

THE REVEREND THOMAS BLOOMER BALCH - GREENWICH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTER

Thomas Balch was an unusual clergyman of the 1800's. Some may have thought him eccentric. He possessed a remarkable mind and a simple piety. He made an important impact on Northern Virginia during his day.

Father

Rev. Stephen Bloomer Balch, the father of Thomas, was born April 5, 1747 on Deer Creek, Harford County, Maryland. He graduated at Princeton College in 1774. He was a captain in the Calvert County Militia during the Revolution and aided in repulsing the British on the Patuxent River and Chesapeake Bay.

Stephen Balch accepted a call to found a Presbyterian church in Georgetown, D. C. He began work in March 16, 1780 and remained there until his death 53 years later. Among his friends were George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Stephen married Elizabeth Beall. (5-80)

Reverend Hezekiah I. Balch, uncle of Thomas, was the first signer of the Mecklenburg (North Carolina) Declaration of Independence in May, 1775.

Young Thomas

Thomas Bloomer Balch was born February 28, 1773 at Georgetown. Since his prominent father's church was near the capital, he got to know a number of famous politicians.

Stephen required the young Thomas to sit next to the pulpit in order to keep him quiet during church services. One Sunday when the prayer was extremely long Thomas lost his patience. He reached over, got his father's spectacles off the pulpit, put them on, opened the hymn-book and said, "Come, my brethren, while the pra'r is going on, let us sing a hime."

One day when his father was absent from home, several couples came by the house to be married. Thomas, a little older at this time, decided to perform the ceremony. "So, in prankish feat, without ban or surplice, [he] went through a form of marriage, the parties being none the wiser, and it is hoped, none the less happy, for being married by the son instead of the father." (7-107, 108)

Education

Stephen Balch provided a good education for his son. Thomas took to learning readily. He enjoyed reading and did well in school. He graduated from the College of New Jersey in 1813 and Princeton Theological Seminary 1817 (Hampden-Sydney College conferred an honorary DD on him in 1860). Daniel Webster is supposed to have described him as the most learned man he had ever known. (2-85) Julia Balch, his daughter, said he studied classic lore and entered realms of thought others hadn't considered.

Thomas read good literature and soon began writing. He also loved nature. In 1849 he related a summer experience west of the Blue Ridge at Forest Inn near a stream by the name of Mossy Creek. "Woman had not then so spread out her charms as to entangle him in the sundry perplexities of life." He devoted the summer to studying and enjoying the geography. (1-80)

Churches

Baltimore Presbytery ordained Thomas October 31, 1816. For several years he assisted his father in the church at Georgetown. He accepted a call to Snow Hill, Rehoboth and Pitts Creek, Maryland July 19, 1820. Snow Hill is the oldest Presbyterian Church in America.

Thomas Balch was never settled as a pastor after he left Maryland. He is listed as a missionary in Fairfax County from 1829-36. His brother-in-law, Septimus Tuston, had been a regular preacher at Greenwich, Va. between 1825 and 1842. This connection may have led to Thomas becoming the stated supply at Warrenton and Greenwich 1836-38 and again 1874-78. He also supplied at Prince William and Nokesville. (18-148)

Home

Just after he accepted the call to the churches in Maryland, Thomas Balch married Susan Carter of Fairfax, Va. (8/21/22) Susan was the daughter of Charles Beale Carter of Shirley. Charles Beale Carter was an uncle of General Robert E. Lee. No doubt the marriage into the prominent and wealthy family helped Thomas financially.

When Thomas and Susan moved to Prince William and Fauquier Counties, they bought a place between Aubourn and Greenwich on Highway 603 near its intersection with Highway 669. He called the property Ringwood. He along with Jane Alexander Milligan ran a boarding school for girls there. Part of the structure was later remodelled and remains today. The family of the late James Mac Nickens and Kate Chambers Nickens of Haymarket, who later owned the property, possess a photograph of the building taken about 1900. Members of this family recall when, as children, playing at the house, they saw an old trunk full of letters and papers, some of which dated back into the 1700's. The trunk was stolen during a time the house was not occupied.

