

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

FRANCIS W. SHEPARDSON
The University of Chicago

William Rainey Harper was born in New Concord, Muskingum County, Ohio, July 26, 1856, and died in Chicago, January 10, 1906. His ancestors on both sides of the family were Scotch-Irish. His great-grandfather was Robert Harper, who came from Ireland in 1795 with his wife Janet, and a son Samuel then aged fifteen years. They found a home at first in western Pennsylvania with others of that hardy Presbyterian stock, the son Samuel removing after some years to a farm about two miles north of the village of New Concord, Ohio. In 1848 a grandson, also named Samuel, became a resident of the village near by, marrying Ellen Elizabeth Rainey, a member of another family which, emigrating from Ireland, had found a home first in New York, and afterward in Cambridge, Ohio. The first-born child of this marriage was named William Rainey Harper after his maternal grandfather.

Samuel Harper, the father, a dry-goods merchant, was a leading citizen of the village, a pillar in the United Presbyterian church, and a moving spirit in the affairs of Muskingum College, a small denominational school in New Concord. To this institution the son was sent for his education, entering the preparatory department when he was eight years old. From his earliest childhood he had been fond of books. He pursued his studies with avidity, easily held his own with more mature students, and was ready for the freshman class at ten. Since the school was designed primarily for the training of those who were to enter the ministry of the denomination, the study of the Bible in several languages was a prominent feature of the curriculum. And it may have been more significant than anyone then thought that this youthful student delivered his commencement oration in Hebrew, when he received the degree of bachelor of arts at the age of fourteen.

For three years after graduation he remained at home, clerking in his father's store, pursuing favorite studies under tutors, and, inci-

dentally, leading the New Concord Cornet Band, in which capacity he made a visit to Granville, in Licking County, which adjoins Muskingum on the west, to furnish music for the commencement exercises of the class of 1873 of Denison University. In the fall of that year he entered Yale College for graduate work in philology under Professor William Dwight Whitney, to whose inspiration he always felt greatly indebted. At nineteen he received the degree of doctor of philosophy from Yale. In the same year he married Ella Paul, daughter of Rev. David Paul, the president of Muskingum College and his first teacher in Hebrew, and went to Macon, Tenn., where he spent a year as principal of the Masonic College. With this experience as a teacher he accepted an invitation to become a tutor in the preparatory department of Denison University, removing to Granville in the fall of 1876.

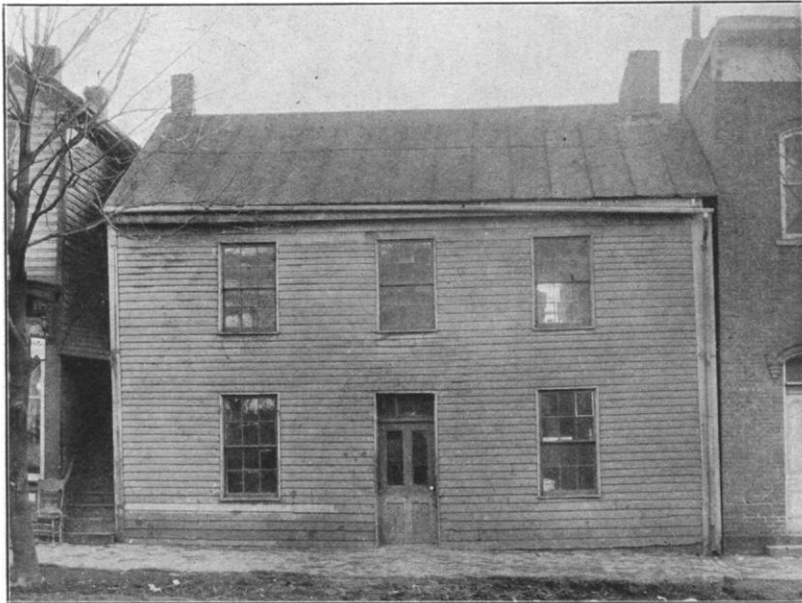
Here he came under the inspiration of the president of the college, Rev. E. Benjamin Andrews, the second of the great teachers who influenced his life. A fortunate situation soon made him principal of the preparatory department, and the two men, working harmoniously together, stirred the institution to its depths. They introduced many innovations, quickened the intellectual life of their pupils, drew many students to the college, and exerted a wonderful influence over those under them, making every student of either a friend for life. At Granville, too, Dr. Harper united with the Baptist church, thus coming into connection with the denomination under whose auspices he was to have his great opportunities in the field of education. Before his plans for Granville Academy had really begun to develop, he was called to the Baptist Union Theological Seminary at Morgan Park, Ill., where he came under the influence of a third great teacher, Dr. George W. Northrup.

