., thence by canal boat to Buffalo and there on a "propeller," one of the first steamboats in use, to Southport, Wis., on the west shore of Lake Michigan, where their father had taken up 400 acres of government land.

Today one of the Whitney boys, David Whitney, is a citizen of Omaha. He came here in 1856 and has lived here continuously since then. But between the time he left his New England home and the time he settled in Omaha he went through one of the fiercest and at the same time most picturesque conflicts in the history of the world, the Mexican war.

Descendant of the Nomans

The ancestral tree of the Whitney family is exceedingly interesting. It possesses that absorbing fascination that comes from an association with great names, a participation in the brilliant scenes and historic events of the centuries that are gone. Mr. Whitney of Omaha traces his descent from Eustace Whitney, who went to England with William the Conqueror in 1066 and was granted lands in Herefordshire. He was the ancestor of a long line of knights who were distinguished in the wars against the Scotch and the French and in the War of the Roses. Sir Eustace de Whitney was born in 1280; Sir Eustace Whitney, his son, was a member of Parliament in 1323; then came Sir Robert Whitney, member of Parliament in 1377; his son, Sir Robert, was knight marshal to King Richard II; Robert Whitney was sheriff of Gloucester in 1527; John Whitney lived in London and emigrated to the United States in 1635, settling at Watertown, Mass.; Moses Whitney was a soldier in King Philip's war in 1652; then came successively Abraham Whitney, 1692; Abraham Whitney, 1724; Captain Abraham Whitney, a soldier in Washington's army, born 1782; Jonathan Whitney, born 1797, and then the generation to which David Whitney of Omaha belongs.

Upon the maternal side the family has made all kinds of noble alliances. The wise men who trace lineages say the Whitneys are connected in maternal line with such sovereigns as William the Conqueror, Henry I, Henry II, King John, Henry III, Edward I, Edward II, Edward III, Malcolm III of Scotland, Ferdinand III of Castile, Robert, the pious king of France, and others. Upon this list, however, Mr. Whitney looks through smoked glasses, and while he has no objection to receiving the glittering array of crowned heads into the family, he regards his claim to this distinction conservatively.

April 5, 1827, was the date of David Whitney's birth and Litchfield, N. H., was the place. It was in the heart of the conservative district, where there are few human rolling stones and where nearly everybody seems to gather moss throughout a long lifetime. But the Whitneys began to migrate early, for when David was still a small child they moved to Stow, Mass., a town formerly owned by their ancestors. There the father opened a general store and prospered. It was that the panic of '37 and he found himself penniless. Then it was that he went to the far west and soon thereafter the Whitney boys followed him, in spite of the dire prophecy of "Uncle" Eliphalet Potts.

In the Mexican War

Four years passed in the wilderness. Then the Whitney boys did something that would have caused old "Uncle" Eliphalet, back in Massachusetts, to open his eyes still wider and shake his head still harder. They enlisted for the Mexican war. The manner of it is related by Mr. Whitney, whose memory is as good as though events of 1847 had happened yesterday.

"A neighbor of ours named Holmes became discouraged, having lost his wheat crop, and, meeting my elder brother one day, said he would enlist if he could get someone to go with him," says Mr. Whitney. "My brother discussed it with father and father, believing the war was nearly over and that we would come in for a land warrant by enlisting, consented to our going. We left home one Friday evening, striking across the prairie northeast for Milwaukee. The three of us walked through the night and at 9 o'clock next morning arrived at the existing place where, after the usual examination, we were all accepted. The company was nearly complete and the next morning we were aboard a ship and started on our way to the far-away battlefields. Hardly were we off when this man Holmes began to get moody. He was naturally of a saturnine temperament. I remember he said that he would have been all right had we enlisted for only five years. But we had enlisted 'for the war,' and he thought the war would drag on for fifteen or twenty years. Poor fellow, he never got entirely over his gloom and died finally in Mexico.

"The boat carried us as far as Toledo. There we took train and went to Cincinnati, where we secured our arms and equipment. Then we embarked on a river boat and floated down to New Orleans, where we were all loaded on an ancient sailing ship which had been condemned for passengers but was considered good enough for soldiers. The trip to Vera Cruz, Mexico, took eleven days. That city had been invested by General Scott, who had moved on inland toward the City of Mexico with his troops and was camped at Puebla, about 150 miles away."