Thomas Balch bought another piece of property at what is now 10214 Lonesome Road, closer to Nokesville. He deeded the property to his son, Chalmas Page, Sept. 10, 1869. (13-764) He had to go to court Oct. 12, 1875 because the title was contested. In Oct. 1878 the land was sold to Julia R. Balch. She did not keep it long. (12-399) Charles Robertson, who later lived in the house said that when he and his brother would misbehave his mother would tell them "Old Chalmas Balch will come back and get you." James Cooke of Greenwich spent time there as a boy and remembers the story.

Susan Balch

Ringwood or Macomb Manse, as it was sometimes called, appears to have been a happy place. Julia, daughter, thought of the home as a "loved retreat." (6-20) Julia remembered her mother, Susan, as one who experienced joys, disappointments, cares, tears, sunlight, "but shadows few." She saw her mother as an accomplished person who possessed rare gifts and culture.

Apparently Susan was an enthusiastic Christian. As a young woman she left tracts by the way-side between Salona and Georgetown. Her stepfather came by shortly on horseback and gathered these leaflets. He took them to his daughter, not realizing that she was the one who had placed them along the road. (7-108)

Thomas's Character and Piety

Thomas had the enviable position of being financially secure enough to do some church work, relate closely to a large family, do a little farming, keep up with politics, and feel confident in high ranking social connections. He spent a lot of time reading and writing, but he said, "The library at Ringwood is so small, that the writer is obliged to depend a good deal on his neighbors for mental entertainment." (1-724) ?

Joseph Arthur Jeffries of Fauquier County said as a child he visited the Balch home and found

Dr. B. was simple, unpretentious and most affectionate, as well as one of the drollest of men in his attire. I have heard that he used to say that he feared that tidiness was his besetting sin. When he wore shoes at all at his home they were down at heel. When visiting his house as a child I usually found him without coat, vest, collar or cravat, slip shod with a domestic flannel shirt on, and knit yarn suspenders supporting his trousers. The old gentleman never waxed fat, but I saw him kick once when a Warrenton drug clerk in his proprietor's absense applied to the old man's back a strengthening plaster so hot that the substance on it was running. So confiding was he, that this young man was able to mollify and persuade him that the pastor was in the very best condition to relieve his trouble." (4-143,144)

Julia said he had "left the applause of the world behind." (8-21,22) Thomas often read Psalm 23. He had afternoon and evening devotions. He kneeled for prayer. His detachment and piety gave him peace of mind.

Thomas was considered a good preacher. He "preached a saviour crucified." (8-21,22) Jeffries said he was "apt to take queer texts in preaching, but not from affectation. I heard him once preach from 'He is the rose of Sharon and the lily of the Valley.' And again from 'Jerushen waxed fat and kicked.'" (4-144)

Thomas Bloomer Balch probably leaned towards the Old School Theology of the Presbyterians of his day. It was more traditional and perhaps more legalistic. The New School tended to be more fervent and more evangelistic and this group of Presbyterians was abolitionistic. Balch must have found himself caught between the two extremes, especially as the Civil War began. Serious issues developed in the church courts.

Presbytery Issues

Just after the Civil War started, Potomac Presbytery meeting at Greenwich, considered a motion to renounce the jurisdiction of the General Assembly and more towards forming a Southern General Assembly. Balch asked to be excused from voting. The request was granted. The resolution was adopted unanimously. Apparently Balch found himself in a personal conflict, as many others did concerning secession and the role and place of the church in it. (10-7) Presbytery didn't meet again until Sept. 15, 1865, again at Greenwich. Balch is not recorded as present on this occasion.

Balch may not have attended because of confusion about the legality of the presbytery. The churches of Potomac Presbytery that had stayed in the Union in the D. C. - Maryland area claimed to be the true presbytery. They kept the name and the minutes. The group of Southerners changed their name to Rappahannock Presbytery.

