

The Coming of D. Sands Wright

In the summer of 1852, when word reached Salem of the death of Reuben Dorland, all felt that the Seminary must close. Dorland had been not only its principal and founder but also its guiding genius. At the time Dorland left, the Visiting Committee was made up of the following persons: John Hockett, Ellwood Ozbun, Thomas Stanley, Even Marshall, William Trueblood, Henry Dorland (left for California in 1852), David V. Davis, William Davis, Rachel Bond, Rachel Hockett, Cynthia Beezely, Martha N. Dorland, Lydia Hiatt, Lydia Ozbun, Content King, and Phebe Davis. Since this committee could do little to help the trustees without the necessary guidance of Dorland, the Seminary gradually expired.

The people of Salem and the Salem Monthly Meeting, however, true to the Quaker principle of the union of education with religion, determined to organize a new academy. The question how best to finance the new school caused the greatest anxiety. At last the people of the church voted to sell shares. It was found that three thousand dollars would be necessary to start the new school.

When thirty shares of one hundred dollars each were finally sold, the new college was assured. The work of raising this money had been quietly and efficiently done by the College Association. Since from the outset John Greenleaf Whittier had shown a decided interest in the project, and had made personal contributions toward the fund, the College Association decided to name the new college after Whittier rather than for Reuben Dorland as had been expected. Accordingly, on May 17, 1867, the Whittier College Association was incorporated.

Fortunately the original statement of the Association has been preserved in an early catalogue of Whittier College. It reads as follows:

The Whittier College Association was incorporated the 17th of Fifth month, 1867, to establish and maintain at Salem, Henry County, Iowa an institution of learning with all the powers of an Academical character usually exercised by colleges, to be conducted according to the principles of the Society of Friends, and open alike to all who will conform to its rules and regulations.

The school was opened for students on the 20th of the 4th month, 1868, under the charge of Professor John W. Woody and Mary C. Woody, his wife as principals. The admirable progress made by the students and the purity of the influence pervading the school have stimulated to greater effort those who have contributed from their limited means to make more complete its establishment. We

are now prepared to say the school is cleared of the debt accrued by preparing and furnishing the school building.

The zeal and determination manifested by the teachers, patrons and friends are taken as satisfactory evidence that it will continue to be self-sustaining. In the past we have been much favored by receiving donations for the Library and Cabinet from our friends John G. Whittier, Wm. P. Wood, John Harvy, J. H. Pickering, Reuben Johnson, and others.

It is our purpose, with the continued favor of Divine Providence, to do in the future as we have done in the past — make each succeeding term more profitable and attractive to the student, and keep pace with the growth of general intelligence.

Those who may desire to aid the Institution in its struggle for means to increase its usefulness, can do so in the following ways: By sending us students; by sending us contributions for our Cabinet; by direct donations; by legacies; by circulating our catalogues and diffusing information concerning the school; but above all, by their *prayers* that we may be kept faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

This important preamble gives a picture of the Quaker builders of Iowa; it shows the motives of the pioneer educators on the frontier. It portrays vividly the genuine piety and sacrificial endeavors of the Iowa pioneers in their search for the good life.

“Whittier College”, explained the prospectus, “is handsomely situated in the suburbs of the town

of Salem, Henry County, Iowa, and is approached by railroad *via* Mt. Pleasant, the county seat; thence by daily coach, ten miles south; and is one of the most moral temperate and healthy towns in the state, and is surrounded by a community of like character."

On the subject of Course of Study the "Board, having in view the wants of their patrons, propose two Departments — the Normal and Business Departments." The first principal, John W. Woody, in addition to his administrative duties taught the following subjects: Greek, mathematics, theory and practice of teaching, and school government. Other studies were divided among his assistants. John Chawner had charge of moral science and elocution; Mrs. Woody of Latin and English literature; Clarkson C. Pickett of natural science and elocution. The common branches were under the tutelage of Annie Packer, B. T. Trueblood, and Anna J. Frazier.

The tuition in the Normal Department for the first year was eight dollars per term, for the second, third, and fourth years nine dollars. In the Business Department the tuition was ten dollars per term for the entire course. Board cost from two to three dollars per week.

