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D Sands Wright

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Whittier College Days

Coming by way of Mount Pleasant, I took passage in the star-route Russell hack, crossed the Skunk River on the ferry at Boyle's mill, and entered Salem in the Seventh Month of the year 1872. There I lived and taught for four busy years in the quiet environment of a good but somnolent town. It was in response to a summons from Clarkson C. Pickett, the head of Whittier College, that I came to the oldest Quaker community in Iowa.

Salem, meaning peace in Hebrew, was stamped with the simplicity of the sect that founded the community. Even then the place was replete with historical interest. In the days before the Civil War, Salem had been an important station on the Underground Railway, and the house of Abel Woodworth was pointed out as a haven for runaway slaves.

On the First Day of my Salem life, impelled by habit, expediency, and a sense of duty, I "went to

meeting'' at the hour of worship. The service commenced in the usual Quaker way with a prolonged period of silent worship. Then something happened. A progressive Friend, Jonathan Frazier by name, was moved to sing a hymn. With the first stave of the song, Uncle Tommie Siveter on the men's side and Aunt Martha Dorland and Aunt Ruth Gibbs on the women's side arose from their seats and passed out through the nearest doorway. No other voices accompanied the singer, and when the solo was finished, the three returned and resumed their seats. Their uprising, out-going, returning, and down-sitting was to bear testimony against the atrocity of singing in meeting. In the minds of at least three members of the congregation, "hymns and spiritual songs" in the course of a religious service were of the devil.

One of the functions of a Quaker elder is oversight of the ministry as "to communications". If, in this dignitary's judgment, the message being delivered was not "to edification", he had authority to interrupt the flow of words and require the unprofitable prophet to cease. Previous to this first Sabbath in Salem, I had attended a thousand Quaker meetings, silent and otherwise, but had never seen this prerogative exercised, and supposed that if it had ever been in vogue it was long since obsolete. My disillusionment was sudden and complete. William Thatcher, a young, aggressive, and not over-wise lay preacher of modernistic proclivities

arose and began to speak. Just behind him on the gallery seats sat William Hocket, an elder, who, weighing the speaker's words, mentally decided that they were "not to edification". He therefore reached over, grasped the coat tail of the other William, and gave it an official yank. Thatcher expressed neither surprise nor anger, but with apparent complacency he meekly resumed his seat. I soon became accustomed to such occurrences, however, scenes which grew in frequency until a division was effected in 1877 and the conservatives found another place of worship.

In the seventies, the language of the Friends was spoken in Salem by saints and sinners alike. By the communicants of the sect, the "plainness of speech, deportment and apparel", prescribed by the discipline, was duly observed. The men wore possum-bellied pantaloons, straight-collared coats, and broad-brimmed, high-crowned hats. The women wore capes and scoop-shovel bonnets. Since the almanac names of the days and months were heathenish in their origin, the Quakers eschewed them all. January was the First Month, and December the Twelfth. The days of the week were First Day, Second Day, Third Day, Fourth Day, Fifth Day, Sixth Day and Seventh Day. Worldly titles of respect were taboo; no man was hailed as "Sir", no woman as "Ma'am" or "Madam". Folks were called by their given names — Mr. Reeves was Isaac, Mrs. Collins, Eddice, and Miss Elizabeth Bond,

Libbie. The only titles of respect allowed were those of Uncle and Aunt. About the time that gray appeared upon a person's temples, that person became an Uncle or an Aunt.

The Quakers of Salem did not go to church on First Day morning. They had no church. Instead, they had a meeting-house, and they went to meeting twice a week — on First Day and on Fourth Day at eleven o'clock A. M. with all of the regularity of a well-regulated clock. The meeting-house was divided into two equal divisions, by means of a frame partition across the room. This was for the segregation of the sexes, and the parts were designated as "the men's side" and "the women's side". At convenient distances there were shutters which opened or closed according to whether the two "sides" were minded to worship separately or together. The men wore their hats in meeting and the women wore their monstrous headgear; the boys and girls, if they were true to their training, followed suit. This observance was a testimony against something or other. No program was provided for the hour of service. The worshippers sat together in silence, until some one was moved — of the Spirit or otherwise — to break in upon the silence. Any one, minister or layman, male or female, was free at any time to speak or pray; but no one was expected to sing, and no "ungodly organ" found place within the precincts of the room.