At Morgan Park he proceeded to carry out two educational ideas



A STUDENT AT YALE

which had taken firm hold upon his mind—one the belief in the value of the inductive method of teaching languages, and the other the determination to awaken fresh interest in Hebrew by means of instruction by correspondence. He wrote textbooks for the study of Hebrew, organized a correspondence school of Hebrew, established periodicals called the *Hebrew Student* and *Hebraica*, and started summer schools of Hebrew. In this work he spent large sums of money raised by personal solicitation, or taken from his own scanty resources, often at



THE HOUSE IN NEW CONCORD, OHIO, WHERE WILLIAM R. HARPER WAS BORN

much personal sacrifice. At about this time also he began to associate others with himself in a plan out of which eventually grew inductive textbooks in Latin, Greek, and English.

Soon he was brought into connection with the Chautauqua system, at first in a minor way, then becoming principal of the Chautauqua College of Liberal Arts, and later principal of the entire system. While thus engaged he received a call to the faculty of Yale University, and before very long was sustaining a dual relationship to that institution, as professor of the Semitic languages and Woolsey professor of biblical

literature. Here again, as at Granville and Morgan Park and Chautauqua, he aroused great enthusiasm among his pupils, and by means of public lectures, delivered in the principal cities of the country and at various colleges, awakened a widespread interest in the study of the Bible.

Then came his career in connection with the University of Chicago, whose history during the years of its existence is largely the biography of its first president. Every detail of its educational policy was worked



THE HOME OF WILLIAM R. HARPER IN HIS BOYHOOD AND YOUTH, NEW CONCORD, OHIO. STILL IN THE POSSESSION OF THE FAMILY

out under his careful supervision; every building bears his approving stamp; every instructor was known by him personally and received appointment on his recommendation. The University was the fruition of his life's labors. For now that his work is done it is interesting, and instructive as well, to see how the hand of God led him along life's pathway; how each stage of the journey seemed to prepare him for the next. When but a lad in the little college at home, he learned to study the Bible as part of the curriculum, and became interested in Hebrew. A youth, at Yale, he came under the inspiring influence of

a trained specialist, and longed himself to become a teacher of power. At Granville he found connection with the Baptist denomination, and the friendship and encouragement of President Andrews. On the recommendation of the latter he went to Morgan Park, found a wider outlook, had better opportunity to carry out some of his cherished projects, and won the friendship and esteem of Dr. Northrup, who in time was to join others in recommending him as the one to carry out large ideas for education. His Chautauqua connection was invaluable, giving him wide acquaintance, added experience as an administrator, and surer conviction of the worth of some of his educational ideas. At Yale again he had maturer acquaintance with university work; and then, sixteen years after receiving his doctor's degree, he was ready to leave New Haven behind him to undertake the great life-work for which these years had so well prepared him.

Others who came into close contact with him are to tell of his special work in each of the manifold activities of his less than fifty years of life. He was an inspiring teacher, a successful author, a founder of journals, a wonderfully stimulating lecturer on biblical topics, one of the greatest of American college presidents, a leading spirit in the National Educational Association, the Religious Education Association, and other organizations for advance in educational lines, a religious leader who exerted vast influence in Sunday-school circles and in general religious education, a patriotic and active citizen, a devoted parent, and a friendly and companionable man. But in all this life he was pre-eminently a teacher. As such he desired to be known and appreciated. The demands of his position forced him to become an administrator—and he was a successful one, too. But, as his life's work is reviewed, it is perfectly clear that the dominant note is that of the teacher, and for that he will be remembered more and more as the years go by. It would be a noble life-work for any man to build the University of Chicago. It would be sufficient ground for praise that one had stimulated his whole generation to greater interest in the Bible. But, if his own wish were respected, the highest meed of praise would be given for his work as a teacher—and that will live longest, because it will repeat itself forever in the lives of the many whom he stimulated to higher purpose.