

WILLIAM SALTER AND THE SLAVERY
CONTROVERSY
1837-1864

New York, from upper Broadway to the Battery, was hung with colored bunting and festive crape, despite ominous warnings in Wall Street counting houses, on Wednesday, March 15, 1837. Citizens crowded close to glimpse a barouche carrying Daniel Webster to the American House, where he was to rest after a tedious journey from Philadelphia to Perth Amboy on the newly constructed Camden and Amboy Railway and from Perth Amboy to New York on a specially chartered boat. In the evening, surrounded by bright flares, Mr. Webster told almost five thousand persons gathered in Niblo's Saloon that he opposed bringing Texas, a slave-holding country, into the Union. Amid rattling applause, he declared the issue of negro slavery must be considered according to the consciences of right-thinking men. A sixteen-year-old boy heard Webster's dignified, yet impassioned, speech and doubtless joined in round after round of applause.

This lad was William Salter, born on November 17, 1821, near the seashore in old Brooklyn. His father was William Frost Salter, a shipowner and trader, who had recently lost a fortune in a trading expedition of the good ship *Mary and Harriet*, bound from New Orleans to Calais, France. William Frost Salter was descended from John Salter, a mariner who arrived in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, from Devonshire, England, some time in the latter part of the seventeenth century. William Salter's mother was Mary Ewen Salter, a daughter of Alexander Ewen, a

prominent Portsmouth importer, who had emigrated from Aberdeen, Scotland, prior to the Revolutionary War.

Both parents agreed that William should be trained in the Old School Presbyterian tenets and educated in the best schools of New York. The boy was compelled to attend Sunday School and church services and much of his early religious inspiration was derived from the sermons of the Reverend Samuel H. Cox, pastor of the Laight Street Presbyterian Church. Here in the family pew he sat with his parents and sisters and brothers for many long hours. When older, he heard Dr. William H. Channing preach and listened also to the evangelist, Charles G. Finney.

At ten years of age, William was put to the study of Latin and at the age of twelve he began to learn Greek. Six years later he was studying Hebrew and Arabic. Some of this training he received in S. Johnston's Classical and English School, where he won many certificates of merit. At one time he thought of studying law, and frequented the courts of New York City where he listened attentively to the great lawyers of his time — David B. Ogden, Josiah Hoffman, Daniel Low, and Prescott Hall — but he first heard a serious slavery discussion by a great statesman that evening in Niblo's Saloon when Philip Hone and other dignitaries introduced Mr. Webster.

At that time, Salter was a student at the University of the City of New York. He was so moved by Webster's oratory that he made frequent allusions to slavery in subsequent rather grandiloquent addresses before the Philomethian Literary Society, a group of lively young men who gathered fortnightly for exercise in debating, oratory, and composition.

Salter, on one occasion, presented a paper on *A Few Thoughts on Republicanism with a Word on Monarchy* and told the assembled debaters that "God is no respecter of

persons and why should we set upon arbitrary distinction among children of one common household."¹ Freedom, he continued, is natural and must spread until despotism's towers are overthrown. Later, as students at Andover Theological Seminary, William Salter and Edwin B. Turner, in the quiet of the library, spoke occasionally of the southern agricultural system as dominated by human servitude. Neither Salter nor Turner then knew that they were to go West, under commissions from the American Home Missionary Society, there to watch, with careful New England eyes, the slavery controversy flame into rebellion.

With the Iowa Band, William Salter came to Iowa in 1843, and at Farmington, within the first week after his arrival, he saw slaves from Missouri bringing grain for milling.² His first charge was Maquoketa, but in 1846 he was called to Burlington where he remained until his death in 1910. As Preacher Salter, for such was he called, rode through Iowa, he talked about slavery with settlers and immigrants, attempting to gauge the frontier's attitude. In Iowa City, for example, he found a young Scotchman, an "intelligent, warm-hearted, anti-slavery" tailor with whom he became acquainted.³ On October 8, 1844, he addressed the first annual meeting of the Iowa Anti-Slavery Society at Washington where two Salem Quakers, Aaron Street, Jr., and Wm. Lewelling, pledged themselves to oppose the extension of slavery.⁴

Only a few days before this, Mr. Salter had heard his colleagues, assembled in general session at Brighton, de-

¹ See Jordan's *William Salter — Philomethian* in the *Annals of Iowa* (Third Series), Vol. XVIII, p. 299.

² Salter's *My Ministry in Iowa*, a manuscript record of the early years in Maquoketa and vicinity. Under date of October 26, 1843, he wrote: "To the mill at Farmington slaves come from 30 to 40 miles South in Missouri."

³ Salter's *My Ministry in Iowa*, under date of October 15, 1844.

