

## CONGREGATIONAL LIFE IN MUSCATINE<sup>1</sup> 1843-1893

Before Muscatine could be Congregational, it was necessary that it be Anglo-Saxon; and before it was Anglo-Saxon, it was first Indian, and then French.

The Muscatine or Mascoutin Indians dwelt at the mouth of the Iowa River, whence they commanded and occupied what is now known as Muscatine Island — a spot called by French explorers the Grand Mascoutin, Grand Mascoutin being an abbreviation of the French phrase — La Grande Prairie des Mascoutins. Just when Muscatine Island became known to Anglo-Saxons as the Grand Mascoutin is uncertain, but it was earlier than 1805; for in that year Zebulon M. Pike, who was ascending the Mississippi River from St. Louis, made camp — as, on August 25th, he records in his *Journal* — “on the prairie marked [on his map] as Grant’s Prairie” — a misnomer evidently for “La Grande Prairie” or “La Grande Prairie des Mascoutins”.

Muscatine — the present-day Muscatine — has, then, in a sense had a local habitation and a name from a date somewhat earlier than 1805.<sup>2</sup> But as a white man’s settlement it has existed only since about 1836, when some cabins were built near the river. In 1839 it was incorporated under the name of Bloomington; and in 1849 the name Bloomington

<sup>1</sup> An address delivered before the First Congregational Church of Muscatine on the seventy-fifth anniversary of its founding, November 17, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> For detailed comment on the name Muscatine and its history, see *Mascoutin — A Reminiscence of the Nation of Fire* in Richman’s *John Brown Among the Quakers and Other Sketches*. Interesting supplementary material may be found in Coues’s *The Expedition of Zebulon Montgomery Pike, 1805-1807*, general index under “Muscatine”.

was changed to Musquitine, or, as it is now written, Muscatine.

Congregationalism, as likewise Presbyterianism, came to Iowa as a result of the opening of the Black Hawk Purchase to settlement in 1833 — a district including all of eastern Iowa as far north as Turkey River. It came by way of Dubuque, and if other Mississippi River settlements were at all like that one, there was much need of it. “Dubuque in 1836”, writes the Reverend Asa Turner, a Presbyterio-Congregational home missionary from Yale, “we did not call a civilized place. True there were some half breeds and some whole breeds and a few miners, but it wasn’t anything anyhow”.

It was at Fort Madison, in 1836, that the first Congregational sermon was preached in Iowa, and Brother Turner was the preacher. On the journey to Fort Madison the missionary evidently took note of the site of Muscatine, for he mentions the place as “disfigured by one log cabin.” In 1838, however, Stephen Whicher, who settled here in 1839, wrote: “Bloomington, aside from its prospect of being the seat of government for Iowa Territory, will be an important place for trade. There are now not a dozen houses in the place; there may be two dozen cabins; not a lawyer in the place, nor a preacher in the neighborhood. I asked a woman why they had no preaching. She said that chickens were scarce; that when the poultry yards became well supplied, there would be no scarcity of preachers! The day is not far distant, however, (perhaps five years) when Bloomington will equal Dayton Ohio [five thousand souls] in wealth and population. . . . A good preacher who could live here without levying contributions upon the people would be the most powerful engine to make this town what it should be.”

If Congregationalism — and hence Congregational life —

may be said to have come to Iowa in 1836 in the person of the genial Asa Turner, it came to Muscatine in 1843 in the person of young Alden B. Robbins, twenty-six years old, a native of Salem, Massachusetts, and a graduate of Amherst College and Andover Theological Seminary. Muscatine in 1843 was a place of perhaps seven hundred people — not five thousand or more, as Mr. Whicher had so confidently predicted in 1838. Even so, according to Truman O. Douglass, historian of the Iowa Pilgrims, it was a “smart town”. Its chief lack was a meeting house — an evangelical one. “You look in vain for the least sign of a church”, writes a thirty-niner, “and the bell of the boat sounds tenfold more like your church-going bell at home than you will hear for years to come if you tarry this side of the Father of Waters. There are those here whose eyes fill with tears at the sound of that bell reminding them of the church bells of New England.” But our thirty-niner was somewhat in error. There was a church in Muscatine in 1843. Alden B. Robbins at no time in his life looked with favor on Catholicism, but in this year of his coming he was honest enough to say: “There are more than seven hundred people in the town, and there is no meeting house in the place *except* a small Romish Chapel, which is opened only occasionally.” The chapel referred to, be it observed, stood at the corner of Second and Cedar streets, where, in the rear of the Graham Drug Store, it stands yet. “For several Sabbaths after my arrival”, Mr. Robbins continues, “I preached at the Court House. There are connected with the Church twenty-four members — eleven males. We are all poor but we are hoping and working . . . . It is essential that we should immediately erect a house.”

