

FREDERICK HOMER BALCH.

The subject of this sketch began life in the little town of Lebanon, Oregon, December 1861.

His mother, Harriet Snider, was a native of Indiana. Left an orphan at an early age she was taken into the home of Dr. and Mrs. Robert Crawford of Decatur County, Indiana, where she received the same loving care as their own children.

In 1848, Mr. and Mrs. Henry, the parents of Mrs. Crawford, took into their home an orphan girl, whose name was Mary Stephenson. She was the same age as Harriet and the girls soon became devoted friends.

In 1852, Dr. Crawford and family and Mr. and Mrs. Henry planned to cross the plains to Oregon. The guardian of Mary Stephenson forbade her going, much to the distress of all concerned, and especially of Mary, who knew no other home. When the day arrived for their departure, the latter part of March, 1852, Mary accompanied them to Madison, Indiana, where the families were to take passage on the steamer for St. Joe. Mary could not reconcile herself to the parting and begged Mr. and Mrs. Henry to take her with them, regardless of what her guardian might do. It was hard to resist her entreaties and they finally consented, and secured her necessary outfit at St. Joe. Mary's work on the way across was to do the cooking for Mr. and Mrs. Henry and drive the loose stock belonging to them. The work of Harriet Snider was driving the loose stock for Dr. Crawford, and thus the two girls were thrown together on their six months' journey across the plains. Their work required constant vigilance but was not especially hard after they became accustomed to the saddle, yet the dust was at times, almost unbearable.

Dr. Crawford was elected captain of the train, which became known as the jolliest crowd on the plains. The cause of such overflowing happiness is explained by the fact that there were about fifty young men, twenty-five young women, several pairs of "newly weds" on their honeymoon trip, a number of ministers with their families, and a large sprinkling of college graduates; and all from the same section of country in Indiana. Reverend Worth conducted a Bible class each evening, songs and games were indulged in, and lectures and readings were frequent. They had no trouble from Indians, but there were twenty-two deaths

from cholera. In June, Dr. Crawford's oldest son, Thomas, was dangerously sick with the disease; the family "laid by" and he recovered. The journey was ended in September, when Dr. Crawford and Mr. Henry located near Brownsville, in Linn County, Oregon.

The first act of Mary Stephenson was to write to her guardian, who, up to the time her letter was received, did not know that she had left Indiana. Young people quickly adapt themselves to new surroundings, and in 1853, Harriet Snider became the bride of young Mr. Gallagher, a pioneer of 1847, Mary Stephenson acting as bridesmaid. In November of the same year, Miss Stephenson married Z. F. Moody¹, a merchant of Brownsville. Mrs. Gallagher's happiness was short lived, for in less than two years she was left a widow, with a tiny daughter to claim her care and love. She later married Benson Helm, son of a well-known pioneer. Mr. and Mrs. Helm made their home at Lebanon and here a son was born to them and was given the name of William Benson Helm. Happiness once more brightened the path of the young mother when death again entered the home and snatched the husband from her side leaving her alone with the two children, Allie and Willie, to care for.

Sorrow left its indelible traces upon her, for she was often referred to at that time as "the woman that never smiled." To support her children she took in boarders. Her foster brother, Thomas Crawford², came to Lebanon to attend school and to relieve her of the heavy work. With his help she solved the problem of supporting her children.

About this time, Milton Wright, her mother's kinsman, was sent as a missionary to Oregon. He had charge of the school started at Sublimity by the United Brethren Church and also of evangelistic work in Marion County. He visited her at Lebanon and did much to comfort her in her trouble and interest her in religious work. Milton Wright returned to the East in the fall of 1858, but the cousins continued to correspond and her interest in religious matters lasted throughout her life.

James A. Balch was born in Sullivan County, Indiana. He graduated at Wabash College and studied law but never applied for admission to the bar. He came to Oregon in 1851 and took up the work of teaching but did not confine himself solely to that

¹ Z. F. Moody was governor of Oregon from September 13, 1882, to January 1, 1887.

² Thomas Henry Crawford was among the earliest graduates of Willamette University. For many years he was a popular and well known educator of Oregon. He died in 1916.

occupation. In 1857, he was located in Silverton, Oregon, proprietor of a "Picture Gallery," where he made daguerreotypes, some of which are still in existence. While at Silverton he boarded with Mrs. P. L. Price who spoke of him as "a great lover of music and a melancholy man." From Silverton he moved his gallery to Brownsville which is near Lebanon. At the latter place he met, wooed and won Mrs. Helm and thus became the stepfather to Allie Gallagher and William Helm.