However, Thomas Balch soon took part in presbytery on a regular basis. He was directed to prepare a memorial for a deceased minister, Rev. Elias Harrison. He failed to be present or to send in the memorial at the appointed time. Another minister was given the task. He was "excused for his non-compliance with order of Presbytery" Oct. 5, 1866. (11-26) Thomas showed up at a later meeting June 1867 and read his memorial. (11-413) Presbytery elected him as a commissioner to General Assembly meeting in Nashville, Tn., Oct. 18, 1867. (11-65)

In June 1867 Balch was placed on a special committee of Presbytery to consider the duty of the denomination to the "freed people within our bounds, and the best mode of discharging it." (11-46) Balch seemed to have a real concern for the blacks, though neither the presbytery nor the denomination ever did much in this area of ministry.

Slavery

Slavery was probably a source of conflict for him and his family. Susan and Thomas may have had slaves given to them by the Carters. Balch's daughter, Julia, spoke of Mammy, Jess, and Peter whom she loved. Jeffries said

from being a man of considerable means, he was literally eaten out by a number of Negro slaves that he owned and kept around him, for the most part in idleness, while his wife and children did most of the necessary domestic work. It is said to be a fact that in winter one of his Negro men would go to him and say, 'Master, it is snowing hard and there is no wood at the woodpile' what must we do?' He would reply, 'You had all better go to bed and cover up warm till the storm is over.'" (4-144)

Balch took interest in the Colonization Society for which he was an agent. He was in favor of sending slaves to Liberia before the war. (18-148)

Civil War

During the hostilities many soldiers, both North and South, came by the house with the stile and the roadside gate. Mackall relates that

during the Civil War Mr. Balch, although a Southerner in his feelings, prayed so earnestly for Northern soldiers every time they came to the house, that he was able to get anything he wanted from them, even real coffee, when his neighbors were compelled to use beans for that purpose. His wife was also

of a very religious temperament, and great in prayer. She would begin with a room full of officers, and pray on, and on, until there would be no one left but herself, and in that way saved the corn and hay from being taken by them. (7-107)

Sometime during the war, a party of Union cavalry, carried off two of Thomas' horses. He sent their commanding officer a letter eventually printed in the Presbyterian newspaper in Philadelphia during the war. It found its way in the pages of Richmond's Central Presbyterian some seven months after the surrender:

Colonel: Yesterday a squad of your men took off a couple of my horses. One of them is cream-coloured, like the steed that Washington rode at Yorktown in 1781, and the other a bright sorrel, like one mentioned in the 'Arabian Nights.' Please consult Blackstone on the mighty difference between meum and tuum. Possession is nine out of the twelve points of the law, and therefore you have no moral or military right to Fan and Reuben. It is not my purpose to use either of them in making a raid on your camp. --A Presbyterian minister must not turn soldier, as if he were a Romish Pontiff. One of the animals is a pony, that carries my corn and wheat to Longley's Mill, and you must not forget that Henry Clay was a mill-boy. With the going down of the sun, let me see both my steeds in their own fragrant clover-fields, and the vesper beams of the day will reflect renewed lustre on your deeds. Permit me to subscribe my middle name, in the hope that your sense of justice will be in full flower.

T. Bloomer Balch (16-87)

Last Years

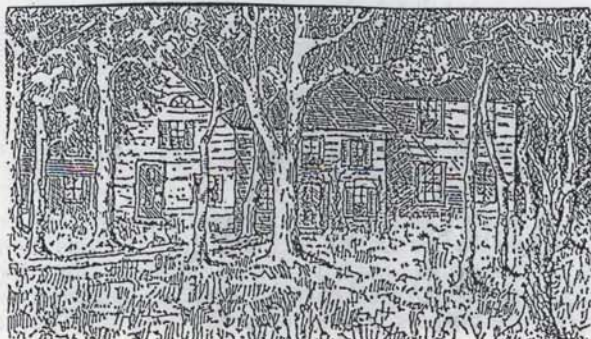
Thomas and Susan Balch's last years may have been difficult. The Civil War and its aftermath may have put them in a financial strain. In a letter December 19, 1871 Charles Green asks Dr. Moxley to "make another of the miry-est rides in all the country-side, to poor Mr. Balch, having first satisfied your purse with \$25 which I desire you to present him wishing my kindest regards. Pray do this before Christmas Day if you possibly can." (6)