⁴ Salter's *My Ministry in Iowa*, under date of October 15, 1844.

bate the question whether church fellowship should be withdrawn from slaveholders. The same problem was being earnestly discussed by officials of the American Home Missionary Society and, despite the protests of extreme anti-slavery advocates, was terminated, for the time being, when the Society declared itself ready to offer financial assistance to churches regardless of their slavery views. With this decision Mr. Salter was then in accord. In June, 1856, however, the General Congregational Association of Iowa, meeting in Grinnell, reversed its former decision, and reported that "the time has come when the American Home Missionary Society should no longer grant aid to any church which allows the practice of slave holding by its members."⁵

Not only were Mr. Salter's views upon slavery conditioned by his conversations with Iowa settlers during the saddle years of his ministry; they were also influenced by the attitude of his father-in-law, Eliab P. Mackintire,⁶ of Boston, and by the opinions of his older brother, Benjamin Salter, then a dry-goods commission merchant of New York. Both these men held anti-slavery — although not abolitionist — views, and their well-balanced sentiments, expressed in long series of letters, undoubtedly did much to mellow Mr. Salter's youthful tendency to take an extreme view.

Mr. Mackintire, in particular, did much to mature and shape the opinions of his son-in-law. A canny, honest New Englander, descended from a family settling in Reading, Massachusetts, about 1651, Mackintire had inherited an aristocratic rationalism. He easily conceived human nature

⁵ Letter from William Salter to the American Home Missionary Society, dated Burlington, Iowa, September, 1856.

⁶ See Jordan's *Letters of Eliab Parker Mackintire, of Boston, 1845-1863, To the Reverend William Salter, of Burlington, Iowa*, in the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, July-December, 1934, Vol. XXXVIII.

as evil, had a decided bent to the ethical, and manifested during his entire life a Calvinistic thrift. For him religion and education were the dominant features — capped, of course, by a successful commercial career — of the well-rounded social life. Such was the background of the man whose opinions Mr. Salter took seriously, and to whom he frequently wrote for an interpretation of perplexing problems.

Mr. Mackintire held the opinion that slavery in a State should not be interfered with but, on February 22, 1856, he wrote to Anthony S. Morss, President of the Bunker Hill Republican Association: "I would resist to the death the extension of the institution over a foot of territory now free, the annexation of any new slave territory, or the addition of any new Slave States to the Union."⁷

On subsequent occasions Mr. Mackintire sent sound advice to the young minister whose Burlington congregation included men who were not opposed to the extension of slavery; for Burlington, be it remembered, had many elements of southern society. "If", Mr. Mackintire wrote in 1847, "instead of organizing voluntary associations to attract the South and throwing a cudgel at every slave-holder we can find, and shaking our fist in the face of everybody who does not see things as we do — we of the free states would just make our own *laws* free and equal, and employ our wisdom and patriotism in devising some *practical* way by which the evil could be removed, we might perhaps do more good."⁸

This sound philosophy was substantiated by the opinion of Benjamin Salter who, although not the student Mr. Mackintire was, nevertheless possessed good business

⁷ *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, Vol. XXXVIII, July, 1934, p. 527.

⁸ *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, Vol. XXXVIII, August, 1934, p. 640.

sense and believed that discretion did a minister no harm. It was his opinion that slavery, if left to work out its own development, would eventually either be confined to the southern States, or be cast aside as an unprofitable venture. As early as November 30, 1844, he wrote, "I have great faith, and more hopes than fears, that in due time, the evil of slavery will be removed."⁹

However moderate these gentlemen were in their attitude toward slavery, they were bitterly opposed to the Mexican War. They called it a conflict for annexation, heaped fire upon President Polk, and denied that the several States should furnish arms and men. Benjamin Salter looked on the war as unjust and thought the slavery advocates were responsible for it.¹⁰ On January 19, 1848, Mr. Mackintire wrote: "Our rulers seem bent upon the conquest of Mexico, Cortes-like. . . . The fact is, the people are becoming infatuated with military glory, and even with those who condemn the war, the *army* is popular. And grave senators are taking the ground openly that if the people desire the whole of Mexico, it is as vain to try to prevent it as to stop the Niagara. And if the President can get a standing army sufficient to conquer, or to hold Mexico, it will give him a patronage and power that the people may try in vain to overthrow or resist."¹¹

As he learned the ways of Burlington Congregationalism, Mr. Salter was displeased to find his parish enthusiastic in the support of the President's aggressive policy. By June of 1846, Burlington had raised two companies, and its unpaved streets felt the tramp of rookie feet, guided by sharp

⁹ Letter from Benjamin Salter to William Salter, dated New York, November 30, 1844.

¹⁰ Letter from Benjamin Salter to William Salter, dated New York, November 13, 1846.