Of the sermons preached at the courthouse, the first — noted by Mr. Robbins in a pocket diary which he kept — was on the text from Jeremiah: “If thou hast run with the

footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?" The erection of a house of worship was promptly undertaken, for on December 8, 1844, the society held services in a structure located on a hill at what to-day is the corner of Fourth and Sycamore streets. On this occasion the sermon was from the significant text: "And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled." The walls of the church were of home-burned brick, but the shingles for the roof came from Lowell, Massachusetts, and the bell — the same still in use — from Boston. This bell weighed some six hundred pounds and was hung in a wooden belfry at the rear of the building, whence the designation, "the Stern Wheel Church". Later designations — after the young pastor had had opportunity to give Muscatiners a taste of his quality on the slavery question — were "the damned Yankee Church", and "Uncle Tom's Cabin".

In 1852 a new Congregational Church building was erected on a hill at the corner of Third and Chestnut streets. It had a spire seventy feet high, would seat five hundred and seventy-six persons, and cost seven thousand dollars. In 1857 it became necessary to take down this building because of the grading of Third Street, and a house of worship was put up out of the old materials on the rear of the same lot at the new level. This building still stands, and after serving as an armory and drill hall — a use which would have met with the entire approval of its old-time pastor — is now occupied as a printing office. The use of the building for church purposes, however, came to an end in 1893 when it was superseded by a modern structure erected close beside it. The latter fell a prey to fire in 1907 and in 1908 was replaced by the present building.

In 1843 Reverend Asa Turner complained lustily of the

way in which the new Iowa towns were infested with lawyers. He said that Burlington with eighteen hundred inhabitants had twenty-six lawyers but no Presbyterian or Congregational minister. Whether Reverend Alden B. Robbins in 1843 found a superfluity of lawyers in Muscatine is not revealed, but the town did not lack for legal talent: there were such practitioners as Ralph P. Lowe, Joseph Williams, S. Clinton Hastings, Stephen Whicher, William G. Woodward, David Caesar Cloud, Jacob Butler, and J. Scott Richman.

S. Clinton Hastings — afterwards Chief Justice in two States and member of Congress from one — was a not infrequent attendant upon the sermons of Mr. Robbins, which he pronounced Ciceronian in style — something they certainly were not and did not pretend to be. As for Stephen Whicher, he became a member of the Yankee church in 1845. He was tall, slender, and reserved in manner. His features were regular — the nose straight, the mouth nearly a straight line, and the eyes deep set and glowing. John G. Whittier, the poet, who saw him in 1854, said of him that he was “a witty and cultured man”. Witty he assuredly was — acridly so upon occasion. To this day the tradition of his wit — with selected specimens — lingers with the Muscatine bar. His ability withal was of the best. He had studied his profession in the office of Henry Clay, and in course of time he achieved the honored position of United States District Attorney for Iowa. Apropos of lawyers as Christians, the writer remembers that one evening at prayer meeting in the Congregational Church an insurance agent raised the question of the eligibility of lawyers to the Kingdom of Heaven and was broadly smiled at by the pastor for his pains. Lawyers might be a dubious moral quantity, but what about insurance agents!

Two other lawyers of the Muscatine contingent of 1843

became Congregationalists — William G. Woodward and Jacob Butler. The former, like Stephen Whicher, was a thirty-niner. He was courtly, highly social, a graduate of Dartmouth College, and professionally a disciple of Rufus Choate under whom he had gained admittance to the bar. In Iowa he became a justice of the Supreme Court and a State Senator. He was a singer withal, and in the church of Mr. Robbins had charge of the music for many years.

The official records of the Congregational Church of Muscatine have from the first been scrupulously kept, and from them, between 1843 and 1891, there may be gleaned bits of Congregational life.

On November 20, 1843, Alden B. Robbins was invited to officiate as pastor "for the present". Between 1843 and 1857 his salary, in so far as it was locally paid, grew from \$150 in 1845 to \$500 in 1849, \$600 in 1852, \$1000 in 1855, and \$1200 in 1857 — sums equivalent in general purchasing power to three or four times as much as the same amounts to-day. It is interesting to note that although formally invited to become the permanent pastor of the church in 1849, and reminded of this call in 1851, Mr. Robbins took his time about deciding. In fact he did not accept till 1852 when the salary was increased to \$600. And even after acceptance of the call, it was not till 1854 that the pastor became a member of his own church — the church over which he had presided for ten consecutive years — through a letter from "the Church of Christ in Amherst College". It was in January, 1853, that Mr. Robbins was formally installed as permanent pastor, and Stephen Whicher thus describes the occasion: "The night was beautiful and the whole ceremony went off in good New England style; only no ball was held by the young people, and the ministers had no 'phlip' — a favorite New England winter drink made of beer, sugar, rum, and hot iron."

Congregational discipline in the forties, fifties, and even the sixties and seventies of the past century, was a thing different from what it has become since. There were then, even in Muscatine, not a few citations of members to appear and show cause why they should not suffer humiliation for their sins. As one examines the entries of the records, he almost feels himself back in the seventeenth century, with the journals of William Bradford of Plymouth Plantation and of John Winthrop of Massachusetts Bay under his eyes. To illustrate. In 1844, on October 29th, we read that "this day evening a church meeting was held at the house of Rev. A. B. Robbins a house near the Court House", to take into consideration charges preferred against a certain brother. The first charge was of "taking away three horses and one wagon and selling the same and converting the proceeds to his own private use". Then followed other charges, the indictment concluding with a charge of having sold "certain bedding and a buffalo skin to his own use." The accused put in a defense in the nature of confession and avoidance, but his guilt was deemed established, and on April 5, 1845, he was voted into outer darkness.