In a letter to his good friend W. W. Corcoran, December 9, 1869, Thomas thanks him for his elegant Christmas present which made him weep. He also says "Hope that an Indian summer will soon come, when I hope to get down for my eye is paining me." (3-310)

For a number of years Balch was the oldest living Princeton alumnus. According to his memorial April 1878, his strength had gradually declined for a long time. Fatal illness continued about three weeks. "To the last he had a clear mind and he uttered many expressions of faith and hope up to his last breath." (9-155)

He died February 14, 1878 at Ringwood. His wife, Susan, had expired the year before. His friend W. W. Corcoran provided stones for the couple and they are buried in the Greenwich Presbyterian Cemetery. During his life time Thomas Balch had "become almost as highly regarded by Virginia Presbyterians as his famous father had been by the citizens of Georgetown and Washington." (16-43)

RINGWOOD MANSE



Thomas Bloomer Balch (continued)

Children (2 et al.)

1. Ann Carter Balch was born in 1821, in Fairfax County, Virginia. She married Mr. Ashton and had two children, Charles and Thomas, who lived in Fauquier County, Virginia. She died before her mother.
2. Elizabeth Balch was born about 1824, in Virginia. She married R. M. Carter, a planter in Alabama. They had three children: Fitzhugh, who was in the United States Army at Fort Henry, near Baltimore; Thomas, a lawyer at San Diego, and Cassius, who was in the United States mail service. Elizabeth died during the war and the family didn't hear about her death for 7 months.
3. Robert Monroe Balch was born May 7, 1826, in Virginia. He moved to Haywood County, Tennessee. He was a large, fine looking man, with most courtly manners, and was Lieutenant Colonel in the Confederate Army under Gen. N. B. Forrest. He was in the Western Army, and at the fight at Fort Donelson had his horse shot out from under him, but mounted another. After the war he was a lawyer and cotton broker at Memphis. In 1871 he was killed in Crittendon County, Arkansas by squatters on lands there which were owned by him and his brother Charles.
4. Charles Carter Balch was born in 1828 at Snow Hill, Maryland. He was a captain in the Confederate States Army and served under General Forrest. He fought at the Battle of Fort Donelson. He lived at Lansing, Arkansas.
5. Harriet Balch died young.
6. Chalmas Page Balch lived on the property on Lonesome Road.
7. Linnaeus Balch died young.
8. William Cowper Balch was a private in the "Black Horse Troop," Co. H. 4th Virginia.
9. Felix Neff Balch was a twin to William Cowper Balch.
10. Mary Landon Balch was born in Georgetown, D. C. She lived in Washington, was highly educated, and conducted a school which made a specialty of preparing candidates for the Civil Service examinations. She died in 1899. Mary must have been called Mollie. Jeffries said,

Dr. B. devoted much personal attention to the education of his daughters. The presence of visitors while he was teaching did not seem to distract him at all from his work. He was devoted to his daughter, Miss Mollie, who is now a most successful educator in Washington, D. C. The story is told of him that someone, when she was very young, mentioned in his presence the prospect of her marrying and leaving him. He said, "What, my daughter Mollie! If any man came for her, I would take my horse whip and whip him around the world." I never could get rid of the idea that Lord Lytton had his like in mind when he portrayed the character of Pisistra as Caxton's father. We do not find his kind with us any more. (4-144)

11. Julia Ringwood Balch was born in 1837. She conducted a school with her sister Mary in D. C. She died 8/25/1905. Julia, who seemed to possess the culture and refinement of her mother loved the home place and was quite fond of Ann Alexander Milligan who ran Ringwood Academy. She was probably the only one born at Ringwood Manse.

