

# Frederic Homer Balch (1861-1891)

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## A brief excerpt: *Genevieve: A Tale of Old Oregon*

**B**alch's celebrated novel, *The Bridge of the Gods*, published in March of 1891, has never been out of print. A Hood River minister, he claimed to have gathered real lore from the last informants of the vanishing natives. A melancholy figure, Balch died just before his 30th birthday.

Alfred Powers, the great Oregon bookman, edited Balch's 2nd novel, *Genevieve: A Tale of Old Oregon*. This intriguing story contains autobiographical material, showing humor and melodrama, despite its preaching for Christianity. Converted in a tent meeting at 21, he gave up Ginevra Whitcomb, the love of his life and burned his pagan manuscript in the fireplace. Ginevra moved to The Dalles, contracted pneumonia and died. Her body was rowed across the river through ice flues. Balch was forced to officiate at her funeral.

All three – Frederic, Ginevra and Alfred Powers – reside in the pioneer cemetery at Lyle, Washington.

The dramatic death of Princess Winemah [pgs 322-23 – she is later buried at Memaloose Island] is taken from: *Genevieve: A Tale of Old Oregon* (published by Metropolitan Press, 1932).

“**W**inemah glad,” she said in a stronger tone, and speaking in her broken English. “Winemah curse the white man again before she die.” Her eyes brighter now, flashed on them with deathless hate. They looked at her in aversion and awe. She was silent for a moment and seemed gathering into herself all the strength for one last effort. Her mind was back in the past, her scorn and loathing of the white invaders was rekindled by their presence, she was once more the Winemah of old, the daughter of Kenasket, the dauntless champion of her race against the Saxons.

“I defy and loathe you even here on the edge of the black night. I hate you! I curse you by the Spee-ough power, I curse you by the Soh-lee Tyeel! It is sweet to Winemah that her eyes have looked on the blood of the white man, that her hand has made the white wife's heart hungry and bitter. You found Winemah. Go find the dead. Seek out your brothers whom she has slain. Their bones rot in the forest; the leaves cover them; the coyote gnaws them; the tears of their wives fall not on them. Winemah rejoices and her heart is glad as she says this.”

The fierce words faltered on her lips; she gasped for breath, her eyes grew duller, life seemed flowing from her; the woman's soul fluttered on the brink of the abyss.

“You will go back with us and be hung!” exclaimed the leader, angered by her invective and not realizing the nearness of her dissolution. Her spirit leaped up in one last burning inspiration, one last outburst of final and defiant hate.

“Winemah goes, a long way, but not with you. You hunt her, you track her to her den, you reach out to grasp her, you shall not have her. Her life goes from you. Winemah takes it into darkness and leaves your hands empty.

I hate you. Want Winemah – Take her!”

Even as she spoke the two closing words, passion, strength, life went out. As the last accent of the taunting, exultant “Take her!” was uttered, her head fell back and her eyes grew glazed and sightless. Then a long sobbing cry, the Indian death-wail burst from the old withered watcher by her side, and the Indians that were listening mutely in the neighboring huts knew that the daughter of Kenasket was dead.



Alfred Powers revived  
Balch's *Genevieve* in 1932