Marching in the Tropics

After camping at Vera Cruz five days the regiment in which Mr. Whitney and his brother were began its march inland to re-enforce Scott and participate in the great campaign whose object was the capture of Mexico City. The line of march lay along a narrow road bordered on each side by the thick vegetation of the tropics. The sun beat down from directly overhead with all its torridity. The American soldiers were heavily loaded with guns, ammunition, blankets and knapsacks. They had not gone far before some of the soldiers began throwing their blankets aside. But these were forced to go back and take them up again. Within a few days they had begun to ascend the Cordilleras, a high range of mountains, and with the increased altitude the temperature fell until the soldiers could hardly keep warm at night even in their blankets. Nearly two weeks were required to make the march to Puebla. But they were two weeks full of wonder. The historic interest alone was great in that country, the home of the Aztecs, that unchanging race which sits today, idly, dreamily, languidly, generation after generation and watches the pageant of pomp and power, the rise and fall of struggling peoples, of ambitious men, and seems to say, "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity. What's the use of struggling. Live, eat, sleep, die. That is the best plan to be happy." Over this same road Cortez had led his invincibles of Spain 100 years before and conquered the ancestors of those same Aztecs who now watched in idle wonder the advance of the American army.

The city of Puebla itself was set in a position unique in all the world. A plateau 7,000 feet above sea level is the site of this beautiful "City of Angels," so beautiful as to be fit, in hot imagination at



DAVID WHITNEY.

least, for celestial inhabitants. So high is the plateau that corn, wheat, barley and other products of the northern zones flourish there. Around it all is the sublime range of the Cordilleras. Only six miles from Puebla were the ruins of the ancient city of Cholula, once filled with the seething life of 200,000 inhabitants, now lying silent as the tomb in the white heat of the sun. After camping in Puebla several days General Pillow proceeded toward the valley in which the City of Mexico is situated, there to join with General Scott in the final blow which it was hoped would result in the fall of the capital.

"We left Puebla," says Mr. Whitney, "on August 10. The marching was rough a great part of the way. The country was barren, with nothing in it but rocks and cactus. And then suddenly one day we topped an eminence and came in sight of the great valley of Mexico, with the beautiful city in the center of it, like a diamond in the middle of a sheet of green velvet. The city was surrounded by diverging shady paseos, bright fields and picturesque haciendas. The great lake Texcoco lay immediately beyond the city, shaded by a floating cloud which concealed the bases of the volcanoes, Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl, while their snowy summits glowed brightly above in the sun. It was a magnificent sight, but it also marked the place where strong fortifications were to be stormed and where the enemy, almost four times our own number, lay behind intrenchments ready to mow us down and seemingly able to do it."

Mexico City is built in the midst of this spacious valley in a site which is low and which is approached in all directions by great causeways. These causeways were the key to the city, particularly the one from the south. There it was on August 20 that the series of five battles occurred. In each case the Mexicans were strongly intrenched; in each case they outnumbered the Americans, yet in each case the Americans were gloriously victorious. In two of the worst of those battles David Whitney was engaged, Contreras and Churubusco.

Capture of Contreras

"We were very doubtful about Contreras," he says. "Everything seemed against us. The Mexicans were strongly intrenched on the heights and General Santa Ana had put so many men there that he thought there could be no chance for us to gain the position. It rained hard the night before. The ground over which we stumbled was covered with rocks, prickly pear and cactus; there were ditches filled with water and lined with the maguey plant. But this only seemed to make us the more anxious to do something and when the signal was finally given at 6 o'clock in the morning we sprang up the heights in the rear and on the flank of the astonished Mexicans. And they, terrified like the Philistines when Jonathan and his armor-

bearer put them to flight, ran pell mell toward the city. The actual fight lasted only seventeen minutes and put us in possession of their position."

The next fight of the busy day was at Churubusco, a fortress standing at one end of a bridge in the causeway leading to the city. This was built of stone. Within the main wall was a castle and back of the castle a church rising to a great height. Early in this engagement David missed his brother from his side where he usually stayed even in battle. He found him shot through the knee. After Churubusco had been taken there was a call for some to remain behind and help the surgeons and hospital corps. David returned, therefore, and attended his brother. He was taken to a hospital and after the city was taken was removed thither. But he died soon after this removal, the ride over rough roads in a springless wagon being apparently too much for him. After this David fell sick with fever and was in the hospital for a number of weeks. When he recovered he was engaged for a time in skirmishes with the guerrillas.