No other church trial seems to have been so formally conducted as this one, but in 1856 it was resolved that "we consider the case of Brother Giles Pettibone charged with running the ferry boat on the Sabbath". A motion was promptly made that Brother Pettibone be "excommunicated"; but he owned up to his delinquency with such engaging frankness, sorrow, and repentance that he was let off with "suspension from the privileges of church fellowship for one week." Giles evidently had profited by familiarity with the text, "A soft answer turneth away wrath".

But early Congregational Church discipline in Muscatine, though tinged with Puritanism, was not nearly so

rigid as it might have been. On the subject of amusements, for example, the records reveal but two entries. One bears the date of November 13, 1856, and reads: "After some conversation in reference to the attendance upon the theatre and the patronizing of dancing schools by Christians, we adjourned." The other entry, dated July 20, 1869, records a vote that the examining committee on membership "earnestly remonstrate with any of the members who practice dancing, ball attending, and card playing". No mention is here made of the theatre, but it is mentioned that two of the brethren "are commonly reported to bring reproach upon the Church by habits of intoxication".

Dancing, in all pioneer communities, is a form of amusement so spontaneous, so natural, that everybody able to command the not ungraceful use of his two legs responds to it. When therefore in the forties or fifties any Muscatiner received a note "respectfully requesting the pleasure of his company at a Cotillion Party" — under the patronage, as cotillion parties then often were, of Dr. George Reeder, Mr. J. B. Dougherty, Mr. John W. Richman, Mr. Chester Weed, Mr. Joseph Bridgman, Mr. Luke Sells, Mr. Ben Beach, and Dr. O. P. Waters — the party to be given at the Iowa House, or the American House, or the Ogilvie House, on a stated evening of November or February — the probabilities were that he would contrive to attend. Little wonder that in order to keep Congregationalists from joys so exotic to their faith, yet so rapturous, church action now and again was required. Indeed, as late as 1869, Mr. Robbins muses in bitterness thus: "A dance close by — two squares off — had at least two of our members."

As the year 1860 drew near in these United States, the question that dwarfed all others in the public mind was the question of African or negro slavery. On this question the attitude of Mr. Robbins and his "Uncle Tom's Cabin"



church was of course unequivocal and resolute. One member, however — a gentleman from Missouri admitted to fellowship in 1855 — was not in sympathy with the church and its pastor on the slavery question, and in 1858 he openly accused the pastor of “lying” in regard to the South. A church trial followed. It was short and sharp, and was marked by the passing of a resolution that the church “has the fullest confidence in the integrity, faithfulness, wisdom, and piety of its beloved and long-tried pastor; and that we hold as enemies to the Church any who make efforts to break down his influence as a minister of Christ.” But — and here the plot thickens — a further resolution that the pastor’s critic “is guilty and be expelled from the fellowship of this Church” failed to pass. Now on both resolutions the sisters of the church, for the first time in its history, had been permitted to vote; and this permission, it appears, had been granted to them over the protest of the pastor who had contended that for Congregational sisters to vote on, or even discuss, any matter of church business was not only contrary to the practice of the Muscatine church but contrary to that of Congregational churches in general. What then was the situation? It was this. By the votes of the sisters in the Lord — votes wholly out of order, at that — a traducer of the pastor had escaped punishment. One can but feel some curiosity as to what there was about the Missouri gentleman that won for him such indulgence from the Congregational sisterhood.

Whatever it was, the sisters paid for it in the end, as sisters are apt to pay for their indulgence, for at a subsequent meeting of the church it was voted that “in accordance with the uniform usage of Congregational Churches, the power of debating and voting on all business matters in this Church shall for the future be confined to the male members”. Did not the Bible say: “Let your women keep

silence in the churches . . . . And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church". "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection . . . . I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

Be it added that at the same church meeting a further expression of confidence in the pastor was put on record, to the effect that his "free and outspoken testimony against the sins of Slavery and Intemperance" met with unqualified approval. But one month later our Missourian — did the sisters again rally to him? — was given a letter of dismissal and recommendation to the Presbyterian Church of Muscatine.

Between 1861 and 1865 there raged the great American Civil War. The Congregational Church in Muscatine, as was to have been expected, was ardent in its support of President Lincoln and the boys in blue. But rather strangely no mention of the war or its causes is to be found anywhere in the Congregational Church records. In 1857, during the very height of the slavery contest, a negro woman sought admission to the church on the strength of a letter from the African church of the town, but it was voted not to receive her. The entry states: "In the opinion of the majority of the Church, the reasons of the applicant for being received into this Church rather than to labor for Christ in the Church and among the people of her own color are not satisfactory." Hardly consistent — was it — that in 1857 "Uncle Tom's Cabin" should stand open to Uncle Tom and at the same time remain closed to Aunt Dinah? As regards the Civil War itself, a suggestion of it is perhaps contained in the church record of April 11, 1861, that "Brother George W. Van Horne just named by President Lincoln United States Consul at Marseilles, France, having

requested a letter of dismissal and recommendation for himself and wife from this Church to any Evangelical Church of Marseilles, a motion was entertained that it be granted."