In the early part of December, 1861, a great flood covered the Willamette Valley, causing much destruction of property. On December 14, as the flood waters were receding, Frederick Homer arrived at the home of his parents, in Lebanon. A long and severe winter followed the flood and much suffering was experienced by the settlers.

With the early days of spring, the unrest and dissensions of the Civil War divided the sparsely settled country into factions. In 1864, James A. Balch enlisted in Company F of the 8th Regiment of the Oregon Volunteers, which was stationed on the frontier. The family remained at Lebanon, the children, Allie and Willie, attending school. Mr. Balch was discharged from service in 1866 and returned to his home.

Mrs. Balch was a constant sufferer from asthma, and a drier climate was thought best, so in 1871 the family moved to a farm near Goldendale in Washington. There were then four children, Gertrude being the baby. To the older children this trip was a delightful experience; down the beautiful Willamette and up the Columbia river, with its waterfalls hung like white ribbons from the mountain side. They were filled with amazement at the sight of the basalt columns of Cape Horn; St. Peter's Dome with its soft and varied colors of green and brown won their admiration, while Castle Rock seemed to them a veritable Giant's Castle. The six mile ride at the Cascades was their first railroad traveling. Then they seemed to have entered a larger world, where everything was on a grander scale, the mountains were higher, the skies more blue and farther away, the horses and cattle grazing on the mountain slopes seemed mere tiny specks in the distance, yet plainly outlined through the transparent atmosphere. To Fred, at least, the journey was a continuous panorama of beautiful scenes which became indelibly fixed upon his growing mind.

The work at the farm may have been laborious but it was healthful and invigorating and was entered into with zeal by the young people. There was a herd of black and white cattle, a large

barn where they were housed and fed, there were horseback rides looking after the cattle, there was planting time and the harvest when the great barn was filled for winter feeding, yet there was one time which was seldom infringed upon, the hours devoted to study. Mr. Balch was an excellent teacher and in lieu of school the children were taught by him at home.

In June, 1873, Herbert joined the family group at the farm near Goldendale and soon became the playmate and constant companion of his sister Gertrude. Allie developed a talent for music and received instruction on the guitar; she later married her music teacher and became Mrs. Richard Condon. William Benson Helm, the elder son, found work elsewhere, married, and founded a home of his own.

Mrs. Balch's health had become much improved, and in 1876 the family moved to a farm in Multnomah County, Oregon, about six miles east of Portland. Fred entered the public school at Mt. Tabor in September, 1876. This was the only school he ever attended. He fitted into the seventh grade work with pupils of his own age. In appearance he was taller than his classmates, slightly stooped, with hands and feet too large for his body. No one would have called him handsome, yet his eyes were clear and steady and sparkled when talking on a subject in which he was interested. He had a lively sense of humor and enjoyed a joke, whether the joke was on himself or on the other party. He was gentlemanly in manners, talked easily, using language free from slang or grammatical errors. To the principal, in their daily walks over Mt. Tabor, to and from school, he spoke freely of his hopes and ambitions for the future, for he was firmly convinced that his life work was to be a writer. His father was working on an invention which Fred fondly hoped would solve their financial difficulties and enable him to have all the books he wanted. He always carried a book in his pocket, and utilized every moment. The book was not about school work nor an amusing story, but the work of some standard author. At the time he was in school, he had read Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Scott's *Lady of the Lake*, some of Shakespeare's plays, some of Macaulay's writings and poems by Longfellow, Bryant, Burns and Moore. He frequently asked advice from the principal about profitable books for him to read and one time inquired what I thought of the merits of David Copperfield, and where it could be obtained.

In his diary written about this time, we read these lines: "To make Oregon as famous as Scott made Scotland; to make the

Cascades as widely known as the Highlands; to make the splendid scenery of the Willamette a back ground for romance full of passion and grandeur, grow more and more into the one cherished ambition of my life."

Much as he loved reading he did not neglect his school work, but he did neglect to take part in the play on the school ground; his schoolmates would call, "Come on Fred, we need you to make the game." He would slip the book in his pocket and go reluctantly to help them out, coming back to his reading at the first opportunity.

