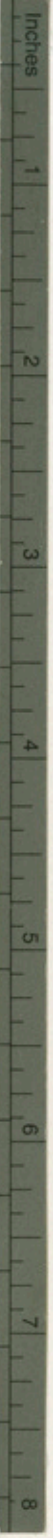


Article

No 1

Subject
A remarkable Pioneer Woman
"Barbara Ann McBees"



Opium

No. 1

*Respectfully,
Wm. A. R. Smith, M.D.
Boston, Mass.*

A remarkable Pioneer-woman.

We read in Holy Writ that "A prophet is not without honor save in his own country." It were well for mankind, if this patent truth were confined to the Prophets. We know that on this Pacific Slope, there is nobody who, all things being considered, is more esteemed than a Pioneer, that is a man of "49" or of previous coming.

I stopped a hale and hearty, active old gentleman this morning and asked him -- "When did you come over land?"

"In 1847, General!"

Now I have known this pioneer for thirteen years. He has himself an extraordinary history. A son of a Jew, his mother a French Catholic, separated from home when a mere child; a sailor, a sporting lad, a trader, a farmer, a janitor, an indian scout and what not, by turns. He has had a variegated experience. His character was long in its forming and much hay and stubble have been mixed in with the stones of the foundation, and gotten between the bricks of the super-structure; but at last it has become established with such renewals as make it strong and sound.

For the last thirteen years he has shown himself a staunch and true follower of Christ, and is bringing up a fine family, with which to bless the world. But it was not of this pioneer exactly, that I wished to write, but of his excellent wife.

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Now I have known this pioneer for thirteen years. He has himself an extraordinary history. A son of a Jew, his mother a French Catholic, separated from home when a mere child; a sailor, a sportsman, a trader, a farmer, a hunter, an Indian scout and what not, by turns. He has had a varied experience. His character was long in its forming and much hay and stubble have been mixed in with the stones of the foundation, and gotten between the bricks of the super-structure; but at last it has become established with such remains as make it strong and sound.

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I put to him this morning a second question: "What was before marriage, your good wife's name?"

"Barbara Ann McBee, Sir."

Now, as it is no more than fair to give a noble woman a chance in History, as Mrs. Holloway has done in her choice book, "The mothers of eminent men" I thought, I would just try and note a few of the incidents and a brief of the life, which this pioneer-woman has rendered remarkable.

The McBee family, of Scotch and German extraction, found its way, like so many others which had caught Horace Greeley's "Westward ho! fever" from Greenville, Ohio to the village of Melville Mo. The father found ill health in the town, so he soon moved to the country near to Melville, taking his family to a farmhouse. It was a Christian family, belonging to the Methodist wing of the Church. Mrs. McBee always had the prophet's chamber, with bed, table, stool and candle ready for the Circuit Minister's use. The old Bible was kept in the living room and free from dust. In it were recorded the names of father, mother and children, but it was not confined to that use, nay, its commandments and the precepts of Christ were taken from it and planted in the mind and heart of each child. The Bible was the word of their counsel and the guide of their life.

Yet somehow, notwithstanding an apparent prosperity, and souls reasonably filled with good things, Mr. McBee was persuaded to move again westward. Eight wagons, such as men of the plains used to call "Prairie Schooners" were put in readiness by Mr. McBee and his

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neighbors, with plenty of oxen or horses to draw them. Into one he loaded his family, consisting of Mrs. McBee and seven children. The eldest, Barbara, was a girl of thirteen; then were three other daughters and three sons. The youngest, ^{of them was} a baby boy, and the next older a little lad of three and a half years. Our friend McBee couldn't have had much property, as he was able to thrust it all, except his oxen and horses, into two wagons. True, with their large bodies and broad canvas tops the wagons might carry considerable bulk; yet it may be remembered that in 1852, when this family set out for Oregon, there were but poor roads over hills and mountains and the journey was too long for heavy draught.

I will not attempt to follow these pioneers as they left their home in Missouri in the month of April, and joined a larger train moving toward the great mountains, which they were destined to cross before the next winter should set in.

They crossed the broad Missouri, just south of the mouth of the Platte. The city, Plattsmouth, has since been planted there and the river spanned by a long bridge. Ascending the Platte Valley for miles to find a place they could ford, they were hardly over the first fork, when poor Mr. McBee was taken ill with an attack of the cholera and died within forty-eight hours after his sickness began. His wife was deeply stricken and terrified. She went on, but soon became ill with a fever, resulting more from a broken heart, than from any other cause. She too, very soon succumbed to the

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fatal combination of grief and disease, and was laid like her husband in the bosom of the boundless prairie.