¹¹ *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, Vol. XXXVIII, September, 1934, p. 721.

orders from officers of the regular army. Whiskey from the generous hands of recruiting sergeants fired the patriotism of many a farmer boy, bringing him, quite befuddled, into his country's service. So well did one yokel avail himself of army spirits that he died of delirium tremens soon after enlistment. His coffin, covered with a dirty flag, was carried to the burying-ground, to the music of a fife and drum, and interred with full military honors.¹²

Despite the efforts of recruiting officers, Manifest Destiny might have been halted at the frontier line of 1840 if Mr. Salter's pulpit oratory had taken the field. He wrote to his fiancée, Mary Ann Mackintire, on May 25, 1846: "Instead of preaching on the evil of war, I shall discourse, I believe, on the blessing of peace from I Kings 5:4, as there is too much of a war spirit here, as in the West generally. I may avoid perhaps giving offense [and] secure the same object by telling what a good thing peace is".¹³ He accordingly preached on the blessings of peace, showing that an absence of war stimulated westward migration, increased the nation's commerce, added to the number of inventions recorded at the patent office, favored the development of the arts, education, and manners, and promoted benevolent enterprises among men.

Despite his desire to avoid offense, he did not resist the temptation to strike at the war spirit then so enthusiastically manifested in Burlington. "It is the settled conviction of nearly all minds", he said, "that we must never engage in aggressive wars. Any one who should propose wars for conquest like those of the Roman emperors, or those of Napoleon, or those of the British in India would be condemned at once, and his name cast out as evil. A standing army of any kind can hardly be endured. It is

¹² Letter from William Salter to the American Home Missionary Society, dated Burlington, Iowa, October 12, 1847.

¹³ *Annals of Iowa* (Third Series), Vol. XIX, p. 459.

with extreme difficulty that an annual appropriation of ten or twelve millions of dollars can be obtained from Congress for the support of the army and navy under what is singularly called a *peace* establishment. The Military Academy has long ceased to be a popular institution. Military training which was once the glory of our country villages has become a byword and a reproach."¹⁴

Despite this diatribe against war, peace was not to come until General Scott had captured Vera Cruz and entered the City of Mexico, and the insatiable American appetite for westward expansion had been temporarily appeased by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848. Mexico then agreed to consider the Rio Grande as the international boundary and ceded to the United States the provinces of New Mexico and Upper California, in all an area of nearly 522,955 square miles, receiving in consideration the nominal sum of fifteen millions of dollars.

Mr. Salter's chagrin was great, but he had little time to mourn what he considered the loss of national "dignity". The slavery controversy was rapidly increasing in importance; rebellion was daily coming closer. Although the Fugitive Slave Law was often disobeyed, Mr. Mackintire advocated patience and cautioned Mr. Salter not to make too active demonstrations against it.

In 1852 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared. It was published in Boston by a Mr. Rockwood, a friend of the Mackintires, who said that ten thousand copies were ordered by April first and that four presses and one hundred binders were employed to meet the demand. This two-volume blow to slavery, having been read by Mr. Mackintire, was sent to Burlington where Mr. and Mrs. Salter took turns reading

¹⁴ Manuscript sermon, delivered at Burlington on May 31, Maquoketa on June 8, and at Chicago on July 13, 1846, from the text I Kings 5:4 — "But now the Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent."

it, and then loaned it to friends. As a result many Burlingtonians realized that Harriet Beecher Stowe had struck, as Mr. Mackintire wrote, "the hardest blow at slavery as it exists in this country it has ever received".¹⁵ A year later the Rockwood press published Mrs. Stowe's *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and this, too, came to Burlington. In addition to these works, Mr. Salter's views on slavery were influenced by the magazines and newspapers which came to his home. Among these were *De Bow's Review*, the *North American Review*, the *Biblical Sacra and Theological Review*, and the *New York Observer*.

In the fall of 1856, Mr. Salter agreed with Mr. Mackintire that slavery could be destroyed only by one of three methods which the two men had worked out in a lengthy correspondence. The first, indicative of what actually was to take place, was by bloodshed and violence. The second was by political action, a means which Mr. Mackintire, having small respect for politicians, was doubtful of. The third method was by the awakened conscience of the slaveholders themselves, a possibility which Mr. Salter, familiar with the chauvinistic and egocentric South and West, despaired of. Three years later Mr. Salter, after much troubled reflection, brought his thoughts together in a sermon entitled "Slavery and the Lessons of Recent Events", which he delivered on Sunday, December 4, 1859.¹⁶ Until the beginning of the Civil War, this sermon expressed the results of his study of slavery which had begun twenty-two years earlier when he heard Webster in Niblo's Saloon.

Taking his text from Romans 3:29,¹⁷ Mr. Salter began

¹⁵ *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, Vol. XXXVIII, October, 1934, p. 843.

¹⁶ *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, April 1, 1900.

