

# MY MINISTRY IN IOWA

## Dr. William Salter's Record of His Work as a Minister in Iowa

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Edited by PHILIP D. JORDAN

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### INTRODUCTION

#### I

On Wednesday, June 11, 1845, William Salter, preacher, left Maquoketa, Territory of Iowa, for a visit to New York.<sup>1</sup> This was his first vacation since his arrival on the frontier two years previously. He had come, fresh from Andover Theological Seminary, imbued with high hopes for the success of his labors; he was returning disillusioned and disappointed. The subject of his ministry, Jesus Christ and Him Crucified, had not found a generous reception in the hearts of a "whole community . . . filled up with families who are Universalists or ignorant persons [and] who have never been brought up to respect the Sabbath or attend public worship."<sup>2</sup> A "torrent of abuse" had been the only reward for his faithfulness in administering to men who quarreled over land titles, drank prodigiously, and gambled on the Mississippi steamboats. For two years he had been forced to travel on foot and horseback through Jackson County, preaching wherever he could gather a few of the faithful or coerce a few of the unregenerates. He had lived in a log house and his study had been a portion of the main room partitioned off by a swaying curtain. The prospect of leaving unleavened Iowa to experience again the delight of paved streets with omnibuses running to schedule, to browse in the libraries of New York University and Union Theological Seminary, where he had attended classes, and to talk with educated people must have brought eager an-

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<sup>1</sup>Vide the indexes to the ANNALS OF IOWA for many references. The *Dictionary of American Biography* also contains a sketch, 16:314. A biography of Salter is Philip D. Jordan's *William Salter: Western Torch Bearer*, Mississippi Valley Press, 1939.

<sup>2</sup>This and subsequent direct quotations are taken from the letters here printed, and the editor therefore omits any further citations.

ticipation to this twenty-four year old Congregational pastor. He was anxious, too, for the sight of Mary Ann Mackintire, only daughter of Eliab Parker Mackintire, prominent Boston merchant. He hoped to make this girl his wife. If she would accept him, he desired to announce their engagement before he returned to Iowa.

From Galena, Illinois, he went by stage to Chicago, and then across the Lakes to Detroit where he arrived on June 21. On July 2 he was safe in his father's New York home and was warmly greeted by his brother Benjamin. For twenty-eight days Rev. Salter remained in the East, and when he left, about July 30, he carried both Mary Ann's promise to marry him and her daguerreotype. On August 16, the journey from New York was ended and again Preacher Salter, bachelor, was at his pastoral duties in Maquoketa.

## II

William Salter's first sojourn in the West had extended from October 24, 1843, to June 11, 1845. In this period he saw Iowa for the first time, was ordained at Denmark, November 5, 1843, organized churches at Andrew and Maquoketa, and began the saddle period of his ministry. Then came his return to New York and Boston. His second period in the West was from August 16, 1845, to July 6, 1846, when he left to be married. He had now grown accustomed, in a measure, to the frontier, for Iowa was close on the line of settlement in the 1840's and he was preparing himself to say, "I shall aim to show that the West will be just what others make it, and that they which will work the hardest and do most for it shall have it. Prayer and pain will save the West and the country is worth it." There is something here of the dignity of the frontier, a something which no man could have uttered had he not first experienced it. William Salter, perhaps unknown to himself, was succumbing to the spirit of enterprise, strength, and determinism of Lubberland. From youth he had been taught that slavery was an abomination in the sight of both God and man. So well did he learn this lesson that he always was ready to attack that system

wherever it showed itself. He lent active sympathy to those ardent spirits who operated "stations" in the underground railroad and many times he preached of the evils of Negro servitude.

In this second period of his life on the frontier he wrote with evident satisfaction, "There is one interesting thing about Iowa, to wit: that it is the only part of the country west of the Father of Waters which is *free* . . ." Here is the thesis for his volume, *Iowa—The First Free State of the Louisiana Purchase*, published sixty years later. He early learned that in the West a man's measure was taken on the basis of his personal worth rather than upon any academic or professional training. "People distinguish," he said, "between a black coat and a fine man." His parishioners wanted a preacher to visit them in their log cabins and sod houses and to talk "direct and plain." An ornate sermon was an unsuccessful one. A minister who was only a scholar was almost worse than none at all. William Salter was a scholar, but fortunately more than just that. He had been bred to books, and he loved them. He perhaps loved the quiet of his study even more than he loved his parish work. "I would much rather be in my study," he said, "but the work, [of visiting] though humble, is great." Here lies one of the minor tragedies of Rev. Salter's ministerial career. His duties as a clergyman frequently intruded upon his duties as a scholar. It is perhaps safe to say that, in one sense, he felt more at home in the role of historiographer than of preacher. This applies to his entire career.