Barbara now had the care of the little brood. She was an extraordinary child; yet she was but a child. She had been taught morning and night to pray to God in Christ. She says she was converted, when thirteen, (probably early in that year) at a Methodist revival, and after that always felt that her sins were all forgiven and that she could put her whole trust in Christ. There was an uncle and an aunt with a large family of their own in the train; and those who had been neighbors, rough as they appeared in manners and language, were usually kind and helpful to the children. They experienced rains, freshets, cold, snows, hail, wind and storms. They often suffered from want of sufficient clothing and food. Still following old trails and keeping up due activity and diligence, they reached the valley of the Columbia a hundred miles above The Dalles before the close of September 1852.

The beautiful little lad of three years fell sick and died at the "Meadows" not far from the town of Umatilla. Barbara was in great distress at this third trial, and she had to cry out from the depths of her young soul: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him".

Again a few days later, after the wagons had threaded their way over the rugged hills and through the canyons to the Dalles, where there was then a small Steamboat-town, the darling babe, thus far almost miraculously sustained, faded away, and the Lord took him also. Poor, stricken Barbara, how could she bear this? True, she

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was not the mother, but she seemed to combine the mother and sister. Her arms were empty, and she longed to die. Yet God had given her great recuperative power, and there were four more birdlings to nourish and bring up, three sisters and a good brother. The Lord give her strength for this task!

Not long after this, they reached the beautiful Willamet valley and found themselves in the then small city of Portland, Oregon.

Her uncle did not live long and her aunt had more of her own than she could manage to support, so the children, Barbara and the rest were soon scattered.

The daughter, now fourteen could not, as she desired keep them together. She herself fell to a family, Mr. Allen's. He was a blacksmith by trade, but much given to horse-racing and gambling. His wife, however was a good woman and Barbara found here with the Allens, some twelve or fifteen miles back of Portland, a reasonably comfortable home. She did have at odd times now one child and now another with her.

She was at this time a tall girl with a fine figure. Her hair a dark brown that would pass for black, a greek, oval face and a dark full expressive eye. Like the eldest child in large families, who has been obliged early to bear responsibilities, she appeared two years older than she really was.

A young man, F----. by name, straight as an arrow, handsome and strong, full of wit, genial and kind in ordinary moments, but

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A young man, P---, by name, straight as an arrow, handsome
and strong, full of wit, genial and kind in ordinary moments, but

of high temper and fierce enough when roused, sought her hand.

He was with the "Sports" and in fact, at that time, lived almost altogether by gambling. He was young too, not more than twenty-one or twenty-two. Friends, at first interposed, but he loved the girl and manifested it in a manly way. She soon reciprocated his affection and chose to go with him for better or for worse. They were married when she was but fifteen.

The old Bible went with her and has been her companion from that day to this.

For a few years her husband kept a store in Central Oregon, in the neighborhood of Indian tribes, some thirty miles from the nearest white settlement. While there the family experienced all the horrors of two Indian wars. She was often left at home with only her children and Indians for neighbors and companions, while her husband went off on questionable and perilous expeditions, or made his difficult trips to San Francisco for goods and supplies.

Other years she had to endure all the terrors that came from mingling with coarse, rough, drinking gamblers. Sometimes, for a season, the family enjoyed all the luxuries of wealth and then suddenly poverty would come. Her husband passed through so many private battles, where he desperately fought for his life, that his body is now covered from head to foot with deep and ugly scars. Barbara F---. has had eleven children. Eight are living. All these are doing well in life; all honorable and upright. The three young-

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est are still with her.

She carried her husband, by prayer, through untold difficulties and dangers, till his heart was changed from all the waywardness of wrong-doing to the right. She kept such an ascendancy over her sisters and brother, till they were grown up, that they followed her wishes and are to-day an honor to such a sister's care and love. There are in Washington Territory four excellent families which have sprung from this noble stock.

To-day I sat in the home of this Pioneer woman, a home neat and comfortable, adorned with the pictures of the numerous loved ones, of brother, sisters, nephews, nieces, children and grandchildren. Mrs. Barbara F---. has even yet scarcely a trace of gray in her glossy, brown hair. She is still at fifty-two replete with freshness of complexion and womanly beauty, and her face shines with the constant presence of loving thoughts, divinely helped.

Verily, I said, as I sat in her presence, the commandment with a promise is indeed true: "Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

And her children and children's children will rise up to call her blessed. She said: "When wickedness has hemmed me in and seemed to prevail, I often stole away to some sheltered nook in the woods to pray, and I held service always in my heart."

God bless and reward the numerous Pioneer women whom this Godly mother represents!

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