While the Friends of Salem practiced the ortho-

dox habits of their faith, they were exceptionally progressive-minded in providing means of education for their children. Scarcely had the settlement been established before the Salem Monthly Meeting appointed a committee to "endeavor to have schools put in operation". In 1845 Reuben Dorland founded Salem Seminary. By 1851 the enrollment had grown to more than two hundred students who came from far and near. At the very height of success, however, Dorland's health failed and his school languished.

Realizing the value of the institution, the Salem Monthly Meeting built a brick structure twenty-five by thirty feet in size and reopened the seminary. But these quarters were eventually outgrown. In the spring of 1867 the "Whittier College Association" was organized for the purpose of operating an institution to train "practical and self-reliant men and women established in evangelical faith." Whittier College opened its doors on the twentieth of Fourth Month, 1868. The college was a success from the beginning. Over two hundred students were enrolled in 1869. Salem had the appearance of an educational center. Further increase of registration caused the old brick meeting-house to be remodelled for a school building in 1874.

"Whittier College", stated the catalogue, "is handsomely situated in the suburbs of Salem, Henry County, Iowa, and is approached by railroad, via Mount Pleasant, the county seat; thence by daily

coach, ten miles south. It is one of the most moral, temperate and healthy towns in the State, and is surrounded by a community of like character." Indeed, the purity of the influences surrounding the college was considered one of its most desirable features. "The quiet and morality of Salem" were "proverbial", while "Drinking and Billiard Saloons, Gambling Halls, and other corrupting influences, so common in larger towns," could not be found there. Fewer circumstances combined "to distract the attention of the student from his studies" at Whittier College than at any other institution "in the land".

In naming the college in honor of John Greenleaf Whittier, the Friends of Salem sought to express their appreciation of the services he had rendered to "freedom and humanity". Perhaps they hoped too that the students might emulate the character and ideals of the Quaker poet. That Whittier was pleased by this evidence of esteem is indicated by his gift of books to the library.

Other friends of the school made valuable donations to the library and the cabinet. The *New American Cyclopaedia* and *Chamber's Cyclopaedia* were secured in 1872. Although the cabinet was small it was interesting. The chemical and philosophical apparatus was "well selected".

My coming to Salem was to occupy a chair — a sofa in fact — and share the administrative duties in Whittier College — a college in the sense that a

village is a city, or a male citizen of Kentucky is a colonel. In the extent of its curriculum, it was little above the rank of an academy — a form of secondary school that fifty years ago flourished in about every pretentious town in the Middle West.

Whittier College offered two routes to the baccalaureate degree — the classical course designed to prepare “young men and women for teaching successfully in our high schools and academies” and the scientific course with its “practical drill in science and a sufficient course in mathematics”. This “greatly improved curriculum” was presented “to an intelligent public”, with full confidence that it would be found “exactly suited to the demands of the Western people.” In addition to the regular courses, a normal department was maintained to train students in the art of teaching by the “best and latest methods”, while the business department offered “special accommodations” for instruction in bookkeeping, business correspondence, and commercial law.

In conformity with the tenets of the Quaker faith, Whittier College was coeducational. “We hold”, declared the directors, “that the separation of the sexes at any period of life is contrary to nature, and only can result in evil. The proposition that boys and girls, who are thrown together in the family circle, in the district school, and who must be made to associate together in all their future lives, when they are developing their mental powers, and form-

ing character for life, when they most need the chastening, purifying and ennobling influence of each other's company, is a proposition too preposterous to be worthy of a moment's thought." The government of the school also reflected the characteristic Quaker individualism. "We desire that the students should feel that they are the rightful guardians of their own characters," said the catalogue, "and must learn to govern themselves if they expect to become useful members of society."