But while the church records between 1861 and 1865 failed to make mention of the war, the pastor himself did not: the pulpit was fairly clarion on the subject of the great struggle. So much so was it, that on Sunday, October 27, 1861, the pastor's diary records the following: "Some one broke in the front window glass with a club during preaching. The devil is alarmed."

Outstanding events of the Civil War period were: the firing on Fort Sumter in 1861; the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Union victories of Vicksburg and Gettysburg in 1863; the contest for the presidency between Lincoln and McClellan in 1864; and the constitutional amendment abolishing slavery, the surrender of General Lee and the assassination of President Lincoln in 1865. On all of these events Mr. Robbins spoke. In the early years of the war he often likened the southern rebellion to the "Rebellion of man against God". The Lincoln-McClellan contest of 1864 he characterized as "Choice of God or Devil"; and, apropos of the surrender of Lee in 1865, he noted: "Up to Dr. William O. Kulp's to talk and sing and pray, with thanks for the victory over Lee's army surrendered to Grant. Front windows illuminated in the evening!" Lincoln's assassination finds mention in his diary thus: "Saturday, April 15th, 1865: News of Lincoln's and Seward's Assassination came to-day." "Sunday, April 16th: House of worship covered with crape for President Lincoln." "Sunday, April 23rd: Preached to full House on death of President Lincoln." "Sunday, May 7th: 'Preached on Finding out a Man' — with allusion to John Wilkes Booth." What text was chosen for the sermon on Abraham Lincoln is not

stated, and this we can but regret. No clergyman could excel the pastor of the "Uncle Tom's Cabin Church" in selecting texts that were themselves sermons.

But, as was natural, the war interest of Alden B. Robbins centered in the Emancipation Proclamation and the proposed constitutional amendment to back it up. On Thursday, May 28, 1861, he had said at prayer meeting: "*The thing to be prayed for now is Emancipation*"; and on Sunday, September 7th, he had noted: "Preached in favor of emancipation of slaves. Full house — some excitement." His joy, therefore, when, on January 3, 1863, he heard of the Proclamation of Emancipation was profound. "Glorious dawn of hope for the country!", he exclaims, "more than three million people set at liberty!"

For the Congregational pastor, as for all loyal Muscatiners, the war possessed deep interest in its local aspects. Down on Muscatine Island in 1862 was encamped the Thirty-fifth Iowa Regiment of Infantry — a body of men almost entirely from Muscatine County. Twenty-three of them were from the Muscatine Congregational Church, and the colonel, Sylvester G. Hill, was closely allied to that church through the membership in it of his wife, Martha J. Hill. To this regiment Mr. Robbins was an unofficial chaplain. He ate with the men at mess; he preached to them on "The True Idea of a Soldier"; and when, in November, they left for Dixie, he gave to each of the twenty-three men from his own church a copy of the Psalms — one copy at least bearing the inscription: "He teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight." Nor was his chaplainship uncolored by tragedy. In June, 1864, it fell to him to preach the funeral sermon of Frederick Hill, son of Colonel S. G. Hill, killed at Yellow Bayou, Louisiana; and the same year, in December, to preach the funeral sermon of Colonel Hill himself, killed at the battle of Nashville. On the latter

occasion his diary reads: "Funeral of Colonel Hill at the church. Church crowded. Preached on the 'Breaking of a Strong Rod'."

The Muscatine soldiers were the pastor's staunch friends; still Satan, it seems, would not let them or him alone, for one evening in 1864, when he was attending a soldier's reception, "the devil", he tells us, "took advantage of things and run in a dance."

Whatever the pastor might think of women as voters, he was proud of them as workers in the Soldiers Aid Society. "Abolitionists are loyal", he wrote in 1863. "All of the women of my church are Abolitionists. They would give away their last chemise for the Union." Mr. Robbins took pride in the Muscatine soldiers and in the local women war-workers; but those in the community in whom he took the greatest pride in connection with the war were the negroes. The negro had been freed, and when, as was true in Muscatine for many years after 1865, the black citizens, on January first, marched through the streets in celebration of their freedom, they stopped in front of the Robbins dwelling on West Hill and gave three cheers. "It is a great honor", notes the pastor in 1868, "and one moving my heart. I mean to have a larger flag at the door next year."

We have now traced the course of Congregational life in Muscatine from 1843 to the end of 1865 — a period of twenty-two years. Long before 1865 the Congregational Church had become firmly fixed in the community as a power to be reckoned with, and when in 1868 Alden B. Robbins completed the twenty-fifth year of his pastorate, it was voted by the church, that "the event be celebrated by appropriate social and other arrangements." Prior to 1868 annual celebrations of various kinds had been held — anniversaries of the founding of the church, and of the

pastor's birthday — the 18th of February. In 1867 the birthday occasion — the pastor's fiftieth — had been celebrated with special emphasis. The supper served, including some desperately strong coffee, was pronounced by the *Muscatine Journal* "perfectly gorgeous"; and a little speech which the pastor made in recognition of a multitude of gifts, "as classical as an essay by Macaulay." Among the gifts was a poem by Dewitt C. Richman:

Thine the firm soul — the Puritanic will —  
That bends nor swerves to right or left to court  
The wooing breeze of favor or renown.