He stood high, both in deportment and scholarship in the principal's room where all his study was done and all his recitations except mental arithmetic and grammar were given. As assistant in the school those classes recited to me. In mental arithmetic Fred was perfect, in grammar it was very different. We were using Clark's text book and many diagrams were required; he understood how the work was to be done but considered it a waste of time, and neglected it. I talked with him to find out the trouble, and inquired, "Do you like grammer?" His answer was, "I despise it." I tried to make the study interesting but the weeks slipped by and I saw no improvement in his work. One day when I was trying to impress upon the class the importance of some point, I saw Fred very busy reading from a history, I stopped abruptly and said, "Fred, why do you cheat yourself?" He looked up in confusion, but made no reply. I repeated, "You are cheating yourself and no one else when you take time from the recitation to study something else, why do you do it?" His answer was, "I have no use for grammar." I continued, "You may think so now, but when you are older you will know better, and regret your wasted time, especially if you should ever write for publication." There was a change in the expression on his face, and I was sure that at last I had touched a responsive chord. He closed the book, laid it on the desk in front of him and gave attention to the work in hand, and never again was there any cause for reproof.

He enjoyed the work of committing his thoughts to paper, and unsolicited, handed short articles of prose or poetry of his own composition to the principal for his criticism or approval. He wrote too rapidly to pay any attention to his penmanship, which sometimes became a scrawl. School closed in March, 1877,

and a few months later the family moved back to Eastern Washington where the interesting young student passed from our knowledge, to study the semi-barbarous Indian in his native wilds.

Nine years later when we were living on a farm in Hood River Valley, we passed a pine tree, on which a notice was posted. It read, "Rev. F. H. Balch will lecture in the Hood River School House on the Geology of Eastern Oregon." It did not occur to us that the Rev. F. H. Balch was anyone we knew, and we did not attend the lecture.

The next day a neighbor called, and said, "You missed a great treat in not hearing the lecture. Mr. Balch told us about the geological specimens found by Professor Condon in Eastern Oregon and gave us a lot of information on the geology of this country. He is a good speaker, tall, fine looking, and about forty years old, is a Congregational minister and I think a graduate of some eastern college."

The next day I saw a man approaching the house, there was something familiar in his appearance, but when I met him at the door I failed to recognize anyone I knew, and directed him to Mr. Coon at work in the garden. They returned in a few minutes; but instead of an introduction Mr. Coon said, "So you refuse to recognize your old pupil?" I was puzzled and turned towards the visitor, who said, "I can't understand how you can forget anyone as homely as I am." There was a twinkle in his eyes which I recognized as belonging to the boy, Fred Balch, and thus we renewed the acquaintance of former years, and I learned that Fred, now a minister of the Congregational Church, was in Hood River to organize a church, and if successful to move to Hood River as the pastor.

At the earliest opportunity, after this first conversation, he said to me: "I have something to say to you, something that I have wanted to say for years and feared I should never have the chance. I want to apologize, to ask your forgiveness for the trouble I made you in school." I did not know what he referred to, and said, "I do not understand." "Surely," he exclaimed, "You remember my impudence in the grammar class, when I told you I had no use for grammar!" I recalled the incident and said, "Yes, I remember, but I never thought that you meant to be impudent." "But I was impudent," he said, "and should have been punished." I replied, "If that is the way you feel, I think you have had your punishment already." "Yes," he said, "I have been punished; every time I had to go to my school books for infor-

mation I thought of you and your words, and wondered how young people could be so foolish as to waste their time as I did."

In this incident he revealed a conscience so exacting that the man was impelled to make amends for the mistakes of the boy; he also disclosed courage and humility, traits characteristic of true greatness.

Before speaking of his work in Hood River we must review the nine preceding years which he passed in Klickitat County. For three years the family made their home in Goldendale, which, about that time, became the county seat. Mr. Balch was elected to the office of County Judge and served one term. There is no record of any work done by Fred during these years, but, as he put in his spare time near Mt. Tabor, in plowing and working for his neighbors, so he doubtless found similar work in Goldendale; and he probably found many books in the town that he could borrow, and thus add to his store of knowledge. He was a lover of Nature and must have enjoyed the view of Mt. Adams, as seen from this point. There were also many Indians here whose queer customs, superstitious beliefs and degraded living conditions gave him material for much thought. In the summer of 1880 Gertrude entered the school at Goldendale. She was then nearly eleven years old and this was her first school. That fall they moved to a farm near Lyle, and she entered the school there, and in a contest in spelling, given about a week later, spelled down the entire school, including some young men twenty-one years of age. The school room was crowded with visitors, the County Superintendent from Goldendale being among those who witnessed her triumph.

Not far from the Balch farm, Mr. Jesse Snider, (Mrs. Balch's brother) had located with his family, Mrs. Richard Condon, with her husband and children was also living in this neighborhood, so that this move was in the nature of a home gathering.

The land selected for the new farm was on a gentle slope overlooking the Columbia river, with an altitude of about seven hundred feet above sea level. Memaloose Island with its bleaching bones and ghastly relics lay in midstream before them. From the south shore line of the Columbia river, the hills rose, tier on tier, in a westward climb to the summit of the Cascade range, where Mt. Hood towered above all. It was an inspiring view, especially when the varying shades of light, at sunrise or sunset, gave color to the scene, and painted a picture beyond the power of man to imitate.