Upon entering Whittier College the pupils and teachers alike were expected to "comply with and sustain the following requisitions:"

1. Regular attendance.
2. Promptitude.
3. Decorum.
4. Courtesy.
5. No unnecessary noise.
6. No communications.
7. No immorality.
8. No games of chance.
9. Students are not to visit each other's rooms during study hours, 7 to 9 P. M. They are also expected to be in their rooms for the night by 10 o'clock P. M. Gaming or dancing, if persisted in, will be considered sufficient cause for expulsion.

For the stimulation of religious growth students were "encouraged to attend the Weekly Evening Meeting for Worship held in the building." In this meeting the greatest liberty was allowed. Students were made to feel that it was their meeting; and the hearts of teachers and students were often cheered as they "heard the voice of prayer and praise as-

cent from souls" in quest of "the more excellent way".

At one prayer meeting during my residence in Salem the community half-wit was present. It was his habit, whenever a speaker delivered a message, to rise and give expression to a sentence or two most ludicrously irrelevant to the previous discourse. As the testimonies were given, one by one, he invariably arose at the end of each and made some comment. His remarks became so excruciatingly funny that they were too much for the gravity of the meeting. What began in giggles grew to shouts of boisterous laughter. Finally Aunt Rhoda Perkins arose and addressed the meeting.

"My dear young friends," she admonished, "this is an occasion for pity, not for laughter. Let us remember where we are and what brought us together. We must not make a farce of worship. Let us practice just a little self-denial. I am ashamed of myself for the way in which I have behaved in this meeting, and I am resolved not to be so thoughtless again."

She had no sooner finished than the half-wit arose and said, "I am ashamed of myself too."

Notwithstanding her strong resolution, it was too much for even Aunt Rhoda. She screamed in merriment to the accompaniment of all the others. The meeting unceremoniously adjourned, and the prayers of the evening were ended.

One day, while sitting in my office, I looked up to

see Elam, the town "hoodlum", standing on the threshold. One of the first warnings upon my arrival at Salem was to "beware of Elam". He was reputed to be the leader of the rowdies. Whenever a watermelon patch was raided or any other mischief done, people always shook their heads and said, "There's some of Elam's work." For three years I had been able to avoid the young man — and then suddenly there he was! I gave no word of welcome. I wondered what his business with me could be.

After an awkward pause, he said, "I came to see if the janitor job at the college has been taken for next year."

I answered, "No."

"Then I want the job," said Elam.

My amazement quickly gave way to sympathy as I saw his eyes were filled with tears.

"I am going to make a man of myself," he declared.

I grasped his hand. "Elam," I said, "if there were a thousand applicants for the place you should have it!"

Elam justified my faith and confidence in him. No school ever had a better janitor, nor a more faithful student. After leaving college he taught successfully in the rural schools and later established a mercantile business in Mount Pleasant.

While most of the people in Salem enthusiastically indorsed the activities of the college, there were a

few ultra-conservatives who frowned upon higher education. Uncle Jacob Reeder in particular believed academic training was an invention of Satan and regarded study of the classics as a crime equivalent to embezzlement or dancing. Upon being told of something I had said from the college rostrum he exclaimed, "I wonder that the Lord did not strike him dead."

One day when I was playing the worldly game of croquet with two of Uncle Jacob's granddaughters, he happened along and stood watching the game for a few moments. Then in a stern voice he advised, "Now, girls, if I were you, I would go home. You are out here with a dandy of whom you know nothing and with a man whom I regard as a nuisance to the town."

In 1876 the General Assembly created the Iowa State Normal School at Cedar Falls. Lorenzo D. Lewelling, a member of the Board of Directors of Whittier College and one of my warmest friends, was appointed a member of the executive board of the new institution. It was through his friendship and good offices that I was elected to the position of professor of mathematics. So I left the city of "Peace" and the school of "evangelical faith".

D. SANDS WRIGHT