¹⁷ "Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also."

by saying there is no reason why all men should not live together in peace and love while earnestly attempting to do one another good. God, he said, is no respecter of persons, or nations, or races. "Why then", he asked, "should a system, which is simply a repudiation of all these principles, which bear in every part the lineaments of anti-Christ, still exist, and exist too in swelling power in our country?" The immense profit of slave labor was his explanation of the southern insistence upon a system "contrary to Divine Will and to the principles laid down by the nation's founders".

The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which repealed that part of the Missouri Compromise prohibiting slavery in the territory east of the Rocky Mountains and north of 36° 30', and the Dred Scott decision of the Supreme Court in 1856, which virtually opened all territory to the slave owner, were also cited as reasons for the growth of slavery.

To meet the problem, Mr. Salter made four suggestions to his congregation. First, the slavery question should be calmly, wisely, and thoroughly discussed in the spirit of Christian love in order to forestall rash and inconsiderate action. Second, the Christian church should extend no aid to slavery. Third, the slavery problem should be remembered in prayer frequently, for "one of the avowed objects of the gospel is to undo the heavy burdens, and proclaim liberty to the captive". And fourth, "As citizens of the United States we ought to give our whole influence against slavery." The honest acceptance of these suggestions, he concluded, should result in a happy solution of the problem. "Finally", he said, "let the slaves be treated as men — give them their homes, and let the husband belong to his wife, and the wife to her husband, until death shall part them, and let the child honor his father and his mother

— give them the reward of their industry — and the angry cloud that now threatens the land shall be dispelled forever." He advocated the "immediate commencement of the work of emancipation".

This sermon produced a sensation among the congregation. Men and women doubtless gathered in the vestry after the service to discuss it, and to compliment the pastor when he appeared, for the southern element in Burlington society which Mr. Salter found when he went there in 1846 had largely disappeared, and in its place a sharp anti-slavery sentiment had developed. On the following Thursday, a committee of ten forwarded to Mr. Salter a note saying that the signers had listened with pleasure to Sunday's sermon and asked that he permit them to publish it in the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*. Among the names signed were those of John G. Foote, Thomas Hedge, Charles Dunham, Wm. Smyth, and Luke Palmer. The "Slavery Sermon", as it came to be known, was published then, and forty years later, while Mr. Salter was still living, it was reprinted in the *Hawk-Eye*.

A month before Fort Sumter was fired upon, Mr. Salter, foreseeing coming events, again spoke to his people on the question of slavery, but on this occasion he shifted the emphasis from slavery itself to that of rebellion against the nation.¹⁸ For more than twenty years, he said, the sentiment had been growing among southerners that slavery was a righteous and proper institution and that its preservation and extension was a high and paramount national duty. He cautioned his congregation against permitting any section of the Union to rebel against established authority in order to perpetuate "a blot upon our

¹⁸ A sermon delivered in Burlington on March 3, 1861. The text was from Ezekiel 2:8 — "But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; be thou not rebellious like that rebellious house: open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee."

civil and religious order". He concluded by saying, "The work to which God calls us is to contribute whatever influence we can command to the cause of Emancipation." This was the first of a series of nine public addresses, preserved in manuscript, which he gave between 1861 and 1865.

By July, 1861, Burlington was listening to the raillery and banter of recruiting officers, much as it had in 1846, and spots of blue mingled with the drab dress of farmers coming to the county seat to hear the latest war dispatches. On Sunday, July 28th, Mr. Salter, recognizing the mounting muster rolls, preached on "The Duty of the Soldier".¹⁹ The first duty of the soldier, he said, is to see that his cause is just, for the warrior, in the language of the Apostle, is "the minister of God, to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." The army, apparently, occupied a higher place in Mr. Salter's opinion than it had in 1846. Slavery, he asserted, was a monstrous crime whose supporters were assaulting American institutions.

Believing that the result of civil war would be either the overthrow of the nation or the inauguration of a system of emancipation, Mr. Salter devoted much time to activities connected with the conflict. His correspondence with Mr. Mackintire and his brother, Benjamin Salter, was stimulated anew as war news increased. Both these men supported President Lincoln's war policies. "I think the government and Lincoln are too slow," Benjamin Salter wrote, "but I believe they are powerless and it is necessary to be very conservative, for we must not have a divided North."²⁰

Among Mr. Salter's activities was the surreptitious and

¹⁹ A sermon preached at Burlington on July 28, 1861, on the text from Deuteronomy 23:9 — "When the host goeth forth against thine enemies, then keep thee from every wicked thing."