The house built for the new home was near the road, quite unpretentious but marked from afar by two poplar trees near the gate. In this home Fred began writing on his book, Wallulah.

Joining the farm on the west was a tract of land owned and occupied by Indians, descendants of a common ancestor, a mighty chief. Of this ancestor they never tired of talking, rehearsing deeds of valor, legends and myths. With the degradation of Indian life before him at every turn, with their latent possibilities undeveloped, it is easy to understand the appeal made to his mind as he wrote his book, weaving romance, war and religion into the story. This work was done by snatches in the day time, but he worked long hours at night, infringing upon his sleep. At last it was finished and he showed it to his friends, who gave it unstinted praise for its literary merit, but there were some, among them his mother, who dissented to the atheistic doctrines inculcated.

The extensive reading of the author had brought to him many phases of different religions, and now that his ideas were questioned, he began a thorough investigation. He read more books; studied the question from every angle; talked with laymen and ministers, read the Bible and prayed and became convinced that he was wrong.

Like St. Paul, he turned about to right the wrong he had committed; the book Wallulah was burned; he made public confession of his conversion to Christianity at a church service held in the neighborhood school house. He became an earnest lay worker, giving his time and best efforts unstintingly; he also united with the Congregational Church which was organized about that time.

There was no building for church services in the community. Rev. Whitcomb donated an acre of his land for a church site. The Congregational Missionary Association contributed a fund and took charge of the work, while those of the neighborhood, who desired, helped with donations of lumber, labor, etc. In this latter class F. H. Balch was active and efficient.

When the building was completed, there was no minister to fill the pulpit, but being solicited he accepted the work, believing it to be his duty, he also occasionally filled the pulpit at White Salmon. He had felt the call to preach and was preparing himself by study for the work, for there was no opportunity for him to attend a school of theology, neither did he have the leisure to

devote his daylight hours to the necessary study. His father's health had gradually failed and the farm work and responsibility of supporting the family came upon the son, added to this the farm crops failed, then in 1882 he secured work in Oregon on the railroad then under construction. Crossing the Columbia river in a small boat every morning, he worked ten hours a day, returning he spent his evenings in study. Thus he prepared himself for his work, and in due time was ordained a minister. Also, troubles weighed upon him, a dear friend passed away, and he was called upon to conduct the funeral service, there was no one to take his place and he bravely went through the ordeal, only saying, "It was the hardest thing I ever did." Then his father, away on a business trip, came back sick; the money he had collected was missing, and his mind a blank. He lived a number of years, but never recovered. His oldest sister, Mrs. Condon, became ill, she suffered nearly two years and then passed away on September 25, 1885, leaving her husband and two small children, the youngest child, Edna, was taken by Mrs. Balch, and cared for.

In the spring of 1886 Mr. Balch came to Hood River, as has already been stated. A Congregational Church was organized there, and the family moved to their new surroundings. The church services were held in the Barrett school house, on Sunday and on week days Gertrude, Herbert and Edna were pupils in the day school, where T. R. Coon, (formerly of Mt. Tabor) was teacher.

In 1887, a building capable of seating two hundred people was erected for the church, a pulpit built by "Father Hodge", who was over ninety years of age was presented to Mr. Balch and placed in the building. The growth of the church was encouraging from the first. Mr. Balch never read his sermons, neither did he make any attempt at fine speaking. His language was plain, simple and easily understood. His voice seldom rose above a conversational tone, but he always had a message to deliver and made it clear and convincing. His sincere earnestness won the confidence of his audience and made him many friends.

As soon as he had become settled in his work in Hood River, he began writing a book, which was usually spoken of as, "Cecil Gray, the missionary," but later known as, "The Bridge of the Gods." When it was finished he looked among his friends for a censor, Mrs. Barrett was chosen by him and accepted the task, and to her he dedicated his book. She was a woman of mature

years, and well versed in literature. Together they went through the book, making minor changes at her suggestion. He copied his manuscript by hand (for typewriters were not then in general use) and sent it to a publisher. It came back promptly, it went forth the second time, and returned. How many times this was repeated I do not know, I only know that the author despaired of its publication and was surprised when it was taken up by McClurg & Co., of Chicago. The first edition appeared in October, 1890; since then twenty-five editions have been issued and the end is not yet. "The Bridge of the Gods" has been used in many of the High Schools as a reference book, being remarkable for its purity of style. In 1911 it was dramatized by Mabel Ferris, and was shown in many of the leading cities of the United States.