He had much to confound him in the West where everything went by noise. Bilious fever and ague stole the few members of his congregation. As he sat beside the sick and dying he sometimes jotted down the cause and course of the disease, complaining of the lack of judicious medical treatment. Consumption is given again and again as the cause of death, and "death by drink" is frequently recorded. Children and young people especially felt the hand of death on this Iowa frontier. In one list of eleven deaths, Rev. Salter records that six of them were of chil-

dren under three years of age. When a general court was in session, the meeting house, when time for service came, remained empty. And he found it inadvisable to schedule a meeting at the same time as a land sale. His deacons were not always pillars of the church, and so the church excommunicated them. It is little wonder that he wrote, "In so new a country, where so many other interests absorb the minds of men, the objects in which we are engaged are very much slighted."

Although William Salter was willing to go where Providence should send him, he, at times, wondered if Jackson County was the appointed place for him to round out his life. Perhaps Providence would, in its infinite wisdom, direct him to a more fruitful field. In 1843 when the members of the Iowa Band, after praying, had selected their fields of ministry, Rev. Horace Hutchinson, recently married, had chosen Burlington. Now, two years later, he was ill with consumption, and his congregation was falling away. How long Rev. Hutchinson could keep this parish, no one knew, but everyone saw that it would not be a great length before he would have to give in to the disease. Then Mr. Badger, of the American Home Missionary Society, learned of the sad state of affairs in Burlington and, when Rev. Salter went East in 1845, approached him with the idea of going to Burlington when the Congregational pulpit there should become vacant. Although Burlington was an important and growing town of about 2500 persons in 1845, possessed of more culture and social life than the majority of Iowa river towns in the forties, it was not an altogether attractive parish, and Rev. Salter wrote aptly when he said of the Congregational prospects, "The church is feeble. The house of worship unfinished. A deacon and leading man in the church is a political newspaper editor and has not much influence and is not highly esteemed as a Christian." By January, 1846, Rev. Hutchinson's health again failed and he gave up the thought of continuing his ministry in Burlington. Immediately Albert Shackford of the Burlington congregation wrote Rev. Salter inviting him to

Burlington with a view to settling there. This was not a formal call, but only an invitation for Rev. Salter to come and acquaint himself with the situation. The news brought by Mr. Shackford's letter troubled the young preacher. He was building a small brick study where he could prepare his sermons free from the interruptions of lovable, yet noisy, children, and where he might store his letters safe from curious eyes. He felt hardship and privation to be part of his duty. Yet the thought of Burlington with its elements of southern society and its larger sphere of usefulness intrigued him. But he would not go unless he felt it to be the Lord's will and unless the church would give him a unanimous call. On February 24, 1846, wrapped in a buffalo robe and seated in an open wagon, he left Maquoketa for Burlington. Driving through a heavy snow, he reached Davenport that same evening. From Davenport a sleigh took him to Bloomington (now Muscatine) where he failed to meet the Burlington stage. There he stayed from Friday until the following Tuesday when the stage finally got through. On Wednesday morning, February 30, he arrived in Burlington to find the Rev. Hutchinson dying. On Saturday, March 7, at ten minutes past three in the afternoon he died, and Burlington was left without a Congregational pastor. On March 16, Rev. Salter received a unanimous invitation to become Rev. Hutchinson's successor. However, nothing was said about salary, and Mr. Salter left on the steamer *Lynx* wondering if Burlington Congregationalists could raise \$150 among them to add to the \$300 which they hoped the American Home Missionary Society might pay. If he was able to write seriously, "The cause in Burlington will require an unremitting study and protracted effort in order to make advancement," he was also able to write humorously, "Everything in the West goes by noise. This is a high pressure boat. I was amused to see the mulattoes rattle every plate they put on the breakfast table this morning. At one table some of the passengers are earnestly engaged in card playing. Here sits your friend *solus*. . ."

In Maquoketa, on March 25, he decided to accept the call and go to Burlington. This decision disturbed many of his friends in Jackson County, even causing an excommunicated parishioner to urge his remaining. On Sunday afternoon, April 5, he preached his farewell sermon from I Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." He preached in the morning from John 6:28-29 and in the evening from II Kings 2:2. In his farewell, he said in part:<sup>3</sup>

"I therefore take you to record this day that I am free from the blood of all men. If any of you die in your sins, it will not be because I have not warned you of the way of death, and urged you to choose life. I have endeavored to keep back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying to one and all repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord J[esus] C[hrist].