Notable as the fiftieth birthday celebration in 1867 had been, it was felt that the twenty-fifth anniversary of the pastorate in 1868 should surpass it, and the happy idea was conceived of causing the celebration to take the form of a "pastoral silver wedding". It took place on Wednesday, November the 18th — a time of the year but little earlier than that of the landing of the Pilgrims on Plymouth Rock. "A great crowd", notes the pastor, "many charming letters and tokens of interest, among them a silver watch and chain." And, on the Sunday following, the pastor preached again the sermon he had preached on his first Sunday in Muscatine — then Bloomington — from the text: "If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses?" At this mid-period of Mr. Robbins's life — true though it was that, as the birthday poem said, "his will had bent nor swerved to court the wooing breeze of favor or renown" — honors fell thick upon him for in 1869 Amherst College, his Alma Mater, conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Divinity.

The charter members of the Muscatine Congregational Church — those signing the Articles of Faith in November, 1843 — numbered twenty-six — twelve men and fourteen women. In 1853 the membership seems to have been about

90; in 1866 it was 209; and as late even as 1883 it did not exceed 241. In 1866 the pastor in his diary says: "All — brothers and sisters too — so far as I know, are Republicans and Radicals. Temperance professedly, and most of them anti-tobacco." Still there were drawbacks. Mr. Robbins's people might be "Republicans and Radicals", but some of them *would* steal off to dances, desert prayer meeting for concerts, and — a notable few — get intoxicated. In 1851 the pastor describes Muscatine as "a sad and guilty reckless town"; nor did he speak much better of it in the sixties, for it was then distinctly pro-whiskey at municipal elections, and there were in it not a few Copperheads. It required only the coming of a theatre to bring down a genuine malediction, and in 1867 a theatre came — a lurid vaudeville, the Black Crook. "Shamefully low state of intelligence and morals indicated by the crowds going to such a theatre!", the pastor exclaims. Despite drawbacks, however, the church prospered. In 1865 the pastor's salary was increased from \$1200 to \$1300. In 1866 it was made \$1600; and in 1868, \$1800. Above \$1800 it never rose. In fact in 1874 it became fixed at \$1500. The deduction consequently is a fair one that the heyday of the church — its golden era — was from about 1853 to 1870. This is confirmed by the course of the church benevolences which for fourteen years, 1848 to 1861, maintained an average of \$1000 a year.

During the first twenty-five years of its existence the church bore on its roll many names of more than local significance. Among them, as already pointed out, were Stephen Whicher, William G. Woodward, Jacob Butler, and George W. Van Horne. The last two have been mentioned — the one as pioneer lawyer and the other as United States Consul at Marseilles — but they should be mentioned again; Butler as a financier and as speaker for one session

of the Iowa House of Representatives, and Van Horne as editor and lecturer. Then there were Dewitt C. Richman, already alluded to as poet, but deserving notice as public speaker and Judge of the Circuit Court; Henry O'Connor, major in the Union army, fiery Republican orator, and for long years solicitor of the Department of State at Washington, D. C.; Suel Foster, horticulturist of state wide prominence; and Frank L. Underwood, southwestern banker. Two other members of the church of more than local distinction there were — Finley M. Witter, educator, scientist, and convert to Darwinism when to be known as such took courage, and Mrs. Cora Chaplin Weed, musician, devotee of culture, and inspirer of youth. Sylvester G. Hill, killed in 1864 at Nashville, was a Congregationalist in all but name, and the same may be said of Thomas Hanna, lawyer and State Senator. With these two should be associated Chester Weed — after his marriage in 1873 to Miss Cora Chaplin — Muscatine's European traveller when to have traveled in Europe yet brought a measure of renown.

Deacons the church had of course: Samuel Lucas, Pliny Fay, Cornelius Cadle, and, after the removal of Mr. Fay to California in 1873, Suel Foster — each (Samuel Lucas perhaps excepted) a man with individuality enough to have been the original of the deacon immortalized by Oliver Wendell Holmes in his "Wonderful One Hoss Shay". It was Deacon Cadle, however, who most abounded in all that was deaconlike. He had dry humor (a bit broad), and discriminating appreciation of good cheer. Cornelius Cadle came to Muscatine the same year as Mr. Robbins — 1843 — and lived, he says, "next house" to him. Like Stephen Whicher, Mr. Cadle thought Muscatine destined to great things. In 1844 he described it as "in latitude 41° 20'," containing "about one thousand inhabitants", and "the most important point above St. Louis".



Mr. Cadle relished the society of the Congregational pastor, but twelve years were required to bring him into the church fold. Apropos of the smashing of a barrel of crockery shipped to him about this time from New York, we find him announcing the fact with the comment: "In the general wreck of matter I had the heartfelt satisfaction of finding a bottle of Irish whiskey". And as late as 1847 he addressed to a distant friend the query: "Don't you feel as if you would like to be in Canal Street again, with all our old companions, and a few of champagne?" But by 1848 regeneration had so far set in with him that he wrote: "I have adopted the cold water system both externally and internally and never drink any more whiskey punch. . . . A year ago I joined the Sons of Temperance and have kept remarkably sober since then."