²⁰ Letter from Benjamin Salter to William Salter, dated Paterson, New Jersey, March 10, 1862.

illegal assistance rendered fugitive slaves. Such help, although bitterly resented by the South, frequently was afforded escaping servants by prominent northerners who justified their acts on humanitarian, rather than legal, grounds. Many negroes, fleeing from Missouri masters, cautiously penetrated Iowa by way of Denmark. Here the Reverend W. H. Hicks received them, only to pass them along to Burlington where they often found refuge in Mr. Salter's home. On July 18, 1861, Mr. Hicks wrote that a colored Baptist minister, an escaped slave of Doctor Wayland of Francesville, Missouri, was hiding in Burlington. As Doctor Wayland was offering a reward of half the slave's price in the current market, Mr. Hicks implored Mr. Salter to find the negro and assist him to reach Canada. "Do not trust anyone", he wrote, "not even this brother, that I am the sender of this information, as I am still in that section where he is from, and should it be known that I have sent warning it might prove dangerous to me."²¹

On October 28, 1861, a note, left under Mr. Salter's door, warned him to expect "three contrabands" from Doctor Curtis Shedd about three or four o'clock the following morning.²² From Burlington, Mr. Salter's refugees might be spirited north through Mt. Pleasant, Crawfordsville, Washington, Davenport, and DeWitt, a route commonly used, or, crossing the Mississippi, might follow the Illinois route to one of several ports on Lake Michigan.²³

²¹ Letter from W. H. Hicks to William Salter, dated Denmark, July 18, 1861.

²² Letter from P. B. Bell to William Salter, dated Burlington, October 28, 1861. The author is indebted to Mr. E. R. Harlan and Miss Halla Rhode, of the Historical, Memorial, and Art Department of Iowa, Des Moines, who generously sent these letters for his examination.

²³ Although Wilbur H. Siebert lists 116 Iowa operators of Underground stations, residing in seventeen counties, he names none for Des Moines County. — Siebert's *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (1898), pp. 409-411.

As the year 1862 came to a close, detachments of the Twenty-fifth Iowa left Burlington for Memphis, Tennessee. This regiment contained many boys whom Mr. Salter knew personally. Among these was Allen Lockwood, eighteen-year-old admirer of Mary, Mr. Salter's oldest daughter, then a student at Denmark Academy. Lockwood's letters, written from bivouac and camp, brought something of the realities of war to the Salter family, and might well have drawn Mr. Salter's thoughts to the work of the United States Christian Commission which, by the winter of 1862, had completed its organization and had delegates in the field.

In the summer of 1864, encouraged by reports of friends who had served in the Christian Commission and wishing to see the Army of the United States in action, Mr. Salter and his friend, the Reverend J. W. Pickett, of Mt. Pleasant, made application for commissions as field delegates to the Army of the Cumberland. Eighteen years earlier, writing from Maquoketa, his first Iowa parish, Mr. Salter had been shocked by the news that a St. Louis Presbyterian minister had preached to a regiment soon to leave for the Mexican War. Now he himself was planning not only to preach to soldiers, but also to follow them to the field.²⁴

The work of the United States Christian Commission, together with services rendered soldiers by the United States Sanitary Commission, was well-known in Iowa.²⁵ The primary purpose of the Christian Commission was to bring religious influences to the army in action, although the Commission also ministered to the physical comfort of soldiers, furnishing them with reading matter, medical

²⁴ *Annals of Iowa* (Third Series), Vol. XIX, p. 460.

²⁵ See Fullbrook's *Relief Work in Iowa During the Civil War* in THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. XVI, pp. 155-274; Moss's "Christian Commission" in *The Nation*, Vol. VI, pp. 214, 215; and an article by M. L. Stoeber in the *Evangelical Review*, Vol. XVI, p. 258.

supplies, clothing, and items of diet. In the four years of the Commission's service, 4859 delegates were commissioned, serving an aggregate of 181,562 days. Over 95,000 boxes of stores and publications were distributed, not including 1,466,748 Bibles, Testaments, and portions of the Scriptures. Union soldiers received 8,308,052 knapsack books, little volumes designed for the soldier's reading, as well as providing space for notes and remarks. Delegates preached a total of 58,308 sermons, and conducted 77,744 prayer meetings. They wrote 92,321 letters home for sick or wounded men, a service considered by the Christian Commission as one of its most useful functions.²⁶ The total expenditure for the period 1862-1864 was \$6,291,107.68.²⁷

Some 2217 delegates were commissioned in 1864, the year Mr. Salter received his commission. They were divided into three classes — to the field, to hospitals, and to battlegrounds. In practice, however, their functions frequently overlapped. The average term of service was six weeks, and delegates served without pay.

Mr. Salter was named a delegate to the field; and, shortly after his commission arrived, he received a small black book, entitled "U. S. Christian Commission", which not only set forth the duties of the delegates, but also provided space for a running diary, as well as ruled spaces for the names of sick or wounded soldiers, their regiments, homes, and relatives, and general remarks.

The instructions read as follows:

The work of the U. S. Christian Commission to the field comprises, besides the religious services, &c., at the stations, the supply of field hospitals with such clothing, bedding, and stores as their necessities require; the distribution of stores and publications to all

²⁶ Moss's *Annals of the United States Christian Commission* (1868), p. 292, Table VI.