In the catalogue for 1872 there appears an announcement that "the repeated calls for the

study of German have induced us to make arrangements for the accommodation of all those wishing to study this language. The pronunciation will be taught on *strictly phonetic* principles, thus enabling the pupil to pronounce with ease, fluency, and correctness, in the shortest possible time". Pursuant with this demand the college in the fall of 1873 welcomed C. Fred Wahrer as the first teacher of German in Whittier College, and, it should be noted, one of the earliest in Iowa.

The year 1872 is also notable for the coming of D. Sands Wright to the college as associate principal with Clarkson C. Pickett. The leadership of these two men created an influential Quaker center of education west of the Mississippi. Among the older people in Salem, they are to this day mentioned with deep affection.

D. S. Wright was born on December 7, 1848, in a Quaker settlement at Samantha, Ohio. His father and paternal grandfather were Quaker preachers who built their lives into the frontier settlements, and on the maternal side his ancestors, the Cowgills, had followed the anti-slavery movement of Friends from Virginia to Ohio. In this Quaker home the young boy read avidly the books on his father's shelf. Of these the Bible, *Paradise Lost*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and some Quaker sermons held the most important place; and with

these and the McGuffey Readers, filled as they were with masterpieces of literature, he enriched his mind, and on these he built his literary style. Throughout his life he wove phrases from these pages into his chapel talks and sermons.

After making the most of the educational opportunities in Ohio, as finances allowed, he alternately taught rural schools and attended the Old National Normal at Lebanon, Ohio, now merged with Wilmington College in Ohio. In 1872 he was teaching a rural school in Ohio. During this period he kept a diary which gives a vivid picture of his leaving Ohio and of his first days among the Quakers of Salem.

Saturdays and Sundays and Fourth Day were taken up with Friends Meetings. It is interesting to note that he often liked the women preachers better than the men. An entry in January revealed the difficulty of heating the schoolhouse. The building had been built in pioneer days and lacked all modern methods of heating. A trip to Hillsboro in February to buy gifts for the last day of school resulted in the purchase of a book which he wanted some pupils to read, *Swiss Family Robinson*. This trip consumed the whole of a Saturday and it was necessary to miss the Monthly Meeting.

Toward the end of February, Jane Jones began

to hold meetings at Oak Grove and was reported to be creating much interest. A new evangelical interest arose at this time among the Friends not only in Ohio but throughout the whole United States. Tract Meetings were often held in addition to the Local, Preparatory, Monthly, and Quarterly meetings. Mr. Wright frequently spent Saturday forenoons at the schoolhouse reading and writing Greek. He began in the spring of 1872 to read Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities*, but Dickens never became quite as popular as the Greek and Latin classics.

One day in May a letter came from a Friend at Lebanon by the name of C. C. Pickett. He told of a new college "in the west" called Whittier. As Mr. Wright read on he found that the letter contained a call for him to leave Ohio for the "prairie land" across the Mississippi. A catalogue of the college accompanied the letter, together with "an advertisement of it". All this interested the young teacher who had read of the west and all the adventure connected with it. Then, too, many in Ohio were heeding Greeley's "Go west, young man, go west". Against the prospect of personal advancement, however, he weighed the thought that he might be of greater service by remaining a rural school teacher.

Presently Mr. Wright went to Lebanon and

had a very satisfactory interview with Pickett, who described the rich prairie land of Henry County, the zeal of the Salem Friends, and their valiant "fight" against slavery. All this made a strong impression on the young Friend, who had already worked for the betterment of the negroes in Ohio. Before the end of May a letter of acceptance went to Pickett, and preparations began in the Wright home for the westward journey.

During the month of June he studied the Greek Testament diligently, since the classics had a prominent place in Whittier College. The new teacher, in addition to subjects in the "Business Department", was to teach Greek. This pleased him more than "business"; nevertheless the business courses had to be taught. After thinking it over he decided to write to a reputable business college for their best methods.