The future deacon's taste for good things is shown by the mention which he makes of the wild game all about Muscatine. "We have no oysters", he writes in 1843, "but then we have lots of wild game which may be had without poaching. Quails sell here in winter for 25 to 27 cents a dozen, and if you think that too dear, just open your windows (those who have any) and they will fly in to you. The old settlers think when they become more civilized they will come in ready cooked". "It would make the mouths of the New Yorkers water", he repeats, "to see the quails here. . . . They walk through the town in droves of twenty to fifty . . . we have had hardly anything else to eat for a month past, and eat from ten to twelve a day. . . . Two men with a net can catch from five hundred to one thousand in half a day. They think of offering up the prayers of the church for protection against them."

As a result of so much abundance, reinforced by a disciplined taste, what more natural than that Mr. and Mrs. Cadle — Mr. Cadle had married in Muscatine in 1848 —

should in 1850 begin observing Thanksgiving Day in a style which, as maintained throughout the fifties, sixties, and seventies, was the admiration and despair of all Congregational Muscatine, at least. The menu — I speak in part from personal knowledge — comprised two large turkeys — one at each end of a long table, a chicken pie, oysters — for by the fifties oysters had begun to appear west of the Mississippi — mashed potatoes, turnips, onions, cranberry tart, pickles, jellies, mince pie, pumpkin pie, and last — the masterpiece of the occasion — a real English plum pudding, made from a recipe brought by ancestral Cadles from merrie England in the eighteenth century.

In 1851 Mr. Robbins tells us that on Thanksgiving Day he dined at Mr. D. C. Cloud's; but in 1852 the record reads: "Dined at Mr. Cadle's." In 1853 it stands: "Dined at Mr. Cadle's — a great day"; and in 1854 it stands: "Dined at Mr. Cadle's." Could words say more!

The pastorate of Alden B. Robbins in Muscatine extended not to twenty-five years only, but to fifty years. So far as Muscatine Congregational life is concerned, the last half of this long period was not marked by features so distinctive as the first half. As we proceed, therefore, that life may be permitted to disclose itself as incidental to the personality of its central figure — Dr. Robbins himself.

When Mr. Robbins came to Muscatine he had just been married, and his first dwelling — the one next to Cornelius Cadle — would seem to have been on what is now Chestnut Street near the foot of the High Bridge. Soon, however, we hear of his occupying a house on what is now Mulberry Avenue, near the present United Brethren Church; and later a house on Third Street, near Sycamore, owned by George Schooley. In the Mulberry Avenue house, the pipe from the heating stove projected out of a front window;

and to this house in winter time the pastor hauled water for laundry purposes from Mad Creek on a sled. The house which Muscatine knew as his for more than forty years — that on West Hill — he built himself in 1850. His diary of February 1, 1850, records: "Hindered all day by a smokey flue in Schooley's mean house." Then, on June 17, 1850, comes, in logical sequence, the entry: "Moving from Schooley's house, opposite Baptist lot, to new and own house on hill."

In mere physique the Congregational pastor was noteworthy. His stature was five feet nine inches; he had clear blue eyes, a Roman nose, and abundant wavy, silken hair that before he was forty had turned white as snow — the most beautiful hair one ever saw. His muscular powers, too, were not to be despised. He was a strong swimmer and as such conquered the swollen Cedar River more than once. He loved a good horse, using one when necessary to carry him to the scene of wedding or funeral. How much he admired physical strength appears from a remark by him in 1890 that he recollected "a good deacon of his church [Samuel Lucas] who could not be handled physically by any man in the County." "We have no such men in the church now", he adds regretfully.

He believed in propagating the race, and disliked Tolstoy because of his theory that "no man has any right to have any descendants". It is perhaps unnecessary to say that Dr. Robbins had pride and a temper. His temper was high when roused, and he was wont to lament it as his besetting sin.

Intellectually considered this pioneer minister, this son of New England, was worthy of his origin. He loved books and he loved reading aloud. His voice was of rare quality and he read the Scriptures to perfection. Often alone in his study would he read aloud to himself some Scriptural

passage or master utterance of secular writer. In 1853, on November 30th, he notes that he read "one half of a speech by the Earl of Chatham aloud"; and one day in 1861 he notes: "Read aloud with great pleasure 'Elegy in a Country Churchyard'." In 1851 he purchased Macaulay's *History of England* and in 1868 the three volumes of Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic*. Fiction he largely eschewed, but *Uncle Tom's Cabin* he classed with the *Iliad* and the *Pilgrim's Progress*. *Cape Cod Folks* as yet was undreamed of. He brought to Muscatine the first copy owned in the town.