"And now behold I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Brethren, I do not leave you without a struggle. It has been in my heart to live and die with you. I could willingly have laboured with you in the work of the ministry that I might have built up here a goodly ch[urch] of Christ, and led you to Heaven. But in the Providence of God I am called to leave these quiet scenes, and this promising community, and my beloved friends, that I may enter upon more weighty responsibilities and engage in severer labors. But I can never forget you. I can never forget that here I have spent nearly two years and a half of my ministry, that here with you I set up the standard of Christ and Him Crucified, and that here with you I have toiled and wept and prayed. The trials I have passed through with you will I trust never cease to exert a chastening influence over my spirit. I have been with you in every good work. I have labored to secure the purity of the public morals. I have aimed

<sup>3</sup>Fortunately the editor found a fragment, apparently the conclusion, of this farewell sermon, and includes it here; unfortunately, the introduction and body of the sermon appear to be lost.

to discourage and repress the pursuits of vanity and folly. I have endeavored to promote the Education of your youth. I have been with you in your days of darkness and stood by the beds of sickness and death. I have followed the remains of eleven persons to the narrow house on yonder hill, and administered to weeping friends the consolations of the Gospel. Two years ago this month we buried the first corpse in that graveyard, and already it has become a congregation of the dead. More than twenty now rest there in the sleep of death. How is that congregation increasing? Alas they wait for our coming. Children are there, waiting for their parents, and parents for their children. Brothers for Sisters, and Sisters for Brothers. My bones may not lay among them, though God only knows—yet from some spot of earth I must rise to meet them at the last day—O that we may meet in peace, to be forever with the Lord. But I forbear. I shall hope to meet you again on the Earth, to hear of your welfare and rejoice in your prosperity. Nothing will afford me greater joy than to hear that you walk in the truth—that this ch[urch] is growing in numbers and graces, and that this community is enjoying in all its interests the smile of Heaven.

“Brethren Farewell—Remember the words that I have spoken to you. The subject of my ministry has been J[esus] C[hrist] and Him Crucified. Be of good comfort.”

On April 11 he was lodged in the home of J. G. Edwards in Burlington, being unable to live with H. W. Starr which he had desired. He was not installed as pastor until December 30, 1846. May was spent in settling himself, writing sermons, visiting members of his congregation, and preparing for his wedding. The Mexican War was filling the minds of Burlington residents much to the annoyance of Rev. Salter who disapproved of the principles involved and so took frequent occasion to discourse on the evils of war and the benefits of peace. At the same time he was looking for a house suitable for a minister and his wife. In June he went up the Mississippi on the steamer *Tempest* to attend an associational meeting at Du-

buque. While in Dubuque plans were discussed for the establishment of a college to be sponsored by the Congregational ministers and to be known as "Iowa College." Davenport was settled upon as the proper location, even though the society there "is very uncongenial to a literary institution of the character we wish to establish." Burlington was chosen as the next meeting place of the association, a decision due perhaps to Rev. Salter's influence. When he returned, on the *Fortune*, he found the roof of his church nearly completed. As he rode through the country he noticed the grain turning golden, saw the bountiful crop of wheat, and the heavy-laden blackberry bushes. He traveled across the Illinois prairies to Galesburg, found that plans were being made for the establishment of a college (now Knox) there, and coming home broke a piece of harness, was two minutes late for the Shoccoquon ferry, and missing it, had to wait eighteen hours amid the mosquitoes before the Mississippi could be crossed. On July 6, the steamer *Atlas* carried him on the first leg on his trip to the East and his wedding. He was feeling unwell on the trip and in New York was overtaken by that old enemy of the frontiersman, the fever and ague. His health permitted him, however, to leave his father's home the last of July, and he was married in the Winthrop Church, on Union Street, in Charlestown, Massachusetts, on Tuesday, August 25, 1846, to the girl whose daguerreotype he had taken West with him in 1845.