²⁷ Moss's *Annals of the United States Christian Commission* (1868), p. 293, Table VII.

in the camps, officers and men; personal individual intercourse with them, to instruct, cheer, and win them to Christ, or to stir them up to greater faith and zeal and activity for Christ; aiding and encouraging constant correspondence with their friends, by giving them paper and envelopes, or if need be, writing for them and mailing their letters, and forwarding for them packages to their homes; securing the organization of Religious Societies, where practicable; encouraging meetings for prayer; aiding chaplains in their public services, and seeking opportunity to address regiments publicly and collectively; addressing them, as delegates of the Commission and as ambassadors for Jesus; and doing whatever else good common sense and warm Christian sympathy and true patriotism may dictate for the temporal and spiritual benefit of the men in the field.²⁸

These instructions also carried suggestions as to the type of sermon which soldiers liked to hear. Delegates were told to be always brief, kind, tender, earnest, and affectionate, and never dull, dry, or abstract, for soldiers, "like powder . . . are easily fired by the living spark, yet they cannot be moved by all the dead ashes and coals that can be heaped upon them."²⁹

If necessary, delegates were to assist surgeons in hospitals and on battlefields, doing everything possible to mitigate suffering and aid recovery, to comfort dying men, and to give the dead decent Christian burial. "In short", Mr. Salter read in the manual, they were to strive "to do all that man can do to meet the wants of brethren far from home and kindred."³⁰

Although at least one critic has declared that the work of the Christian Commission was somewhat disappointing,³¹ the organization, nevertheless, performed a most

²⁸ *United States Christian Commission Manual*, p. 9.

²⁹ *United States Christian Commission Manual*, p. 10.

³⁰ *United States Christian Commission Manual*, p. 7.

³¹ Shannon's *The Organization and Administration of the Union Army*, Vol. I, pp. 228, 229.

useful function in the armies, and justified the statement: "it aids the surgeon, helps the chaplain, follows the army in its marches, goes into the trenches, courses along the picket-line, and ministers personally to the suffering and distressed. Its influence is felt wherever the dying, the wounded, the sick, and the afflicted are to be found. It furnishes clothing to the destitute, nutritious food to the sick, books for military hospitals, posts, and gunboats, a supply of paper, envelopes, ink, pens, pencils, and a thousand and one comforts which are gratefully received by the soldier, and which the Government can not provide."³²

While Mr. Salter was preparing to go to the front, he was completing a small book solicited by the American Reform Tract and Book Society for inclusion in its series of pamphlets relating to slavery and the war. These volumes, usually well-written, although with a decided intolerance, were priced from five to sixty cents and played a tremendous part in influencing children and adults. The titles of some of them suggest their contents: *God Against Slavery*; *Evidence on the Slave Trade*; *A Home in the South*; *Child's Book on Slavery*; *The Future of the Freed People*; and *Walter Browning; or, The Slave's Protector*. Although thousands of these tracts, some bound in boards and others in paper, were distributed in the South as well as the North, they are today sufficiently rare to delight the collector of Civil War juvenilia.

Mr. Salter's contribution, as might be expected, was more serious than most of the titles listed, although written so that young people could easily read and understand it. *The Great Rebellion in the Light of Christianity*³³ was

³² Appleton's *The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events*, 1864, p. 802.

³³ *The / Great Rebellion / in the / Light of Christianity / By William Salter. / Cincinnati: / American Reform Tract and Book Society, / No. 28 West Fourth Street. / 1864.*

the title given to his booklet of sixty-three pages. "The study of history", wrote Mr. Salter in his first chapter, "is intrinsically more important and instructive than that of any branch of natural science",³⁴ and it was from the historical point of view that the book was written.

Although strongly anti-slavery, the work was marked in general by careful attention to historical detail. Some passages were harsh and ungenerous as, for example, "Slaveholders . . . confess themselves in sympathy with the most corrupt forms of aristocracy and despotism. They are at war with the humane and liberal tendencies of modern civilization. . . . The profligate and the vile, whether in high places or in low, are everywhere its abettors."³⁵ Maintaining that suppression of slavery was a Christian duty, Mr. Salter predicted a new life for America when

"The mower moves on, though the adder may writhe,
And the copperheads curl round the blade of the scythe."

The eleventh chapter dealt with the South's future, a future, which did not foresee the horrors of carpet-bag reconstruction governments. With slavery abolished and rebellion put down, the southern States were, according to Mr. Salter, to take their rightful place within the nation.