Home from the War

When peace was finally declared he went back with his regiment, walking from Mexico City to Vera Cruz, where they took a steamer, reaching New Orleans in four days; thence they came up the river by steamboat and landed at Cincinnati, and thence went home by the same route by which he and his two companions had come out. He was the only one of the three to return. "I was as yellow as a saffron bag," he says.

His father died soon after his return, the loss of his son in the war apparently doing much toward causing his death. David worked for a time with a threshing machine. Then he utilized the land warrant which, as a soldier in the Mexican war, he had received from the government, and took up land near Appleton, Wis. He built a house in the town and lived there six years. Then two other families in the town decided to try their fortunes in the new commonwealth of Nebraska, which had just been opened for settlement. David determined to join them. He left his wife and children snug in their Appleton home and came with the other Appletonians south by boat to Chicago, by rail to St. Louis and then by boat up the river. His friends tarried in Kansas and he came on up to Council Bluffs.

"I stopped the first night at the Pacific house in Council Bluffs," says Mr. Whitney. "I asked the proprietor when I could get over to Omaha. 'The hack goes over in the morning,' he said. The next morning I looked out and saw an old hay rack drawn up before the door. I thought some farmers were going out to haul hay. Just then the proprietor spoke to me. 'Ain't you going to Omaha?' he asked. 'Yes, I'm waiting for the hack,' I said. 'Well, there it is,' he said. So I got on the hay rack and rode over to Omaha. I stopped at the old Douglas house and soon got work chopping wood up north and rafting it down the river. In the fall I returned to Appleton and brought my wife and children out, making the trip in all the cold of that very cold winter and reaching Omaha in January."

Life in Omaha

Mr. Whitney bought a farm which is now comprised between Thirtieth and Thirty-eighth streets and between Farnam and Davenport streets. He lived on this place five years. Then the civil war broke out and he left the farm to become a clerk in the general store operated by "Sam" and "Jim" Megeath on Farnam street, between Thirtieth and Fourteenth streets. This was the beginning of commercial ventures which were at times very profitable and at other times equally disastrous. First he bought a grocery store from a Frenchman. Then he went into partnership with Samuel Megeath in the wholesale grocery business at Fourteenth and Douglas streets under the firm name of Megeath, Whitney & Co. He bought out his partner in 1871 and in 1878 after other changes, he handed over his farm to creditors and retired. Later he was engaged also in the commission business, which he conducted successfully for many years.

He has lived for a number of years now in a handsome home at 5010 Izard street. He was married in Appleton, Wis., July 31, 1851, and Mrs. Whitney is still living and in as good health as her venerable husband. They have had five children, of whom two are still living. They are Burt H. Whitney, broker, who resides next to his parents, and Mrs. Walter G. Clark, who lives with her parents. Mr. Whitney was very ill a dozen years ago and finally in despair decided to live without meat. The result was that he is a hale and hearty and active man, and physicians have told him he has the pulse of a child, though he is more than 80 years old. All of which he attributes to the fact that he uses no meat. He once belonged to the Odd Fellows' lodge and is of the Unitarian faith. Three of his brothers are still living: Jonathan Whitney lives in Pestigo, Wis., and is 83 years old; Andrew Whitney lives in Burlington, Ia., and is 79 years of age, and Edwin lives in Chicago, a mere boy of 77.

If old "Uncle" Eliphalet Potts could see David Whitney today he would be compelled to admit that he has lived a truly broad life full of events, full of strife and action and yet tempered by that philosophy which looks farther than the petty material things of the present day. "I never worshipped money or any of the temporal things of earth. I tried to get them honestly, but failing to get them or losing them after I had succeeded never worried me," says Mr. Whitney, and therein lies perhaps a goodly part of the secret of a long life through many strenuous years.

Volcanic Scenes Rarely Beheld by Human Beings

Mighty Eruptions in Bering Sea Which for Two Years Have Been Making and Destroying New Lands

THE greatest show place in this country in 1906 and last summer was at the southern edge of Bering sea, a little northwest of Unalaska island, where one of the most wonderful volcanic eruptions on record was in progress. Two new islets were lifted above the sea between two old islets, and the outpouring of hot lava continued till they made land all around the four high rocks. The new cones, from 400 to 500 feet high, were steaming like puddings.

It was a wonderful spectacle. A scientific party from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology arrived just in time to see it last summer at its best. In two aspects the scene was one upon which human beings rarely gaze.

The party had reached a place where the earth was alive and lands were in the making. Only sixteen months earlier the water was sixty feet deep between the two outlying rocks, where now was land.