In June, David Hunt of Iowa began holding Meetings at Hardin's Creek. Hunt was probably a "public Friend". The term "public Friend" came from England with the earliest American pioneers. A public Friend went out as did the New Testament apostles carrying "the seed" of the true religion. He conducted "appointed meetings" which the communities considered of the utmost importance. On the occasion of Hunt's coming from Iowa, Wright dismissed his school at

three and went with "about half the children" to hear the afternoon address on "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand". Entire families attended these meetings and on this afternoon of sixth month 19th day he noted that "the meeting was considerably disturbed by babies".

On August 10th and 11th Mr. Wright attended Monthly Meeting at Clear Creek, his home Meeting, for the last time. His father who sat in the ministers' gallery preached. Many good-byes were said and Clear Creek, Ohio, felt "kinship" with Salem, Iowa. On this same day a message came from Lebanon saying Pickett was to start for Iowa about "Third or Fourth day" of the following week. On Sunday evening at home after the Meeting the young man and his father and mother committed to Divine Providence the journey and the new work in "the west".

Early Monday morning he set out, arriving at Lebanon by noon. The next day he was in Cincinnati and reached Indianapolis by nine in the evening. There he obtained his "first glimpse of prairie land" by moonlight. But most of all he looked forward to seeing the Mississippi River, so romantically described all over the "east". "The view of the 'Father of Waters'," he wrote, "was obtained as we crossed the bridge above" at Burlington. "It was", he unqualifiedly declared, "the

finest sight that I ever saw." Mount Pleasant was reached that night, and early the next morning he was in Salem.

The new principal arranged to board with "Aunt" Martha Dorland, and in a few days he was comfortably settled. He was present at the final exercises at the August Commencement of 1872 which marked Principal Woody's last appearance. Annie Packer, Whittier's beloved teacher, gave the address.

The fall term opened on September 24th. Meanwhile, the Iowa Yearly Meeting at Oskaloosa occupied Quaker attention. Several wagon loads of people went from Salem, the Whittier College teachers among them. One evening Mr. Wright with "several Friends" attended "a colored meeting" in Oskaloosa. He wanted to see what Iowa was doing for the negroes, since he had been a leader in work on their behalf in Ohio. Brotherhood seems to have been the central theme of this Yearly Meeting. The "two sittings" of each day were faithfully attended in addition to the sessions of the "Iowa Yearly Meeting College Association" to which the Report of Whittier College was presented. How so much could be packed into those nine days seems surely a "nine days wonder". Late on September 9th the meeting closed, and the principals of Whittier College

hurried home to prepare for the opening of the new term.

Such entries are typical of the serious purpose of the young man who gave four years of his life to Whittier College. On the recommendation of Lorenzo D. Lewelling, he began in 1876 a half century of service at the Iowa State Normal School where he continually contributed to the advancement of education and religion in the State of Iowa.

Other people, besides Reuben Dorland and D. Sands Wright, made a deep impression upon Whittier College and upon the young Quakers who attended the school. Fred Wahrer left many friends in Salem when he decided to quit teaching and study medicine. From Fort Madison, where he practiced for over forty years, he maintained his interest in this Quaker community. Annie Packer, an early alumna and later teacher at Whittier, contributed very valuable service to education in Iowa, serving as teacher, and as county superintendent of both Van Buren and Henry counties. Following these in point of time, Professor G. A. Walters also deeply affected the thinking of the people of Salem in his early teaching days before he, too, transferred his activities to Iowa State Teachers College. He was one of the distinguished speakers to be gladly welcomed

at the celebration of the Salem centennial in August of this year.

With the development of the public high schools and colleges in Iowa during the eighties and nineties, the need for private academies was no longer as imperative as it had been. Whittier College has long been closed, but its influence still lives in the conduct of its alumni and their descendants.

Now that the centenary has come and gone, the contribution of the Salem Quakers to the building of Iowa can be seen with a certain clear perspective. Against the background of the years, Reuben Dorland and his co-workers can be understood better than their contemporaries understood them. The same is true of the beginning of Whittier College, and of that body of men and women who endeavored to promulgate a religion of the spirit, and a hatred of slavery, and who earnestly desired to see religion and education join forces for the welfare of society.

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