Interest and attendance in the church showed a steady growth during the entire pastorate of Mr. Balch. In June, 1887, Milton Wright,³ then known as "Bishop" Wright, visited Mrs. Balch and family at Hood River. He had never met any of the Balch children, and was much pleased with the work of Frederick Homer. In the late summer of 1889, the many friends of Mr. Balch learned with regret, that he had been granted a leave of absence of two years, to enable him to attend the Pacific Theological Seminary at Oakland, California. In reply to the many protests, he said, "I am sure it is for the best, the people of Hood River have been very kind to me, and made allowance for me because I was young. I will be twenty-eight on my next birthday, and now that I have the opportunity I must make the most of it. It only requires two years, and if you still want me here, I can come and serve you better than I could if I did not go." A few days later he said good-bye and another minister came to fill his place.

In the summer of 1890 he came back for a short vacation; was in good health and very cheerful, and said, "I will soon be back to stay."

In April, 1891, he returned, unexpectedly. He was sick, though able to walk about. A few days later, he and his mother went on a visit to relatives near their old home at Lyle. A sudden change for the worse came and mother and son went to Portland where he entered the Good Samaritan Hospital. Many friends called to see him, among them the Crawfords of Brownsville, who sought to bring comfort and cheer to the afflicted ones. He died June 3, 1891.

³ Later in life Bishop Wright was known as the "Father of the aviators, Orville and Wilbur Wright."

Rev T. L. Eliot in speaking of him said, "He was in his last hours, as always, grateful for the tenderness of his friends and full of love for all mankind." His body was buried by the side of his sister, in the Lyle cemetery, not far from his former home, and near the Pine Hill Church where he had first wrought in the ministry.

His mother never returned to Hood River, being seized with a serious illness soon after the funeral. She passed away and was laid to rest beside the son within a month from the date of his death.

At the time of his death he left one book, practically complete, and five others, outlined and partly filled in, also a number of poems, none of which have been published.

The congregation organized by Mr. Balch in Hood River Valley dwindled away, "like sheep without a shepherd," and in 1894 was disbanded, the remnant uniting with the Riverside Church in the town, the building was sold to another denomination and the pulpit presented to the Union Church of Odell.

The church at Pine Hill found no leader to carry on the work and was sold to the school district for a school house.

Years passed and the author slept in an unmarked grave. On September 24, 1908, friends from Goldendale, White Salmon and Hood River, with former neighbors living in the vicinity, and pupils from the Pine Hill School, joined with The Dalles Historical Association in memorial exercises for Frederic Homer Balch. A granite stone in its natural state had been procured and set on a concrete base by the neighbors, a stone cutter had chiseled this inscription:

BALCH

1861 1891

Bridge of the Gods

Exercises were held at the school house with Mrs. Elizabeth Lord, president of The Dalles Historical Association, in charge. Reminiscences were given by friends. Mrs. Donnell, who crossed the plains in Dr. Crawford's party spoke of the lovable character of Harriett Snider. Mrs. Z. F. Moody, unable to be present, sent a message. Mrs. Jewett, of White Salmon, told of the hardships endured by the young minister in early days. The school children contributed their share, in songs and readings. "What the Zither

Said," a poem written by Mr. Balch, was read by Miss Campbell; a few lines of which are given below:

O strong the words the zither said,
But weak the human heart!
Ah, me! I hunger for my dead
With pain beyond the zither's art;

The zither sings a song divine,
Of purpose grand and high;
I see a grave beneath the pine
The river flowing by.

I see the reach of weary years,
Of burdens bitter to be borne;
Of deathless memories stained with tears
O Zither, can I cease to mourn?

Lucile Armstrong read "The Hills of Lyle," written by T. R. Coon, former teacher of Mr. Balch, two stanzas of which I quote:

Here Balch's spirit bowed in prayer
Mid nature's charms and heaven's smile,
And sang of Genevieve the fair,
No more with him in life to share
Earth's joys among the hills of Lyle.

And here the mound of earth is shown
And granite rock to mark awhile
The poet's ashes neath the stone,
He bore the cross but not the crown
Among the sacred hills of Lyle.

After a few words of appreciation of the work of Mr. Balch from Rev. Gilmore of Hood River, the name of "Balch School" was conferred upon the building as a memorial of the work done there by him.

Adjourning to the cemetery, Rev. J. L. Hershner gave a short talk and offered prayer. Mrs. J. W. Ingalls thanked the assemblage for their kind appreciation of her brother's efforts, while the school children covered the grave with flowers.

DELIA M. COON