### III

Dr. Salter's early ministry in Iowa may be divided into four periods, each of which is in itself worthy of examination. The first is from 1843 to 1845, the second from 1845 to 1846 (the period just discussed), the third from 1845 to the Civil War, and the fourth comprises the Civil War period. Until recently no adequate or sufficient first-hand information has been available upon which to build an accurate, true account of these chronological periods. Now, however, the writer has had the good fortune to have access to original source material covering each. This material is being edited gradually with prop-

er historical introductions and footnotes. For the period from 1845 to 1846 there is the interesting collection of letters, comprising the correspondence of Dr. Salter to Miss Mackintire. In their transcription and editing only those portions have been omitted which even today are personal and which contribute nothing historically. Omissions have been carefully indicated and, as usual, square brackets indicate material added by the editor. Footnotes perform their customary task of identifying persons, places, and events.

The source material for the first period (1843-1845) comprises a closely written diary of some 130 manuscript pages. The third period overlapping the second by one year, as it does, unfortunately is not revealed by Dr. Salter himself, but indirectly in a long series of hundreds of letters written to Dr. Salter by his father-in-law, Eliab Parker Mackintire, of Boston and Charlestown. This series of letters appears in the New York Public Library *Bulletin*.<sup>4</sup> Dr. Salter, however, again contributes to the Civil War period in a joint diary and account book which lists, in detail, the author's work and adventures as a member of the Christian Commission.<sup>5</sup> Supplementary to all these periods is a quantity of notes, observations, sermons, lectures, account and cost books. These all are holographic.

#### IV

In 1906, Dr. Salter wrote an account of his missionary experiences in Jackson County, Iowa, and entitled his account, "Journal of a Missionary in Jackson County, Iowa Territory, 1843-6," and he first published it in the *ANNALS OF IOWA* for January, 1907. The *Maquoketa Sentinel* soon copied the account, and by April it was reprinted in the *Annals of Jackson County*. Three years later, in 1910, the year of Dr. Salter's death, James W. Ellis included the "Journal" in his *History of Jackson County*. The account may also be found in Mr. Salter's *Sixty Years*.

<sup>4</sup>The *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 38, nos. 7-12, July-December, 1934.

<sup>5</sup>*Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 38, no. 2, April, 1935.

An examination of Dr. Salter's narrative of his work under the direction of the American Home Missionary Society indicated that it was not a "journal" at all in the sense that it was a diary or running account, but that it partook more of the nature of the reminiscences of an elderly man who, in the closing years of life, remembered only the glories and romantic adventures of an earlier day and forgot the disappointments and hardships which were necessarily a part of the Iowa frontier pattern in 1843. A closer examination led me to believe that the account, although not a "journal" itself, was based upon a diary or log book of some type which Mr. Salter actually kept from day to day for the period covered. This judgment was confirmed two years ago when the original diary entitled, "My Ministry in Iowa," was uncovered, worn and torn from its many journeys in saddlebags and its frequent adventures in the pockets of the young missionary as he journeyed through Jackson and adjoining counties in his far-flung prairie, parish work.

The little volume, bound in black boards, measures about 15x19½ cm. and now contains about 172 pages. Originally there were more, but some have been torn out, perhaps for memoranda, and only fragments of others remain. The inside front and back covers are filled with jottings and notes, some listing texts for sermons and others recording household and personal expenses. The majority of the entries are in ink, and all are in the cramped script characteristic of the author's hand even when, at the age of sixteen, he was recording his observations of Brooklyn weather on small scraps of paper. The first dated entry is November 20, 1843, at Springfield (shortly after changed to Maquoketa) and the last, January 1, 1846.

Between these dates are entered Dr. Salter's almost daily observations and comments upon the frontier. Drawn from his immediate and personal experiences, they are set down at the day's end with faithful and candid goose quill. Here is the humor as well as the pathos, the inspirations and disappointments, and the shrewd,

but not always charitable, estimates of the immigrants who flocked into Jackson County from many parts of the world—the Goodenows, Wrights, and Nimses, from Lake George, New York, the Nickersons, and Sutherlands from New England, the Dyers from Virginia, the Thompsons from Pennsylvania and the Ellises from Indiana, the Livermores from Ohio, the Woods from Michigan, the Chandlers, and Currents from Canada, and finally the McCloys from Ireland. Doctors and lawyers practice their professions, and land feuds make enemies of neighbors. And always there appear the determined efforts of the twenty-two-year-old minister to preach the Gospel, bury the dead, sponsor the temperance cause, fight the slavery evil, and establish academies and colleges.

Dr. Salter's spelling and punctuation have been followed as closely as his script would permit. The use of commas and semi-colons as substitutes for his customary dashes being necessary. Material enclosed in parentheses within the text is Dr. Salter's. Material enclosed in square brackets is supplied by the editor. No portion of the diary has been cut, even in those few places where the author has passed what appear to be uncomplimentary remarks upon men and events.

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