Lectures by speakers worth hearing he always attended. In 1855 he heard T. Starr King on "Substance and Show"; in 1856, Wendell Phillips on "The Lost Arts"; in 1860, Tom Marshall on "Henry Clay"; in 1864, Dr. Edward Beecher on "Owen Lovejoy"; in 1867, Theodore Tilton on "Reconstruction" — "good, sound anti-Slavery truth", he pronounced the last lecture; yet he felt regarding Tilton personally that he was "helped by greatly resembling Henry Ward Beecher, once his pastor." Wendell Phillips he heard again, in 1867, on "Street Life on the Continent"; but he was critical of his "poor pronunciation for so finished a speaker." Mr. Robbins also heard in Muscatine in these and other years: Dr. Isaac I. Hayes, the Arctic explorer; Bronson Alcott, the Concord philosopher; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the suffragist; and Schuyler Colfax, Speaker of the national House of Representatives. John F. Dillon of Davenport, the jurist, he heard, but considered his style "sophomorical". He even lectured a few times himself — once on the "Lady of the Lake", and once on "Sir Walter Raleigh". His audience at the latter he humorously describes as "very select".

As classmates of Mr. Robbins at Amherst were two men destined to fame as pulpit orators — Frederic D. Hunting-

ton, afterwards Bishop of Central New York, and Richard S. Storrs, afterwards pastor of the Church of the Pilgrims in Brooklyn. But down to 1875 the pastor's pulpit ideal — so far as he permitted himself one — was probably Henry Ward Beecher. In 1874 came the Beecher-Tilton trial, and thereafter the pastor speaks but little of Beecher. Concerning him his diary utters the few but pregnant words (Beecher's own): "Alas! Alas! Did ever a greater ass fall into a deeper pit!" Let it be added that Dr. Robbins's own sermons, though always practically helpful, rose at times to heights of noble eloquence. One phrase flung out by him regarding the Jews rings in my mind after forty years: "their Conquerors are dead, but they live on."

Having been a radical in politics, when politics involved the issues of slavery and the Union, Dr. Robbins clung to the Republican party long after that party, as many thought, had ceased to be worthy of the confidence of the people. When after the Civil War Charles Francis Adams, Sr., left the "Grand Old Party" in disgust, the pastor denounced him from the pulpit as "a degenerate son of the Adamses". Nor was this the first of his pulpit denunciations of recalcitrant political leaders. In 1852 on the death of Daniel Webster, after that giant of New England had declared regarding slavery that the North must learn to conquer her prejudices, he had preached from the words of the eighty-second Psalm: "I have said ye are gods . . . but ye shall die like men." The most striking instance, perhaps, of Dr. Robbins's defence of the Republican party from the pulpit was in 1876 just after the presidential election, when it looked as if Samuel J. Tilden might have triumphed over Rutherford B. Hayes. A Democrat in the White House was unthinkable to him, and on Sunday, November 12th, he preached (as his diary records) "on God's deliverance of Paul and our nation by a basket". The text

is a familiar one: "Then the disciples took him [Paul] by night, and let *him* down by the wall in a basket." The Republican party, Dr. Robbins reasoned on this occasion, would win even though let down from a wall in a basket. Justice Bradley of the United States Supreme Court proved to be just the basket required to carry the party to safety.

Alden B. Robbins was a Puritan and he gloried in the fact. He consequently was narrow in a sense, but his narrowness had its redeeming features. A user of tobacco was to him in some sort a sinner, and it hurt his conscience to take his children to view the street parade of Dan Robinson's circus; but when it came to setting forth Puritan achievements in church and state he discriminated. The Puritans had hanged witches and Quakers. Privately, he probably felt that the witches and Quakers — especially the Quakers — had deserved hanging, but he meant that it should be understood that the Puritans who did the hanging were not the real Congregationalists. The latter were the Pilgrims and hailed from Plymouth, not from Boston.

On the question of the bondage of the negro and on that of the bondage of the inebriate, Dr. Robbins was broad. But, as we have seen, he was not broad on the question of the bondage of women. He did not believe in equal suffrage. "Went to hear Mrs. S. on suffrage", he notes in 1871. "Smart but sophistical. Makes the ballot to be everything when it is in many respects a humbug." And, as late as 1895, he said: "Regarding the suggestion that women vote, it might not be so great a boon as it seems to be now. Woman's greatest honor is that she gave the Saviour to the World without the intervention of man".

Dr. Robbins was a power in Muscatine — a power with all, be their church affiliations what they might. And two things made him so — his spirituality and his unquestioned sincerity. He was always handling political — and hence

burning — questions, but he had the faculty of handling them in a spiritual way. They did not drag him down, as they do many ministers: he dragged them up. In the fifties he was sometimes called “Cock Robbins” by the pro-slaveryites, but he was never made the target of rotten eggs or dead cats. They would as soon have thought of thus assailing the Apostle Paul himself. In 1880, when James A. Garfield won the presidency against Winfield Scott Hancock, the pastor delivered what the Democratic newspaper of Muscatine called “a Te Deum over the Republican victory”. “But”, said its editor, “Doctor Robbins long ago earned the right to the free utterance of his convictions from his pulpit, and as his political philosophy is acceptable to his Church it is not our business to find fault with it.”

On his distinctively human side, Mr. Robbins was most engaging. He had keen humor, and he enjoyed social occasions; occasions whereon, in the early days, his people remembered him with prairie chickens, quails, mallard ducks, and turkeys; and always with apples — barrels of red Jonathans or huge juicy bellflowers, of both of which he was very fond.