Instead of a few proud landlords of overgrown estates, there will be an immense number of small and independent proprietors. The industry of the country will be diversified, and the mechanical arts will flourish. Our Southern States have the climate of Southern Europe, and will furnish the markets of the world, not only with cotton and tobacco, but also with wine and fruits and silk and other productions which now come from Malaga, Marseilles, and Smyrna. Thoroughly civilized, and animated with the spirit of

³⁴ *The Great Rebellion in the Light of Christianity*, p. 7.

³⁵ *The Great Rebellion in the Light of Christianity*, p. 26.

modern enterprise, the South will become a larger producer and a larger consumer. She will have more to sell, and more to buy. She will attract emigration from the North, and from foreign countries. The infamous trade between the States at an end, a nobler and richer commerce will take its place. No longer a slave-breeding State, Virginia may become again mother of statesmen and presidents, and the free spirit of her mountains dwell once more in the bosoms of her people.³⁶

It is indeed unfortunate that reconstruction could not have followed this idyllic prophecy.

While he was at work upon his book, Mr. Salter received word from the field agent of the Department of the Cumberland that his services were needed. He and Mr. Pickett were directed to proceed at once to Chicago, and then to Murfreesboro, Tennessee, by way of Nashville. Although not pleased with this preëmtory summons, they left Burlington on the Fourth of July.³⁷

At Murfreesboro, five days later, Salter found the Christian Commission station dirty, the food poor, and the table knives "looking as if they had not been scoured for a month."³⁸ Here began his work of ministering to the troops. Loading his haversack with newspapers, tracts, Testaments, writing-paper, and envelopes, he went among the sick and wounded men in adjacent hospitals. Salter complained, with that lack of humor so characteristic of him, that literature given soldiers was frequently dull and often unsuitable. He complained that he was forced to distribute to soldiers pamphlets on the "condition and duties of women".³⁹

From Murfreesboro he was ordered to Stevenson, a

³⁶ *The Great Rebellion in the Light of Christianity*, pp. 52, 53.

³⁷ William Salter's *Civil War Diary*. Original in possession of the author.

³⁸ Letter from William Salter to Benjamin Salter, dated Murfreesboro, July 9, 1864.

³⁹ Salter's *Civil War Diary*.

small Alabama town crowded with soldiers and tools of war. In the streets all was confusion. Ponderous army wagons, mule-drawn ambulances, rumbling caissons, troops of blue cavalry; ragged rebels under guard; swearing teamsters; scurrying negro servants; important staff officers and orderlies; and knots of laughing soldiers, all jammed the dusty Stevenson thoroughfares with bustling, official, military life. Salter saw squads with bristling bayonets marching to relieve weary comrades. "Woods, roads, fields, far and near", described Pickett's pen, "are full of soldiers, halted and preparing breakfast; muskets stacked, little fires built to prepare coffee and fry meat, each soldier carrying his little iron coffeepot and spider. The rail fences were soon used up, and soldiers busy eating pork and hard-tack."⁴⁰

At Chattanooga, Salter found nine hundred patients in the General Field Hospital and one evening, on the banks of the Tennessee River, a group of convalescent soldiers heard him preach. "The moon shone brightly; Lookout Mountain raised its bald head above us; off in the distance was Mission Ridge; the river flowed peacefully at our feet. In the rich and varied landscape, surrounded by these stirring historical localities, our hearts went up with joy and gratitude to God, and we consecrated the soil beneath our feet and the grand scenes around us, and our whole country to the sacred cause of Liberty and Union, for which the defenders of the nation were laying down their lives."⁴¹

He traveled in army ambulances and on troop trains. At Nashville, he was introduced to Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer, of Keokuk, and they met frequently thereafter. Mrs. Wittenmyer, active in the Sanitary Commission, was re-

⁴⁰ Salter's *Memoirs of Joseph W. Pickett*, p. 29.

⁴¹ Salter's *Sixty Years*, p. 306.

sponsible for the organization and administration of special diet kitchens throughout the army. "Many a soldier", Mr. Salter wrote years later, "ascribed his convalescence to the wholesome food he got from her diet kitchens."⁴²

On July 19th, he was ordered to the front, and left immediately for Marietta, Georgia, a town of pretty homes surrounded by shrubbery and great oaks. The Georgia Military Institute, training ground for many Confederate soldiers, had been turned into a Union hospital and here Mr. Salter held services.⁴³

As the determined Union army moved toward Atlanta, Mr. Salter followed and for ten days watched Blue troops slowly cutting off the city from all assistance. On July 26th, Pickett and Salter for the first time found themselves under fire. They were crossing a field in search of a hospital corps known to be located nearby. A surgeon, seeing their difficulty, dismounted, packed their haversacks and blankets upon his horse, and guided them across a pasture exposed to enemy shells. "A shell from a rebel battery burst in the air above us," recorded Salter's companion, "left a little white cloud of smoke, and passed away. The sharpshooters were but a little beyond. As we passed on, one was brought along on a stretcher, wounded. You cannot imagine what strange exhilaration I felt in the excitement of a little danger — the novelty, the booming cannon, the soldiers around us; some firing at long intervals; one reading a history of America, lying behind the breastworks."⁴⁴

Two days later Iowa troops sustained severe losses defending their position before Atlanta against a determined Confederate advance. After the engagement General John

⁴² Salter's *Sixty Years*, p. 305.

