

THE HOME MISSIONARIES

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The Home Missionaries by Franklin Johnson

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FRANKLIN JOHNSON

**THE HOME
MISSIONARIES**

The Home Missionaries.



By FRANKLIN JOHNSON,
Professor in the University of Chicago.

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1899.

PREFACE.

The anniversaries of the northern Baptists were appointed to be held at Portland, Oregon, in May, 1896. The financial depression which then prevailed led the managers of our societies to abandon this plan, and the meetings were held in the East, at Asbury Park. Oregon was chosen originally, in order to commemorate the beginning of our denominational work there fifty years before, and especially the opening of the first Baptist church ever dedicated on the Pacific coast. This house was largely the product of the energy of my father, Rev. Hezekiah Johnson, who solicited money and toiled with his hands to build it. The little frame structure still stands at Oregon City, though long since outgrown by the congregation and no longer used for religious purposes.

In 1845 my father and mother went to Oregon under the appointment of the American Baptist Home Mission Society. The journey over the Rocky Mountains and what was then called the Great American

Desert occupied six months. My father continued to labor in Oregon as a minister till the close of his life. He and my mother, according to their request, were buried under the tall fir trees of a farm near Oregon City, and on their tombstone are engraved the words: "Pioneer Baptist Missionaries."

Before it was known that the anniversaries would not be held in Oregon, these verses came to me, commemorating the journey of my parents across the continent and their subsequent labors on the Pacific coast, and I intended to have them read at the meetings of our Home Mission Society. I remember to have heard the incidents of the journey related often at the fire-side of my early home, and I have visited several times the scenes among which it lay, so that it is familiar to me. I have sought to present some pictures of the regions west of the Missouri River as they were fifty years ago, as, for example, the well-known mimics of the Rocky Mountains, the wild sage, the "prickly pear," the snowy fields of alkali, the hot springs, the "jack rabbit," the prairie-dog, in whose burrow were often found the rattle-snake and the owl, the terrific "cloud-burst," the incomparable luster of the moon and stars, and the monotonous level of the plains,

broken sometimes by the so-called "chimney rocks."

In these verses I have supposed myself to be standing in Portland as a reader, with the white cone of Mount Hood in full view and the Willamette Falls but twelve miles distant.

FRANKLIN JOHNSON.

The University of Chicago.

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THE HOME MISSIONARIES.

I.

All honor to the saintly pioneers,
Who, having wealth of home and friends, left all,
And bore, heroic, to the far frontiers
The life and gladness of the gospel's call.

My father and my mother, such were they ;
For a new world to win to Christ they burned ;
Success, affection, fortune, bade them stay,
But steadfast hitherward their steps they turned.

Yet others joined them, led by love of change,
Of gain, of danger, or by vague unrest,
Or vagrant longings for the new and strange ;
A various muster and a various quest.

Where the plumed cars now race through waving grain,
They plodded patient westward day by day,
Through flood, o'er mountain ramp, o'er fervent plain ;
And hope made all their road a shining way.

There are who mourn that time of wild romance,
When there was room, and one could be alone
Beyond the swarming people's swift advance,
And, owning naught, call earth and sky his own.

Yet was the swarming of the people good :
God fashions plain and forest, rock and fen,
But loves not well the empty solitude,
For His delights are with the sons of men.

II.

The mountains towered into eternal frost
Whose gorges they must thread, whose scarps must climb,
An Alpine chaos in confusion tossed
Upon the earth in some far age sublime.

There saw they cunning mimicries in stone,
A buttressed minster tall, a battle-mace,
A fort, a cross, a tent, a royal throne,
Or, clear against the blue, a human face.

And oft the tumbling crags and peaks were kissed
With colors like a dream of paradise,
Rose, ebon, amber, sapphire, amethyst,
Piled tier on tier into the sunlit skies.