Like most New Englanders, he was inclined to exalt Thanksgiving at the expense of Christmas. But his Sunday School and his children saw to it between them that the balance did not go unredressed. And anyway the Thanksgiving dinners at Deacon Cadle's, followed by the inevitable Thursday evening prayer meetings, served to keep Christmas — a Catholic and Episcopal festival as he thought — in the subordinate position where it belonged. As regards the pastor's humor, it has already sufficiently colored these pages through excerpts from his diary; but he was known to give it way with entire propriety even in a funeral discourse. He preached the funeral sermon of his long-time deacon Suel Foster, and in it alluded to the sartorial idio-

syneracy of the man as revealed in the circumstance that, no matter what suit he wore, the trousers always stopped short six inches above his shoe tops.

Music is the most human of arts, and Dr. Robbins greatly enjoyed it as rendered in hymns sung by the congregation. In the form of elaborate renditions by a choir, he distrusted it a little. That is to say, he distrusted the choir, whatever he may have thought of the music. Thus in 1868 he records: "Spoke at prayer meeting of prayer for choir. The devil (at work as usual through a choir) has stirred up trouble about something said by me." The pastor had reason to be wary of choirs, for it seems that it was through the choir that the unpleasantness began with the gentleman from Missouri in 1858. That individual was a singer — a tenor singer — and as such influential. How influential may be gathered from the notation by the pastor on January 25, 1858 — "the choir have ceased to sing." But during the time they did sing they evidently sang well, for of them Mrs. Cora Chaplin Weed, who joined the church in 1861, speaks thus: "Who will ever forget the glorious choir of the old Congregational Church? Mrs. Woodward, soprano; Mrs. James Weed, alto; Judge Woodward, bass; and G. M. ——— [the gentleman from Missouri], tenor. I used to close my eyes in my early childhood and imagine, as the lovely quartet sang in the high gallery, that it was very like the music heard from cloudland by the shepherds on that first Christmas morn. Many a tear have I secretly wiped away because of the heavenly melodies that floated down from the old choir; melodies repeated now, I believe, in Paradise." In Paradise it may be! Judge Woodward died in 1871, and G. M. in 1875. Concerning the latter Dr. Robbins wrote in 1875 on February 10th: "Poor G. M. — the old church member and enemy of mine and the church — died at Memphis and was buried here today." May it not



have been on account of his angel tenor voice that the sisters of the Congregational Church saved the gentleman from Missouri from excommunication in 1858?

Finally, concerning Alden B. Robbins let it be recorded — and most fittingly so in these days of world-upheaval — that ever and always he was a sturdy patriot. No pacifist he! Not for nothing did his eyes first greet the light in the Old Bay State — the State of the Winthrops, of John Quincy Adams, of Wendell Phillips, and of Charles Sumner. “Can’t whip the South!” he demanded in 1863. “Seven hundred men whipped five thousand at Donelson; eight hundred men and two cannon, under Iowan, [Fitz Henry] Warren, repulsed six thousand and five cannon! Since January first, Texas cavalry at Corinth only saved the South!” Nor did his patriotism ever wane. In 1868 he apologized in his diary for not having a larger flag out when the negroes cheered his home as they marched past it, and he promised himself to make amends the next year. In 1876 he bought a flag “six feet long”, and on January 1, 1877, he noted: “Put out flag for the Emancipation celebration and was cheered by the poor colored band at door.” As late as 1890, at an old settlers’ celebration, he punctuated an address he was making by drawing forth a silk flag and unfolding it.

In 1891 Dr. Robbins, after forty-eight years of faithful service for “God and Native Land” in Muscatine, resigned the pastorate of the Congregational Church. He was at once made pastor emeritus and held the position till his death on December 27, 1896. His first wife, Miss Eliza C. Hough of Canterbury, Connecticut, had died of cholera in Muscatine in July, 1850. His second wife, Miss Mary Sewall Arnold, of Monmouth, Maine, whom he had married in September, 1851, had died in Muscatine in June, 1894.

Muscatine — the Muscatine of the early French explorers and of Zebulon M. Pike of 1805 — is able to point in its Anglo-Saxon period to some striking personalities. Among them two stand preëminent — Dr. Alden B. Robbins and Father Pierre Laurent — the Puritan and the Priest: one from Salem, Massachusetts; the other from Dijon, France. Each was planted firmly upon a rock: the one upon Plymouth Rock, and the other upon the Rock of St. Peter. Both spent in Muscatine, in charge of their respective flocks, their entire working lives — periods of slightly more than fifty years. They never drew very near together — this Puritan and this Priest — but each in a way respected and admired the other. Both possessed superior education; both were by nature markedly social; both did their duty unflinchingly as they saw it. Said Father Laurent one day to a member of Dr. Robbins's church who was angling for his opinion as to whether Protestants could hope to enter the Kingdom of God, "*Ma Chère Madame*" — the Father liked to revert to his native French tongue — "*Ma Chère Madame* — you will all be saved if for no other reason because of your invincible ignorance." Would Dr. Robbins, if questioned, have returned with respect to his Catholic fellow mortals an answer equally hopeful?

I was ever a fighter, so — one fight more,  
The best and the last!

IRVING B. RICHMAN

MUSCATINE IOWA