

Melville Ballard by John Hotchkiss

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MELVILLE BALLARD

I remember that day in November, 1859, on which I first saw Melville Ballard. He was then a young man of twenty, in the full glory of his youth, handsome as Apollo, with regular features, a questioning blue eye, and long locks of an auburn-brown, that swept back from an expansive brow in wavy masses, and gathered in curls at his coat-collar. He was below the medium height in stature, but compact and wiry in muscle, small of hand and foot, light and free of movement; a swift runner, a great jumper, and a wrestler so quick and active that even the giant lumber-jacks of his own Maine woods found in him a worthy opponent. It was a treat to watch him jump: a short, quick run, a sudden vaulting into the air, and a carry, as on wings, far beyond the mark of heavy-footed rivals. He would have been thought an unrivalled acquisition to the field and relay teams of the College of to-day.

But young Ballard was as alert and active in mind as in body, and in all the political discussions of those antebellum days he was an acknowledged giant, ardent in patriotism, able in argument, and ready in repartee. We have no doubt but that his classmate, Mr. Ralph H. Atwood of the Ohio School, could many a tale unfold of our

friend's feints and passes in the numerous intellectual duels that took place among the boys of the High Class as to the respective merits of the then young Republican and the old Democratic parties, and as to the right and wrong of the burning slavery question.

Of course, when Mr. Ballard entered the College, in which he was the only student, he did not have to exert himself very much to become athletic cock-of-the-walk; and it was some time after he had graduated that the College had any sport whatever. Besides, his years of teaching had fixed his mind more on the intellectual aspect of life, and his chief pleasure was in the discussion of the questions of the day, and of the subjects brought forward by text-books that he was studying. In moments of relaxation, he took great pleasure in playful banter with the 'young fellows who were in their first year at College, and who were from eight to ten years his juniors. In these talks he showed a great appreciation of the humorous aspects of life, a dry humor of his own, and a friendly consideration for the other fellow's point of view.

Once one of the "Preps." was bragging of the deeds of the sons of his State in the war then just over, and commiserating the other fellows for not having heroes like Sherman. In picturing Sherman in signs, the boy inadvertently held his clenched fists one above the other as he made the jogging motion of riding. This motion of the "Prep's" clenched hands struck Ballard as remarkably like the manipulation of a broom, and, so, he broke in upon the boy's vain-glorious boasts with a mock-heroic defence of Sherman from the vile insinuation that that stern commander rode with a broom in his hands. The "Prep" vainly tried to explain, but Ballard was humorously hard to satisfy, and the glory of the "Prep's" bragging had departed long before he got through explaining.

Mr. Ballard was a thorough master of the sign-language, and an accomplished mimic, and his reproductions of ad-

dresses by the old Hartford teachers were a treat of which we never tired, no matter how often they were reproduced. They were as good as a stage-comedy; and it was a cause of much regret, when he ceased to exercise his talents socially in this direction from some misconception of the lack of dignity of the performance.

In looking back upon this friendship of half-a-century, I am moved to think that, during all this long period of association as teacher and pupil, as college-mates, as partners in an unsuccessful attempt to publish a paper for the deaf, as co-laborers in teaching, and as intimate friends, there had never risen between us any but ephemeral misunderstandings. His modesty, his patience, his charity, his friendliness, were all-sufficient to cover my shortcomings of temper, or of taste, and there had not been a day when we did not meet as warm and cordial friends.

God rest your faithful, kindly, sympathetic, truth-loving soul, dear Friend.

J. B. H.