⁴³ Salter's *Civil War Diary*.

⁴⁴ Salter's *Memoirs of Joseph W. Pickett*, p. 29.

M. Corse, commanding the Second Division of the Sixteenth Army Corps, took Salter on an inspection tour.⁴⁵

Early in August, a government wagon, drawn by six mules of Stoneman's cavalry, jolted Mr. Salter back to Marietta, the first step on his return journey. Excitement, caused by battlefield scenes, the stifling heat, and the poisonous odors had all impaired his health. He could retain only a little whiskey dusted with nutmeg. In the pleasant Christian Commission station at Marietta, he rested a few days and then proceeded to Nashville where he was photographed.⁴⁶ At Louisville, he preached on the forecastle of the gunboat *Victory No. 33*, and then hurried on to Chicago. When he arrived in Burlington on August 17th, he was broken in health. "Laus Deo", he wrote in his diary soon after entering his long-desired study.

Temperamentally, Salter was unfitted for life among soldiers. His lack of humor, aggravated by poor health, and his preference for the quiet of his library made it difficult for him to meet men of action on equal terms.

Before the weary pastor had overcome the discouragement and illness occasioned by his war service, a tragedy sent him into the depths of despair. Mary, his fifteen-year-old daughter, a student at Denmark Academy, died on November 5, 1864, from what was then known as quick consumption.⁴⁷

Shocked by the death of his daughter and remembering the loss of one of his twin boys, Mr. Salter suffered a relapse, and for a time was in extremely poor health. He

⁴⁵ Salter's *Civil War Diary*.

⁴⁶ See Miller's *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, Vol. VII, pp. 321, 323, 337, 342, and 343, for excellent photographs of the stations, equipment, and field work of the United States Christian Commission.

⁴⁷ This was the second child the Salters had lost in two years. The first was Charles Frederick, one of twin boys, born on December 28, 1861. The second twin, George Benjamin, survived.

managed, however, to preach a Thanksgiving sermon. In this he expressed thanks for the triumphant and peaceful reëlection of President Lincoln, and paid tribute to the work of the Freedmen's Bureau in educating the negro. "In Stevenson, Alabama," he wrote, "in the month of July, I visited one of these schools, held in a log building that had been hastily thrown up for the purpose, and saw one hundred children receiving their first lesson in the primer from a Benevolent Lady who had gone thither from the State of Wisconsin. In Nashville I was told there were a larger number of black children than of white attending school."⁴⁸

By the following March, Mr. Salter's health was greatly improved, and he again watched national events with critical eyes. On April 15, 1865, President Lincoln was slain by John Wilkes Booth. On the following Sunday morning, Mr. Salter preached a vituperative sermon on the President's assassination. Lincoln's death, he said, was the work of southern rebels and must reveal "the real character of the deadly enemy of our peace, and strengthen and intensify the purpose not only to abolish slavery but to exterminate the whole spirit of slavery from the land."⁴⁹ His words reflected the hatred which flared up in the North at the assassination of the President, but taken as a whole, they were an unkind and inaccurate interpretation of the real southern attitude. Had Mr. Lincoln lived, the South might have continued along his line of peaceful and rational reconstruction which even then was in progress. Lincoln alive was more valuable to those lately in rebellion

⁴⁸ Undated sermon, preached during November, 1864, from the text, Acts 4:29, 30 — "And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word. By stretching forth thine hand to heal: and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus."

⁴⁹ *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, April 19, 1865.

than Lincoln dead. But Salter, bitter as Wendell Phillips, could see the assassination only as southern treachery.

His sermon differed radically from one preached two days previously when Mr. Salter had spoken of the recent Union victories and of the cheering prospects of national salvation. This was a balanced, careful consideration of events leading to Appomattox, gave evidence of charity, and suggested a generous attitude toward the conquered provinces. Slavery, warned the pastor, must be zealously guarded so that never again might it rise up to distress the nation. But with slavery conquered, the United States faced only order, virtue, prosperity, and a higher civilization.

Simple though reconstruction appeared to Mr. Salter, the nation was to find the task complex and black with hatred. Order and prosperity were not to ease southern wounds until Rutherford B. Hayes in 1877 withdrew the last Federal regiments from their garrisons in hostile Louisiana and South Carolina. But for Salter, secure in the tenets of Republicanism, reconstruction was more of a name than a reality. He personally turned from war's aftermath to the engrossing task of writing biography and history and of assuming his place as Burlington's first citizen and leading pastor.

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