The census of 1860 indicates that only Chalmas Page and William Cowper of the male children were in the area, Bristoe Station Post Office at that time. (17-48)

"Session and Register Minutes of Warrenton and Greenwich Presbyterian Churches 1855-67" (Other session records lost) list only the names of Susan C. Balch and Ann Balch as members. Ann was dismissed in 1855 or 1856. (15)

Balch frequently wrote for the *Southern Literary Messenger*,²¹³ *The Christian World*,²¹⁴ and published *Christianity and Literature*, 1826;²¹⁵ *The Office and Work of a Bishop*, a discourse preached at the installation of the Rev. G. Wilson McPhail as Pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Fredericksburg, Va.,

June 12th, 1842;²¹⁶

²¹³ *Summer in the Blue Ridge*, Volume XV., 1849, page 80; *Byron and Burns*, *ibid.*, page 165; *The Poems of Sir William Jones*, *ibid.*, page 724, etc.

²¹⁴ *The Christian World*, a monthly publication for all denominations of Christians, T. H. Stockton—Editor and Proprietor, Philadelphia. To this magazine he contributed, *Pencil Notes*, Volume III., 1843, pages 79–85, *Sketching at Richmond*, *ib.*, pages 106–111, *The Wigwam*, *ib.*, pages 217–226, *Sabbath School Hymn*, *ib.*, pages 234–235, *The Ivy Bridge*, *ib.*, pages 248–256, *The Free Church of Scotland*, *ib.*, pages 256–7, *Wyanoke*, Volume IV., 1844, pages 94–97, *Ford of the Shenandoah*, *ib.*, pages 110–113, *Glenochre*, Volume V., 1845, pages 24–26, *Woburn*, *ib.*, pages 94–98, *Windsor*, *ib.*, pages 99–103, etc.

²¹⁵ *Christianity and Literature: in a Series of Discourses*. By T. B. Balch, Pastor of a Presbyterian Church in Snow-Hill, Md., Philadelphia: 1826. The contents of this book is as follows:

1. *The Temptations of Literature*: "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." *James* i. 13.

2. *The Literature of the Scriptures*: "Search the Scriptures." *John* v. 39.

3. *Obstacles to the Piety of Literary Men*: "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." *1st Corinthians*, chap. i. 22, 23, 24.

4. *Christianity Miscellaneously applied*: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ." *Colossians*, ii. 8.

5. *The Relation of Christianity to Polite Literature*: "For all the Athenians and strangers which were there, spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." *Acts*, xvii. 21.

6. *The superior Value of Christianity to Literature*: "Again, the

Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." *Matt.* xiii. 45, 46.

7. *Humility an Ornament to Literary Men*: "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein." *Luke*, xviii. 17.

8. *The Church a Field for Literary Men*: "For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." *Matt.* vi. 32, 33.

²¹⁶ Printed at the office of the *Virginia Herald*, Fredericksburg, 1842.

The Ringwood Discourses, 1850;²¹⁷ *Reminiscences of Georgetown, D. C.*, 1859; etc.

²¹⁷ *The Ringwood Discourses; or Sermons on Various Subjects*. By T. B. Balch, A. M., Author of Discourses on Christianity and Literature. Hagerstown, Md., New York, and Philadelphia. 1850. This book is made up of nine sermons, upon the following subjects:—

1. *The Farmer in Rural Pursuits*: "But Cain was a tiller of the ground." *Genesis* iv. 2.

2. *The Christian Merchant*: "He is a Merchant." *Hosea*, xii. 7.

3. *The Christian Barrister*: "Bring Zenas the lawyer." *Titus*, iii. 13.

4. *Church Extension*: "Enlarge the place of thy tent." *Isa.* liv. 2.

5. *Moses and Goethe*: "Forty years long was I grieved with this generation." *Psalms* xc. 10.

6. *An Outline of Christian Reading*: "Give attendance to reading." *1 Timothy* iv. 10.

7. *Mizpah*: "And Mizpah; for he said, the Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another." *Gen.* xxxi. 49.

8. *The Agency of Providence in small Events*: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one shall not fall to the ground without your Father." *Matthew* x. 29.

9. *The Patriarch's Vision*: A Discourse delivered at the dedication of the Central Presbyterian Church, Washington City, Sabbath morning, May 31, 1846: "For this is none other but the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven." *Gen.* xxviii. 17.

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