Another aspect of the spectacle was equally impressive. These rocks stood right on the edge of a precipice where the water suddenly deepens to a depth of 6,000 feet. What the explorers saw above the surface was merely the top of an immense conical mass beneath the waves. They saw only the vents or crater openings of a volcano that in course of time had risen from the bottom of the sea to a height of 6,000 feet. This volcano is 2,000 feet higher than Vesuvius or Mont Pelee.

The place was already famous, because when the two outer islets rose above the sea their birth as bits of land was witnessed and recorded. The latest eruption began in 1906, and the technology party was sent out last year to see what was going

on. Prof. T. A. Jagger of Harvard, the geologist of the party, has written an account of the eruption for the Bulletin of the American Geographical society, and the facts given here are from his narrative.

When the Trouble Started

The troubles began 112 years ago. Bogoslof, as the Russians named it, rose above the sea with a turmoil that frightened the folks on Unalaska, forty miles away. It is now known as Castle Rock and is much smaller than formerly.

During the recent eruption it was so bombarded by falling stones and volcanic sand that its pinnacles are much sharper than they were a little over a year ago. Another interesting fact is that the whole island was lifted during eight months of 1906 and 1907 about twenty-five feet higher above the sea than it was before. Prof. Jagger says that this means either that a large mass of lava is spreading sideways below and lifting the volcano on its back, or the whole sea floor is slowly warping upward and carrying the chain of islands with it.

This lonely rock had no companion until 1883. Its fires had left it and it was the home of many sea lions and gulleimots. Then another great convulsion came and a new islet was born about a mile and a half away.

It kept changing its size and shape until it finally became an extinct, flat-topped rock, now known as Grewingk, the name of a Russian geographer. Vessels have long steamed between the two islets and they have commonly been known to mariners as the Bogoslof islands.

Early in 1906 things became lively again, and

when the government steamer Albatross arrived there on May 29 it reported that a new rock had appeared from which immense volumes of steam were escaping through new vents in the mass. It was named Metcalf Cone in honor of the secretary of the navy.

It was ascended later by Robert Dunn in spite of the steam and temperatures up to 212 degrees at the steam vents, and he found it surmounted by a great column of lava that formed a pinnacle whose top was 390 feet above sea level. Prof. Jagger says that it was like the famous tower or spire of Mont Pelee, a mass of lava pushed out in nearly a solid condition so that it could not flow down like the lavas of Hawaii.

Another New Peak

Then in the spring of last year Captain Dirks, a local trader, brought news that a still newer peak had risen beside Metcalf Cone. The cutter McCulloch visited the scene in July and gave the name of McCulloch Peak to the new steaming heap.

It also reported that Metcalf Cone had split in two, half of it collapsing, but the great lava spine was still there and was revealed in all its grandeur from the top to the sea edge. This was the situation when the technology party arrived on August 7.

Great changes were constantly occurring. McCulloch peak was the most sensational object, a steaming heap of lava boulders. Rocks were tumbling, now and then, from the rising cliffs above to the foot slopes. But on the whole, everything was quiet, though dangerous looking.

The steam rose in various places from rifts in

the hot rock of McCulloch peak, and all the water around is turbid and hot.

The remarkable prevalence of life among these scenes astonished the explorers. The hot earth was heaving and heaping, but hundreds of sea lions disported themselves in the waters and lay along the shores of the new lands, and the cliffs were alive with innumerable sea birds that seemed to luxuriate in the volcanic warmth, and even amid the steam and heat and sulphur of McCulloch peak they were laying their eggs in the hollow of the rocks and rearing their chicks. In places even land grasses were beginning to grow, and beetles, mites, ticks and flies were found.

There was another great convulsion after the technology explorers left, and it was destructive rather than constructive. On September 1 the people living on Iliulik saw a dense black cloud rising and the air was full of sulphur fumes. Then volcanic ash and sand began to fall and there were rumblings in distant Bogoslof.

Peak Had Disappeared

When the McCulloch again visited the group in October it found McCulloch peak absolutely gone, a steaming lagoon in its place and the rest of the island that embraced the hills piled high with fallen debris. The half of Metcalf Cone as well as the two other rocks was still standing.

We do not know what has happened since. Perhaps other cones have arisen. It is unfortunate that no observers have been in that neighborhood since October last to study the remarkable processes of volcanoes among these islands. The news that this year will bring from the Bogoslof group will be awaited with interest.